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*Brigham Young University*

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More Than One Way: How Migrants Are Able to  
Achieve Belonging Beyond Their Legal Status

Claudia Soto

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

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## ABSTRACT

### **More Than One Way: How Migrants Are Able to Achieve Belonging Beyond Their Legal Status**

Claudia Soto

Department of Sociology, Brigham Young University  
Master of Science

Is legal status a master status for migrant belonging? If not, how do other factors—such as social networks, religious participation, language and cultural familiarity—shape belonging? Over the past few years, some migration scholars have suggested that legal status is a “master status” which determines migrant outcomes (Gonzales 2015). Other literature suggests that migrant outcomes are determined by a variety of factors, asserting that migrant experiences can be better understood by studying the interaction between these factors (Enriquez 2017; Valdez and Golash-Boza 2020). Utilizing 73 semi-structured interviews with migrants in Utah, I compare the experiences of refugees, permanent migrants, temporary migrants, and unauthorized migrants through an interrelational perspective and evaluate how legal status and other factors shape their sense of belonging across legal, economic, social, and cultural spheres. In testing whether or not legal status is a “master status,” I find that legal status matters, though other factors are also salient. Numerous factors affect belonging (e.g., religion, language, and social networks) and within some spheres, these other factors outweigh legal status in shaping integration and belonging. These findings suggest that legal status is not always a “master status,” and migrants can access multiple pathways to achieve belonging beyond their legal status.

Keywords: immigration, belonging, legal status, race, economic, cultural, social

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Sense of Belonging.....	2
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	3
Legal Inclusion/Exclusion.....	3
Economic Inclusion/Exclusion.....	7
Cultural Inclusion/Exclusion.....	9
Social Inclusion/Exclusion.....	11
This Study .....	12
METHODOLOGY .....	12
Types of Migrants in this Study .....	13
Context of Study Location .....	15
Data Collection & Analysis.....	16
FINDINGS .....	18
Legal Sphere.....	19
Opportunity.....	19
Belonging and legal status.....	20
Economic Sphere.....	22
Unauthorized status and work .....	22
Student status and work.....	23
Social Sphere.....	23
Social networks prior to arrival .....	24
Social networks after arrival.....	25
Belonging and social networks.....	26

Belonging to a subsection of the community .....	27
A lack of social belonging .....	28
Cultural Sphere.....	29
The LDS church culture .....	30
The general American culture .....	32
Language proficiency .....	33
Belonging to a subsection of the culture .....	34
A lack of cultural belonging .....	36
The Role of Race & Racism.....	37
Racism in informal settings .....	37
Racism in formal settings .....	39
A lack of racial diversity .....	39
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION .....	40
REFERENCES .....	45
TABLES .....	57
Table 1: Summary of Interviewee Demographic Information .....	57
Table 2: (No) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status .....	60
Table 3: (Sometimes) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status .....	61
Table 4: (Yes) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status.....	62

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of Interviewee Demographic Information.....	57
Table 2: (No) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status.....	60
Table 3: (Sometimes) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status.....	61
Table 4: (Yes) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status .....	62

## INTRODUCTION

Migrant integration and belonging have long been a focus for scholars of international migration, who have examined migrant integration across a number of measures, including employment and economic mobility, cultural integration, legal status, residential segregation, race and ethnicity, and education, among many others. From these studies, we have learned that a large number of migrants arrive without the skills necessary to enter the labor market (Duncan and Trejo 2015); with different cultural and racial backgrounds (Portes and Zhou 1993); with different legal statuses that affect their ability to incorporate (Gonzales 2011; Menjívar and Abrego 2012); confronting negative framing and racial stereotyping (Massey and Pren 2012); and with different education and socioeconomic levels (Lee and Zhou 2015; Jiménez and Horowitz 2013). Despite these and other findings, we know little about how these factors affect different types of migrants' sense of belonging. Furthermore, we lack understanding regarding how the individual migrant experience may challenge the notion of a "universal" or "average" migrant experience. By maintaining focus on each individual migrant's sense of belonging, this study aims to capture the unique backgrounds and divergent realities of migrants while also studying how broader sociological forces shape migrant belonging.

To more fully understand the migrant experience, this study compares the experiences of different kinds of migrants—including temporary, permanent, unauthorized, and forced migrants—to see how legal status and economic, social, cultural, and racial contexts shape integration. Rather than group migrants according to their legal status, I study their unique experiences before, during, and after arrival in the US (including but not exclusively based on their migrant status) from their own perspective. This subject-centered approach allows me to examine migrants' subjective experience and understanding of integration, something not often

explored in the literature (Ryo 2018). In studying these experiences, I attempt to understand how characteristics of these migrants, their migration experience, and their receiving context affect their search for belonging.

### *Sense of Belonging*

Sense of belonging has long been a focus of study in migration literature. In this study, I define sense of belonging as migrants' perception of their ability to incorporate and participate in the host nation (Simonsen 2019; Ward 2013) and how "migrants view themselves in relation to others in society" (Amit and Bar-Lev 2015:948). In essence, sense of belonging is a psychological feeling in which individuals feel a connection to the people and places they live in (Hurtado and Carter 1997). This sense of belonging is dependent on migrants' experiences. When migrants face legal, economic, cultural and/or social exclusion, that exclusion negatively colors many of the experiences, opportunities, and outcomes migrants use to build a sense of belonging (Castaneda 2018). Alternatively, being able to find the inclusion needed to build a sense of belonging benefits migrants' success and wellbeing, and increases participation and cohesion in society in general (Hou, Schellenberg, and Berry 2018).

Scholars have identified various factors that are positively and negatively associated with sense of belonging (Nunez 2009), yet the interaction between these factors has not been as heavily researched. Furthermore, some scholars distinguish these factors as being formal (e.g., legal status) or informal (e.g., religious affiliation), but we are not yet certain whether formal or informal factors take precedence in forming migrants' self-perception of belonging (Amit and Bar-Lev 2015). In this study, I use a subject-centered approach to explain and understand belonging. I derive this understanding from the interviewees themselves, who all had different

definitions of what belonging means for them, and whose viewpoints helped shape my analysis and my knowledge of how different factors affect belonging.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As they navigate life in a new national context, international migrants undergo a range of experiences that all affect their sense of belonging. Migrants' interactions with legal, economic, social, and cultural spheres directly shape their sense of belonging (Hou et al. 2018; Kitchen, Williams, and Gallina 2015). Positive interactions within these spheres can enhance migrants' sense of belonging, while negative interactions can have the opposite effect (Kemeny and Cooke 2017; Chow 2007).

### *Legal Inclusion/Exclusion*

US immigration and border policies, combined with migrants' legal status, directly affect migrants' sense of belonging and opportunity to incorporate (Gonzales 2011; Menjivar and Abrego 2012). US immigration policies have placed a large share of the migrant population outside of the law, depriving millions living in America of social, economic, and civil rights (Frazee 2018). The combination of legal punishments directed toward some migrants combined with the rising inaccessibility of citizenship and its associated rights is "playing an increased role in patterns of exclusion" for both migrants and their family members (Waters and Kasinitz 2015:117; López 2015; Enriquez 2020). US immigration laws and migrant categories create legal inclusion (a permanent legal status granting a right to work, education, and residence within the US) for some and legal exclusion (restricted or no legal right to work, education, and residence within the US) for others. It also creates a third category of liminal<sup>1</sup> inclusion, wherein

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<sup>1</sup> "Liminal" status is a term used by migration scholars to describe statuses that are temporary and in-between permanent status and no status, such student, tourist, and temporary work visas, as well as Temporary Protected Status and DACA (See Menjívar 2006).

individuals (such as students or workers) have temporary rights to live, study, and work in the United States for the duration of their visas, but does not provide them with a path to citizenship.

Current immigration law requires immigrants to prove self-sufficiency while barring or precluding many individuals from access to the education and work necessary to sustain themselves (Hall and Greenman 2015). A stable, permanent legal status allows migrants to live, work, and study in the United States, but many of these rights are restricted or withheld from migrants with temporary or unauthorized status. American political institutions extend rights to all US citizens, and, to a lesser degree, legal permanent residents. When individuals are able to achieve a legal status of citizenship or permanent residency, they gain access to key institutions and greater opportunities for full incorporation in society (Lopez forthcoming).

Individuals with liminal or no legal status face additional risks in their ability to incorporate and, therefore, in developing a strong sense of belonging (Menjívar 2006; Gonzales 2011). Uncertain legal status “permeates many aspects of the immigrants’ lives and delimits their range of action in different spheres, from job market opportunities and housing to family and kinship” (Menjívar 2006:1001). An unauthorized status excludes immigrants from the political and economic institutions that allow them to fully participate and incorporate into society. Without such access to opportunity, migrants, their family members, and the communities in which they live all suffer (Bean, Bachmeier, and Brown 2015; Yoshikawa 2011). With restricted or no access to jobs, skills training, or education, among other resources, temporary and unauthorized immigrants are often unable to sustain productive and fulfilling lives. When legal exclusion prevents immigrants from contributing to political and economic dimensions of society, the US misses out on opportunities for growth and development (Terriquez 2015;

Abrego 2011). Legal status explains why some migrants experience legal exclusion and others do not (Menjívar and Lakhani 2016).

Because of these profound and wide-reaching effects, legal status—especially unauthorized status—has come to be regarded as a “master status” (Gonzales 2015; Scott, Hale, and Padilla 2021; Hoops and Braitman 2019; Ponzer, Mastropolo, and Molina 2020; Hughes 2021; Monaco and Duncan 2020; Rodriguez and Thompson 2019). In his book, *Lives in Limbo*, Roberto Gonzales (2015) showed that unauthorized status becomes a “master status” for unauthorized youth by directly shaping their opportunities across many spheres of life. He finds that this effect is most pronounced when individuals are going through key life changes, such as graduating from high school or college, becoming an adult, and forming a family. Beyond the economic and vocational limitations unauthorized status creates, unauthorized youth find that many of their achievements are trumped by their illegality. In the end, illegality forces a “shift from belonging to marginalization” (Gonzales 2015:79). Legal status is a structural, concrete factor in the lives of migrants which is not easily changed, and which has lasting effects and consequences; these factors have contributed to scholars’ emphasis on the dominant role legal status plays in shaping migrant integration and belonging (Gonzales 2015; Enriquez 2017).

It is important to discuss the convergence of race and immigration. Race has long been a factor that directly shapes immigration law (Schrag 2010; Ngai 2004; Tichenor 2002). The history of US immigration law includes many examples of racist and exclusionary policies (Kibria, Bowman, and O’Leary 2013; Coutin 2003) that directly limited some migrants’ ability to settle in the US and indirectly contributed to specific racialized and classed understandings of what it means to be “American” (Lee 2013). Belonging, therefore, is affected by conditions outside of migrants’ control. Race and racism shape life opportunities in the US, especially

regarding migrant integration and belonging (Masuoka and Junn 2013). Racism is likely another status that affects migrant sense of belonging, in addition to legal status.

Calling any one characteristic—such as race or legal status—a master status makes that characteristic a “determining trait” which will take precedence or salience over other characteristics that migrants may possess (Showers Johnson 2008; Brubaker 2012). Laura Enriquez has challenged the notion of legal status as a “master status,” arguing that, although legal status continues to have a significant effect on migrants’ lives and their marginalization, it is not always the dominant or determining factor shaping opportunity. She has also introduced an intersectional lens and suggests that a variety of “social locations,” including legal status, race, class, and gender, “intersect and interact over time to marginalize immigrants” (Enriquez 2017). Gonzales and other authors later published a book in which they explore a “plurality of scales at which ‘illegality’ is produced and experienced... as a ‘master status’”, particularly within local governance and informal interactions (Gonzales et al. 2019; Haller 2020), seemingly allowing for a more nuanced understanding of legal inclusion and exclusion.

Given these contradictory understandings of the role of legal status in shaping integration and belonging, this study seeks to challenge Roberto Gonzalez’s “master status” frame and reconcile it with Laura Enriquez’s framework which invites us to look at how factors interact to affect belonging beyond legal status. This will help us to better understand migrants’ subjective experiences with integration and belonging. I seek to understand to what extent legal status matters while also making space for the analysis of other factors which may affect belonging. In this way, I challenge the “master status” frame and show that legal status is not the only determining factor that affects belonging. I find that legal status matters—but it’s not the only thing that matters—especially outside of formal legal spheres. These other informal settings

(social and cultural spheres) create spaces of opportunity for migrants to belong in a setting in which legal status is less relevant. Although these spheres may not be dominant factors in immigration literature, they may be valuable to our understanding of belonging.

### *Economic Inclusion/Exclusion*

Migrants' legal inclusion or exclusion is intertwined with their economic inclusion or exclusion. Some migrants may experience economic exclusion even with a (temporary) legal status, while other migrants may experience economic inclusion even without a (permanent) legal status. Although legal and economic factors are interrelated, it is helpful to separate them in order to understand how migrants operate differently in these spheres, and how they can find belonging within them. The convergence of the legal and economic spheres is evident prior to migration because of the socioeconomic requirements to qualify for temporary visas (Gopal 2016; Lawson and Roychoudhury 2016) and the work restrictions placed on some visas and migrant statuses (including employment-based, student, and tourist visas and unauthorized migrant status; Hall, Greenman, and Yi 2019). Migrants' socioeconomic status prior to migration affects the channels through which they enter the US, where they study and work, and places them in more or less desirable "groups" (Waters and Pineau 2015; Abrego 2014). A migrant's legal path to the US is also affected by their socioeconomic status because most visas require applicants (and/or their sponsors) to prove significant income levels, financial assets, and other evidence of economic stability (Lopez 2017). A migrant's education and work are also often determined by their socioeconomic status, as migrants on student visas must pay out-of-state college tuition with limited access to scholarships and migrants on employment-based visas must demonstrate their ability to build (through their labor) or invest in (through their capital) businesses upon arrival (Blau and Mackie 2017).

Some migrants are desired because they have the necessary skills and training to fill skilled jobs in high demand, like engineering and nursing. The more highly sought after these groups are, the more able they will be to experience economic mobility and integration in US society (Lee and Zhou 2015; Jiménez and Horowitz 2013). Migrants with skills and training with less demand, such as those trained in construction, cooking, and farming, often cannot access visas allowing them to work legally in those fields in the US or receive lower wages and fewer economic benefits when they do (Trimbach 2017). Thus, migrants' socioeconomic status prior to migrating to the US can affect their economic inclusion (access to work, education, and higher incomes) in the US on multiple levels.

Upon arrival, most migrants, including those with temporary legal status (such as those on student- and employee-based visas), face work restrictions related to their legal status. This can limit economic inclusion or lead to economic exclusion. Of the dozens of different kinds of visas—covering a range of migration motivations, from education to work to tourism—each carries with it specific restrictions regarding if, when, and how much those visa holders can legally work (U.S. Department of State).

For example, migrants who arrive in the US as students are not eligible for financial assistance or work permits (Agarwal and Winkler 1985). The student visa allows the foreign student to remain in the US only for the duration of their studies, and only allows them to work on campus for up to 20 hours, usually for low pay. They must also pay a refundable deposit of thousands of dollars with their university to ensure that they can pay any outstanding debts prior to leaving the country. When they graduate, they have to apply for a limited-time work permit and when their work permit is up, they have to obtain an (expensive) employer sponsorship or return to their home country (Ruiz and Budiman 2018; Trimbach 2017; Peek and Ludwig 2021).

During this time in which students are under a student visa, their dependents are not able to work or study (Ravindranath 2017).

Other visa types impose different kinds of restrictions on employment, such as H1B visas that bind migrants to their sponsoring employer (preventing them from obtaining legal employment with a different American employer) and tourist visas that prohibit all paid work (U.S. Department of Labor 2021). These restrictions limit many visa holders' ability to economically integrate in the US. Having liminal legal status creates economic barriers, especially related to employment (Urias and Yeakey 2009), further limiting access to economic inclusion for migrants with liminal legal status (Passel 2006). In these ways, economic inclusion is strongly affected by legal status. But legal status may not always play such a central role in shaping economic inclusion. For example, while having no legal status prevents migrants from entering formal employment, it does not always prevent migrants from participating in informal employment or building informal businesses, particularly by participating in their cultural enclaves and/or social networks (Mastman 2008; Bloch and McKay 2014).

### *Cultural Inclusion/Exclusion*

Migrants in the US come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds (Ngo 2009) and culture varies between and within migrant groups. Migrant groups do not have one single "set of values, traits, beliefs, and behavioral patterns that are fixed and intrinsic" (Lee and Zhou 2015:180), nor does the receiving society have only a single culture into which migrants may integrate. Rather, both migrant and host groups are multicultural (Van De Vijver and Phalet 2004). Migrants from the same country or even city have diverse cultural backgrounds (Cornell and Hartmann 2007). Migrants also bring class-specific experiences that may manifest as divergent cultural practices (Portes and Zhou 1993). It is critical to recognize the heterogeneity

of migrants' backgrounds and experiences, even if they share the same national origin, language, religion and/or other characteristics.

Migrants' cultural backgrounds provide them with cultural capital upon arrival. This cultural capital is made up of the knowledge or skills necessary to participate culturally in the host country. It often facilitates migrants' cultural inclusion, which occurs when migrants are aware of and/or comfortable with any or all of the different cultural norms of the host country. But migrants' backgrounds and lack of cultural capital relative to American society can also contribute to their cultural exclusion. A lack of cultural awareness or comfort leads to this exclusion.

Often, the cultural practices and preferences of the host country facilitate cultural inclusion or impose cultural exclusion, regardless of migrants' efforts to culturally belong (Ngo 2009; Erel 2010; Coutin 2003). Over time, US immigration law and its consequences have contributed to the racialization of migrants who are not white or middle class (Gans 2017; Brown, Jones, and Becker 2018). More specifically, many non-white and lower-class migrants are regarded as undesirable and unwelcome (Massey 2012). Even though the number of migrants in the US who are racial minorities has grown exponentially in the past fifty years, non-White migrants continue to endure racialization (Waters 2001). This kind of reception in US society affects migrants' ability to integrate and belong. Racism and racial exclusion experienced within the host country might prevent migrants from integrating, regardless of their legal status (Leitner 2012; Waters 2001). This means that their race has been a mechanism through which they are stigmatized and regarded as an out-group (Massey 2012). Furthermore, Latino migrants, particularly those with an unauthorized status, have been culturally labeled as a threat (Chavez 2013). The concept of the Latino threat narrative uses rhetoric to describe Latinos as criminals, a

“doctrine intent on sowing distrust...effectively sabotaging the possibility of creating a community” (Oboler 2007:116). Being stereotyped in such a way prevents migrants from enjoying full cultural inclusion, even if they can otherwise culturally belong.

### *Social Inclusion/Exclusion*

Factors within the social and cultural spheres overlap and interrelate yet remain distinct. Migrants’ cultural capital allows them to enter and participate in the host society with a degree of familiarity and comfort. (Erel 2010). While migrants participate in US culture, they also establish, build, and maintain relationships that allow them to build a wider social network. A social network is made up of the interpersonal ties linking migrants and their families, friends, and community members (Poros 2011). Although legal status may affect social networks directly or indirectly, migrants at least have a larger sense of autonomy over who they can meet and with whom they can build relationships. These relationships give them social capital, which is composed of the “actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network” (Bourdieu 1986). It is common for migrants to build social networks that will help them succeed and build a sense of belonging in their communities (Motomura 2006).

Social networks are an important tool for migrants as they adjust to life in the US. These networks provide migrants with the resources that are needed to succeed, even when they are inhibited by legal or economic exclusion (Sadiq 2008). The social networks that migrants had before arrival often lead them to self-select for migration to the US via higher education or high-skilled work, but also for low-skilled unauthorized work (Golash-Boza 2015). Previous cultural familiarity and built-in social networks allow migrants to better integrate into the receiving society and feel more like migrants “in transition,” those who are important contributors to society (Motomura 2006).

### *This Study*

This study seeks to examine how legal status, as well as other social factors, shape migrant sense of belonging by comparing the experiences of different types of migrants and how their own interactions with legal, economic, cultural and social dimensions can positively (or negatively) affect their sense of belonging and integration. In examining migrants' integration experiences and sense of belonging, I am asking the question: Is legal status a master status for migrant belonging? And if is not, how do other factors—such as social networks, religious participation, language and cultural familiarity—shape belonging? By answering these questions, I expand our theoretical understanding of the interplay between migrant status; legal, economic, and sociocultural inclusion; and sense of belonging. I find that legal status does not act as a master status for migrant belonging, but it is one of a number of important factors that shape integration and belonging for international migrants in the US. These findings give us a more nuanced understanding of the migrant experience, and invite further research that studies these factors and their effects. Through this research, I also contribute knowledge that can inform national and sub-national policy changes that better promote and facilitate migrant integration and belonging.

### METHODOLOGY

This study contributes to the literature methodologically in three specific ways: by including the experiences of a range of migrants, including refugees; by examining migrant integration experiences in non-gateway cities; and by adopting a subject-centered approach to defining and exploring migrant integration and belonging. Significant research has been conducted on the migrant experience and the factors that shape migrants' lives. We need

awareness of the effects of different types of inclusion and exclusion on migrants' sense of belonging, including migrants who possess a range of legal statuses and migration experiences.

### *Types of Migrants in this Study*

As the migrant integration literature suggests, the legal status and conditions under which migrants move to and settle in the US affect their access to racial, economic, social, and cultural inclusion (Waters and Pineau 2015; Motomura 2006; Menjívar and Lakhani 2016). We have some idea of how legal, economic, cultural and social factors positively or negatively affect migrants' belonging. Although it is important to understand the factors that affect the migrant experience, we cannot get a full picture before first understanding how those factors affect different kinds of migrants. Do all factors affect migrants in similar ways? I seek to answer this question by interviewing migrants with diverse legal statuses. Descriptions of each of these migrant categories are included below, after which I examine how different types of migrants experience belonging.

Refugees are those forcibly displaced persons who gain entry to the United States after they experience war, natural disaster or persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (Fortin 2000; Worster 2012). Refugees are forcibly displaced persons request asylum from outside the US (Chin and Cortes 2015; Hamlin 2014; Kerwin 2012; Hickerson and Dunsmore 2016). After passing several screening and vetting processes, refugees are resettled in a specific state and city in the US. Through resettlement, they are supported in accessing resources for housing, education,

healthcare, employment, and language training during their initial months post-arrival. Refugee status provides direct paths to lawful permanent residency and citizenship<sup>2</sup>.

Permanent migrants are those migrants who gain entry and residency to the US for purposes of family reunification or employment. The majority of permanent migrants access this status through familial relationships with a spouse, parent, or sibling (Gubernskaya and Derby 2018). A smaller number access permanent residency through their high-skilled employment after working on a temporary work visa for several years. Permanent migrants are those who possess legal permanent residency, a status which grants them long-term permission to live, work, and study in the US and gives them a path to citizenship.

Temporary migrants are those migrants who gain entry into the US for a limited period of time. Many migrants fall under this category, including foreign students, temporary workers and their spouses, and tourists. Each temporary migrant status includes different restrictions on employment and duration of residency (Urias and Yeakey 2009; Hunt and Kie 2018). Most temporary migrants do not have any clear path to permanent residency or citizenship.

Unauthorized migrants are those migrants who entered the US without lawfully crossing the border through a port of entry and those who overstayed their visas. These migrants do not have a right to work or reside in the US. An exception is made for those individuals who qualify for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). They are temporarily protected from deportation and granted the ability to work and study for a limited (but renewable) period of time. All other unauthorized migrants face deportation (Singer and Svajlenka 2013; Fathali 2013; Bono 2014). Unauthorized migrants do not have a path to permanent residency or citizenship and

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<sup>2</sup> I label these individuals as being refugees with permanent status. Because all study participants had been living in the US for at least 5 years, all of the refugees had permanent status (either as permanent residents or citizens).

often face years-long bans from the US before being able to return to the US legally on a temporary or permanent basis.

### *Context of Study Location*

Much of the academic literature on immigration and many of the conclusions scholars have drawn regarding the “migrant” experience have focused on migrants’ experiences in “gateway,” or traditional immigrant-receiving, communities. However, we know much less about the migrant experience in non-gateway, or new immigrant-receiving, communities and the extent to which the conclusions researchers have drawn apply to these immigrant-receiving contexts (Singer 2015). The state of Utah provides a platform for this gap to be addressed. Utah is an emerging gateway state to which thousands of migrants with a variety of statuses are migrating (Migration Policy Institute 2018; Gardner Policy Institute 2017; American Immigration Council 2020). Utah has also received tens of thousands of refugees for resettlement over the past two decades (Shaw et al. 2020). Utah has historically had a monoculture made up of racial and religious homogeneity, but its population has rapidly diversified over the past forty years (Hollingshaus, Harris, and Perlich 2019). Although it is a politically conservative state, Utah and its political leaders have generally proven sympathetic towards the refugee crisis and migration. More broadly, this has created a unique political climate for migrant settlement which is ideal for the study of migrant incorporation and belonging (U.S. Census Bureau 2019; Pew Research Center 2014; Herbert 2019). All of these factors make Utah an important case to study and better understand the complexities of the migrant experience and its interaction with the law, the economy, culture, and society.

### *Data Collection & Analysis*

In order to examine the migrant experience in Utah, I utilize data collected from members of all of the migrant categories outlined above. This includes qualitative interview data and quantitative survey data collected from 162 migrants living in Utah. Student researchers and some faculty conducted interviews with 88 refugees between June 2017 and November 2018 and with 74 immigrants between April 2019 and November 2020. In order to recruit these participants, project researchers used snowball sampling. We used social media platforms to advertise the study and listed information about compensation as well as participation criteria. The criteria for participation were to have arrived in the US as migrants, be 18 years or older, and have lived in the US for at least 5 years and Utah for at least 2 years at the time of the interview. Other research assistants and I utilized our social networks to identify potential interviewees; often, our own friends or even friends of friends volunteered to participate in the study. The interviews were divided into two parts. During the first portion of the interview, interviewees were asked to fill out a quantitative survey, in the form of a self-filled questionnaire, which collects basic demographic information as well as information about interviewee religion, access to resources, wellbeing, and health. Migrants' demographic information is included in the table below. During the second portion of the interview, interviewees were asked in-depth, open-ended questions about their experience as migrants: what their expectations were, the reason they decided to migrate to the US, how their realities met their expectations, opportunities and challenges they have faced since settling in Utah, what success and integration looks like for migrants, how factors such as class and gender affect their experience, and whether they feel they belong in Utah and the US. The interview allowed for follow up-questions and in-depth conversations with interviews ranging from thirty minutes to a

few hours. These interviews were recorded with consent of the interviewees and then transcribed by members of the research team.

[Table 1 about here]

The interview recordings, transcriptions and questionnaire data were entered into secure databases accessible only by the project manager and researchers. For this study, I first analyzed both the qualitative and quantitative interview data. In order to analyze the qualitative data, which this study will focus on, I used the software Dedoose. This software allowed me to create and apply the following codes: Agency/Independence, Alienation/Difference, Barrier to Integration, Class, Culture, Discrimination, Education, Expectations vs Reality, Facilitator of Integration, Family, Gender, Healthcare, Identity, LDS Church, Language, Legal Status, Opportunity, Politics, Race/National Origin, Relationships, Religion, Sacrifice, Sense of Belonging, Stress/Fear, Success, and Work.

Because the primary focus of my study is sense of belonging, I identified a subset of 73 interviews in which interviewees were specifically asked about or directly mentioned belonging, assessed whether they belonged or not, and gave a reason as to why they do or do not have a sense of belonging. Many interviewees explained that their belonging was affected by different factors (not just legal, but also economic, social, and cultural factors). I organized this data into a master spreadsheet, along with the sample's demographic data available through the self-filled questionnaire. I organized the master spreadsheet with columns indicating each migrant's belonging (labeled as yes, no, or sometimes), the interview excerpt in which they express that sense of belonging, any extra quotes that add to their reasoning, any extra information that adds context, and the reason they give for their sense of belonging and which sphere that reason falls into (legal, economic, cultural, social). When needing extra information, I used interview

transcripts, and above-mentioned code excerpts, available on Dedoose, to gather more data. By focusing on the interaction between legal, economic, cultural, and social spheres in which these migrants operate I hope to better understand how inclusion or exclusion within these spheres shape migrants' sense of belonging. By utilizing this lens in my data analysis, I was able to identify the following findings<sup>3</sup>.

## FINDINGS

In my analysis of 73 interviews that directly discussed sense of belonging, I found that 14 interviewees (19% of the sample) felt like they did not belong; 17 interviewees (23% of the sample) felt like they sometimes belong; and 42 interviewees (58% of the sample), felt like they belong. Surprisingly, legal status did not appear to overlap with interviewees' self-reported sense of belonging at all. In the following tables that show interviewee sense of belonging by legal status, you can see that all legal status categories are represented across sense of belonging ("yes," "no," and "sometimes"), meaning that, among the interviewees, there were permanent, temporary, unauthorized and refugee migrants who expressed each type of sense of belonging. This shows that legal status is not a master status for belonging. This finding led me to explore belonging and how migrants find belonging beyond legal status.

[Table 2 about here]

[Table 3 about here]

[Table 4 about here]

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<sup>3</sup>The Social Work department (which worked with refugees) followed a similar data analysis process, and its results were combined into documents of summary findings of all their qualitative data, as well as a grand analysis of all their collected quantitative data. They have shared these documents with us in order to perform our own analysis of the refugee experience.

### *Legal Sphere*

As suggested in the literature, legal status is important in shaping belonging. Particularly, it plays a role in shaping economic belonging. This is because work authorization provides access to the economy, and a permanent official status promotes a sense of belonging. Although we did not directly ask migrants to list their legal status, many commented on the effects of their legal status. Those who had a permanent legal status spoke of their ability to live and work in the United States, their access to opportunity, their past temporary status, and the long and expensive process that was required to adjust to permanent status. Those who did not have a permanent legal status spoke of their fear and trauma, the lack of a path to permanent status, family separation, a lack of rights, their inability to travel, and harsh immigration policies (including deportation).

### *Opportunity*

Without a legal status, migrants are not able to succeed in the “the country of opportunity” (Gabrielle-unauthorized status), even though, for most migrants, “all they want is a job and an opportunity” (Diego-formerly temporary status, now permanent status). A lack of permanent legal status creates steep barriers to opportunity. David (unauthorized status) recounts how his own mother’s unauthorized status denied her the “opportunity to create a different life for herself.” Migrants could study and work and live more freely if they didn’t have the “handicap” of being an unauthorized migrant, as Rodrigo (unauthorized status) explained. Many are held back by a lack of immigration status. Their legal status does not “let them do what [they] want” (Juan-unauthorized status), gives them a feeling they have “no power to do anything,” that they are “hindered” or “can’t reach [their] full capacity” or that their “foot is tied down” (Lucy-temporary status).

When legal status changes, some migrants appreciate how much opportunity has opened up to them. Most of the interviewees mentioned in this section who now possess a permanent legal status previously had a temporary status. Alfonso (formerly temporary status, now permanent status) shared how his life changed after gaining permanent residence: “I have a better job, I can work off campus, I’ve got a green card. I realized now I can figure out life more. I have more opportunities.” But migrants spend a lot of time and resources to achieve a permanent status. Several of those interviewed commented on the arduous immigration processes. When the process started, many were not aware “how much money it would take, how long it would take” (Gabrielle-unauthorized status). Others shared that they achieved legal status after a “long time” (Carla-formerly temporary, now permanent status and Jose-temporary status) and a “long process” that was “expensive” (Pedro-permanent status). Some were even separated from their families for months (Pedro-previously undocumented, now permanent status) or years (Valeria-previously undocumented, now permanent status) as they went through the immigration process. These kinds of inefficiencies are due to a complex immigration system that requires migrants to put in massive amounts of resources towards achieving legal status. Even when they achieve some sort of status, they often find that their status is conditional and requires renewal, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program which allowed or continues to allow young unauthorized migrants like David (unauthorized status) to (temporarily) work in the US and be protected from deportation.

### *Belonging and legal status*

Being able to achieve permanent residency status allows migrants to feel a sense of belonging. Not only is it an important change which helps migrants see that they now belong in the United States (Mandy-previously undocumented, now permanent status) but they also

recognize it as a step necessary towards “becoming a [citizen] of a great, big country” (Ali-Refugee, permanent status). The importance of citizenship can be seen in Sebastian’s (unauthorized status) experience:

I've always had to go above and beyond to prove that I belong. One day I want to actually be a citizen, you know? [starts crying] And I, and I think that that will probably be the most important day of my life, you know? Cause it's like... a chance to finally say like, look, I really do belong. I could live anywhere here and know that this was my home because like I've worked so hard to belong here.

Knowing one has permanent status signals to migrants that they belong in the United States, that this is a place for them and that the country is theirs too. It can also help them see that they have certain rights. Naomi (temporary status) said she would be able to feel like she had a place if she had “similar rights from people from here” and this would allow her and others to say, “this is your country, and that, you know, you’re from the United States.” Wangmo (Refugee, permanent status), recounted how citizenship gave them “somewhere to belong”, and Sonam (Refugee, permanent status) expressed that citizenship gave them “some place to call home.”

As migrants are able to achieve a legal status, they are also able to find a sense of belonging, especially within legal and economic spheres. However, my research demonstrates that legal status was not the only signifier of belonging for these migrants, and it was not necessarily a “master status”. Legal status can be very important, yet many respondents share how critical other forms of belonging can be, sometimes in ways more salient than legal belonging. Although legal status affected migrants’ experience, it did not appear to act as a master status outside of the legal sphere, as interviewees found belonging in other spheres of life in which legal status less directly affects belonging.

### *Economic Sphere*

A primary benefit of having a legal status is having work authorization. Beth (permanent status), for example, was told she could work in the US, and so she was able “to apply to so many jobs” and realized that “with money I can do a lot.” Migrants who do not have a status and therefore have no work authorization must find alternatives to legal employment to sustain themselves and their families. For example, Mandy (previously undocumented, now permanent status) mentioned her mother used “fake papers to be able to work so she could feed us.”

### *Unauthorized status and work*

Those who are employed without a work authorization or under a fake or borrowed social security number run the risk of being deported. Again, most of these individuals now have permanent status but previously held a temporary status. Most of them are aware of the threat posed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Lucy (temporary status) commented on the threat that ICE poses to her family: “Even for my parents who like go to the field and work, like there's always, [the threat] ICE like will come.” Diego (formerly unauthorized, now permanent status) was also deterred by the threat posed by ICE, as he described a day-to-day in which he “barely [went] out to places because when you first come here you are afraid that if you go to certain places you can be caught by ICE.” Fear of deportation is a constant threat for unauthorized migrants. Other feelings, such as “anxiety” (Mandy-formerly unauthorized, now permanent status), “fear” (Emilia-formerly temporary, now permanent status), “trauma” (Gabrielle-unauthorized status) and “stress” (Georgi-formerly temporary, now permanent status), are also common amongst migrants with an unauthorized or liminal status.

### *Student status and work*

Migrants classified as international students also face barriers in their work experience. Sam (formerly temporary, now permanent status) commented: “One of the hard things [is] when I was here on my student visa, I could only work on campus.” Student visas are non-immigrant visas which only allow migrants to work on their school campus for up to 20 hours a week. Eva (temporary status) also had a hard time finding a job on campus and expressed how “it made it hard because I felt limited.” Even when students graduate with skills and a desire to enter the US job market, their status continues to limit them. They are eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT) which is a “temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student’s major area of study” (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services). However, OPT has its own limitations, especially given its complex application process. OPT can be “the only thing holding [them] back” (Li Jun-temporary status) given the time-consuming and costly process of “going through paperwork” (Alejandra-formerly temporary, now permanent status). Legal status greatly impacts economic inclusion, and it appears to act as a master status for economic inclusion, at least in some cases.

### *Social Sphere*

The social sphere shapes sense of belonging in a number of ways for the migrants I interviewed: their network provides encouragement for migration, gives them access to resources upon arrival, is evidence of integration, and gives a community to which they can belong. Social inclusion allows migrants to establish, build, and maintain relationships. Social networks—made up of friends, family, coworkers, and fellow students, among others—are an essential component of social inclusion. Through social networks, migrants are able to gain social capital, which is composed of potential resources linked to the “possession of a durable network or membership in

a group” (Bourdieu 1986). Social networks and social capital help migrants succeed in the host society by connecting them to resources, opportunities, and relationships that contribute to a sense of belonging in their new communities.

### *Social networks prior to arrival*

Many migrants establish social networks with family and friends before they arrive to the United States. For many migrants, migration provides a chance for reunification with those friends and family. Many interviewees who migrated to the US had relatives who already lived somewhere in the country. Some had not “seen [their] sister in a long time” (Beth-permanent status), “were separated for three years from [their] dad” (Valeria-permanent status), “already had family here” (Carla-permanent status), had “parents [who] came first” (Laura-permanent status), or “had some family in town” (Lucas-unauthorized status). An (permanent status) suggested that family-based migration often overlaps with other motives for migration, including work and education, and often stems from non-family social networks: “A lot of people in my hometown, they traveled to other worlds for job opportunities. So same thing with my Dad. So, he ended up here, when I was in the first grade. And then [my parents] brought me here.” Here, we continue to see the tie between legal and economic spheres, but can also see how the social sphere interacts to create belonging in spite of legal and economic barriers.

Other respondents, particularly those who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and/or had served an LDS mission<sup>4</sup>, had friends through that international religious network who inspired or helped them to come to the US, and often Utah specifically. There is a strong LDS presence in Utah: the religion’s headquarters are located in

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<sup>4</sup> An LDS mission is an 18-to-24-month period during which young LDS adults are assigned to serve in specific communities around the world and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Utah and over 50% of the population is LDS (Pew Research Center 2014). For example, Joe (permanent status) heard about BYU<sup>5</sup> while on a mission, and several individuals helped him get to BYU after he completed his missionary service. Alejandra's (permanent status) father was a mission president, and when she decided to move to the US for school, the missionaries who served with her father knew she was coming and offered their support. When Naomi (temporary status) was serving as a missionary in the US, her mission president encouraged her to return to the US after her mission ended. Naomi shared that "after much fasting and prayer and talking to Heavenly Father and my [mission president] talking to me about it, I strongly felt that I needed to come to the US." These individuals and many others had (religious) social networks which motivated and even facilitated migration, even when they did not have clear legal or economic avenues that would help them get there.

#### *Social networks after arrival*

Upon and after arrival, migrants' social networks help them find resources that they need. Alejandra (permanent status), for example, attributes her success at work to her relationships: "In regard to working, it has all been thanks for networking with friends from school. I have kept that contact with people in my field...I have had opportunities." Friends may provide short- or long-term opportunities that allow migrants to participate in society. Family also provides the resources and support those migrants need. Eva (temporary status) said, "I think it has a lot to do with family -- they are the ones I call when I need help." Other acquaintances and connections, such as those gained through religious participation, offer the support needed as migrants arrive. Those connections help migrants "fit in" (Nicolas-unauthorized status), experience "growth"

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<sup>5</sup> Brigham Young University (or BYU) is a private university sponsored by the LDS Church.

(Gabrielle-unauthorized status), “communicate” and “improve” (Desi-permanent status) and find an “instant connection” (Andres-temporary status).

### *Belonging and social networks*

The literature often focuses on the importance of social networks for migrants in terms of access to resources and opportunities, but my interviewees emphasized how social networks yield benefits beyond connecting migrants to these resources and opportunities. For example, they emphasized the value of the relationships in and of themselves to contribute to migrants’ sense of belonging. Migrants like sisters Alejandra (permanent status) and Eva (temporary status) were aided by their friends and family to participate in their new host society. Because of this participation, they were able to establish a sense of belonging. Religious networks, as described above, also helped provide migrants with this instant sense of belonging. For example, Georgi (permanent status) expressed that because “the [LDS] Church is everywhere [in Utah]...there is always that support group”. Rodrigo (unauthorized status) found it easier to “integrate because there are similarities in...the gospel” and Yu Yan (temporary status) felt “more welcome at the church and it gives you a safety net where you can get the support you need”. Migrants like Georgi, Rodrigo, and Yu Yan, who all have different statuses, were able to connect with people in their religious community and become a part of a social circle that helped them feel like they belong.

Often relationships themselves are what help a migrant feel like they belong, as many migrants see having friends and other relationships as evidence of integration. Being able to make friends was seen by many interviewees as a rite of passage. Everyone else around them had a social network (it seemed “normal” to have one) and once they had one of their own, it meant they were integrated. Andres (temporary status) stated: “I have friends. I go to school, and I just

live a normal life.” Charlotte (temporary status) observed: "I'm just here having fun, making friends...why wouldn't I belong here?" Lexi (permanent status) explained: “I think that when you are working and going to school somewhere, even if you don't want to integrate, like those things integrate you because you go to school, you learn... You're spending time with those people and that, it just starts to rub off on you.” As migrants are able to fulfill social expectations of mainstream US society, like making friends, they increasingly feel a part of it. Both Charlotte and Lexi, as they made friends, felt like they were integrated. Charlotte even sees this integration as belonging. Overall, having social networks became a facilitator of integration because having friends allowed migrants to find similarities with others around them, rather than emphasize their differences. These informal social interactions seemed to trump formal legal or economic interactions that migrants experienced.

#### *Belonging to a subsection of the community*

Migrants’ relationships with a specific segment of their community can also help them feel connected to or feel like a part of the greater community. Alfonso (permanent status) acknowledged that being part of even a subsection of the community makes him feel like he belongs to the community as a whole: “Belonging is more like feeling part of a community [like] the Hispanic community or my accounting friends. I guess the accounting program helped me feel like I belong, because I do. You feel like you're a part of something bigger.” Beth (permanent status) also felt connected to a smaller subsection of her community. She shared that her belonging was aided by “the Filipino community in Utah. It's kind of nice because every time I'm with them, it feels like home.” Her sense of belonging is directly related to her social interactions with a subset of the community. An (permanent status) shared: “People are really nice here. Like when I was in college, my roommates were all really friendly. I don't feel like...

Even though I'm not belongs [sic] to the culture, I feel like I'm a part of the... You know, it's not like I feel like oh I'm not a Mormon then people hate me. It's not like that. I still feel like I belong in Utah.” An acknowledged that even not being part of the mainstream cultural sphere in the region, being in and being accepted by those she interacted with socially has helped her feel like she belongs.

### *A lack of social belonging*

However, some migrants do not have strong social networks and, for many of them, their lack of social connections and interactions hinders their integration. Without strong relationships, many migrants do not have full access to their communities or the resources within them. Furthermore, their lack of connection to the broader community often leads them to feel like they do not belong. Abdul (permanent status) believes that integration is related to how strong of a connection you have with the community. He reflected on the importance for him and other migrants to “gain inroads into the local community or some of the community or some of the person[s].” Acknowledging that he is not “a gregarious person,” Abdul explained that he struggled to build connections that helped him feel like he belonged. When not able to have social interactions with others, or participate socially, migrants may feel a lack of connection to the community. As Isaro (Refugee, permanent status) described: “It’s kind of like my fault I didn’t get involved when I was [in college] but, I don’t know. Like it was just hard to like to connect. And I don’t know, maybe I feel like, ‘cause like, well like I’m different... Before I like join anything, I have to like find like this little connection.” Some migrants even make a direct connection between social relationships and a sense of belonging, such as Lusamba (Refugee, permanent status), who said, “Since I came here, I didn't belong. I want to be, to be friendly with different people so I can learn...from them, they can learn from me. That's helping me to adjust.”

Social networks are often a facilitator of integration because they can provide migrants with needed resources, help, and advice. Social networks often motivate migrants to move to the US, and these same social networks provide them with help upon and after arrival. There are many ways in which social networks, in general, allow migrants to feel like they belong because they provide some sort of connection to their community. This connection was not dependent on migrants' legal status, but rather on their ability to gain and build relationships. In this way, migrants were able to experience a social inclusion that increased their sense of belonging outside of their legal status. The social sphere in which migrants participate (and to what extent they are included in it) also affects the legal, economic, cultural inclusion that migrants experience because relationships open doors to legal, economic, and cultural resources.

### *Cultural Sphere*

The cultural sphere also plays a role in shaping belonging. Interviewees in my sample had a number of explanations for finding belonging in the cultural sphere, and this is evident in this longer section of my findings. Perhaps because culture is complex (and hard to explain) and each migrant has a unique culture (which is made up by a number of elements), interviewees spent more time explaining how elements of culture (and their familiarity with those elements) shaped their sense of belonging. Migrants were able to find belonging through cultural familiarity, language ability, and co-ethnic communities. Culture is a difficult concept to define, as any one geographic region contains many different cultures and understandings of culture. In this paper, I am using interviewees' own understandings and descriptions of culture to shape my discussion of the "cultural sphere." As interviewees discussed cultural elements, interactions, and belonging, they consistently referred to the following themes: being familiar with and participating in the culture; being a member of and participating in a religious community; and

having a mastery of the language. Interviewees acknowledged that being involved in both US culture and Utah culture is important for belonging because having a knowledge of what is typically done and being able to do it helps individuals feel like they are a part of society like everybody else. Other interviewees did not express a specific pre-existing familiarity with the culture prior to migration, yet upon arrival were eager to familiarize themselves with (and, often, embrace) the local culture. Another segment of the individuals interviewed expressed a desire to learn and be part of the host culture while balancing this with a preservation of their own home culture. Their ability to achieve these things was not dependent on their legal status.

### *The LDS church culture*

Approximately 50 (or two thirds) of the interviewees are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), the majority religion in Utah whose leaders founded the state and to which more than half of Utah's population claims affiliation (Pew Research Center 2014). LDS interviewees<sup>6</sup>, particularly those who were members of the faith prior to migrating to Utah, discussed how their familiarity with the culture of the LDS Church, such as a deep knowledge of the values and actions typical of an LDS Church member, helped them to quickly feel a sense of cultural affinity and belonging in Utah. Being familiar with and subscribing to LDS culture, as well as having others understand why she participated in that culture (something she didn't experience prior to migrating), helped Beth (permanent status) feel like she belongs in Utah. She shared: "When I got here, everyone was LDS. Here everyone just knows [about your faith] and you don't have to explain yourself. I think it's cool because I like my people." Beth sees LDS

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<sup>6</sup> I want to note that some of the unauthorized, temporary, and permanent migrant interviewees were members of the LDS Church prior to migrating to the US; none of the refugee interviewees were LDS before arriving to Utah. Additionally, some migrants, including refugees, joined the LDS church after settling in Utah.

Church members as “her” people, perhaps just as much or more as she sees fellow co-nationals as “her” people. This common LDS culture that crosses international borders can help create a community and sense of belonging that is crucial for migrants. Amy (permanent status) shared: “We have Sunday church meetings and [activities for women and youth], that’s why we always feel like we belong to this area. Because we attend the same [congregation as our neighbors] and then it makes me feel like there’s no big differences.” Much like the social sphere, participating in the cultural sphere allowed migrants to highlight the similarities they held with those around them, rather than highlight their differences.

Those who migrated to the US and were LDS before migrating already participated in LDS Church culture in their home countries. Rather than struggling to adapt to a new culture, these individuals were able to quickly participate in a culture that was already familiar to them and in which they had participated and found meaning. Being familiar with the traditions and practices within the LDS Church helps migrants adapt and be part of Utah culture, even when their national cultures may be quite different from broader American culture. Emilia (permanent status), for example, was not familiar with “all of US culture, exactly, but Utah culture” and she “got immersed into the BYU culture, which was even more kind of in a bubble restricted and different. So, and I liked it though. I mean that I felt comfortable in that kind of environment”. Eva (temporary status), before moving to the US, knew “BYU and BYU Idaho were religious schools, based on the values we have at church. The new lifestyle didn’t impact me the way I thought it would. It was not a huge change.” Knowing the LDS culture allowed Emilia and Eva to participate in this subculture when they moved to the US. Not all migrants had this religious familiarity upon arrival, or experienced religious comfort. Many participants joined the religion after migrating and most of the refugee participants had not heard of the LDS Church prior to

migrating to Utah. On the other hand, some participants who were part of the LDS Church prior to migrating felt a disconnect within LDS Church settings in Utah.

### *The general American culture*

Other interviewees described how they see taking part in the general American culture as a signifier of integration. Sebastian, an unauthorized immigrant who came to the US as a child, explained why, despite his lack of citizenship, he thinks of himself as American:

I feel like I'm an American. Yeah. Right. But like the arbitrary designation of citizen is... I've never even felt like remotely close to that, you know? Right. But I definitely, I definitely feel American, you know, like I grew up in the same high schools. I watched the same movies growing up in the same language. I played the same video games. I watched the same TV shows every Saturday morning. I read the same comic books and I like; I think I went to the same goddamn church. [...] I feel like there is nothing that separates me from my American friends, you know?

Sebastian has been participating in what he regards as the “typical” American life since he was little. Because he is doing things that those around him are doing, he does not see himself as different. Rather, he sees himself as belonging culturally, even if he does not belong legally. When asked about integration, Andres (temporary status) described this kind of belonging in cultural terms: “being able to speak English... enjoying the food because everybody eats... sporting events... just like going and being part of the crowd.” Irene (permanent status) also regards herself as belonging because “in my house the language spoken is English, the food that is eaten is typical food from here, the things we do are typical American”. In these ways, having cultural proximity or participating in the dominant culture can shape migrants’ integration and sense of belonging. This was true for these three migrants who all had different statuses.

### *Language proficiency*

Many interviewees also identified knowledge and mastery of the English language and the ability to communicate with others as another important cultural facilitator of integration. Being able to communicate well with others helps many confident English-speaking interviewees feel like they belong. Li Jun (temporary status) placed major importance on language as an indicator of integration. He had a familiarity with the American culture and language before migrating because he had attended American schools abroad. Given this linguistic and cultural fluency, Li Jun concluded that, “for the most part, I could integrate easily because there was no language barrier.” Sam (permanent status) shared similar thoughts about the need for mastery of the English language. He said, “I think at the basic level, integration is getting to the point where you can function in a society. And that may mean different things. I think learning the language is a big part of that. I think it's hard to integrate fully if you don't know the language because you'll always be at a disadvantage if you can't do that.”

Migrants who have not yet mastered the language often feel a sense of alienation. Raul (permanent status) shared, “If someone hears me doing something in Spanish, they try to intimidate me and question what I came to do in this country and tell me I must speak English like them. I tell them I'm learning; to be patient.” Phil (permanent status) also felt a sense of pressure to learn English, when he said: “I feel like moving here and understanding like, I should probably speak English, you know, people expect me to speak English.” Diana (permanent status) recognized that her lack of ability to communicate was “the most challenging” aspect of trying to fulfill her goals in Utah, and made her feel like she didn't have a voice. The kind of alienation experienced by those who did not fully master the English language hindered their belonging, even when they held a permanent legal status.

### *Belonging to a subsection of the culture*

Not all migrants completely immerse themselves in the host culture. Some seek to strike a balance between their home and host cultures. Alfonso (permanent status) “took some aspects of their [US] culture, but the core is still me;” similarly, William (permanent status) believes that “for integration I do not think it is losing your cultural heritage but it’s coming into America and taking what you think is best and adopting those things.” Cristina (permanent status) expressed a desire to not only merge cultures in her own life, but also in the lives of her children: “I want to keep my culture and teach my kids my culture. [...] I want them to learn the culture of the United States, but I really want to keep what makes me feel that I am here, but I am from there.” Yu Yan (temporary status) shared similar sentiments when she explained it is important:

To have the ability to build your own culture. Shape the person you want to become. Also hold onto those values you have for yourself. As immigrants we come with our own culture and background. You are constantly evolving and changing. Every day you are immersing yourself with so many different cultures that may be different or hard.

Integration means you are confident in who you are, and you are able to integrate what’s best for you in your own culture and life.

Some migrants see the importance of understanding and participating in their host country’s culture while also maintaining their home country’s culture. Striking this balance results in integration and a sense of belonging for them.

Other migrants shared that their sense of belonging was not tied to a new American culture, but rather the culture from whence they came. These migrants were able to find a big enough part of their “home” culture in the US. As discussed above, being surrounded by those who understand and share in a subculture can create a sense of belonging, even if that subculture

does not entirely fit into or align with the majority American culture. Noelia (permanent status) was able to preserve her cultural identity within the greater community by intentionally seeking out community among the Mexican population in Utah:

When we moved back from Mexico a few years ago, we started going to our English “ward,” our church congregation that was English-speaking. But I really wanted to be in a Spanish ward. And a couple of years after, we moved to the Spanish ward because that's where my husband was assigned to work and serve, and I felt right at home there. So, at church, surrounded by Hispanics, or Spanish speakers, is one of those places where I love it. But also, when I surround myself with women who can also relate to my heritage, whether it's because they speak Spanish or because they too have Hispanic heritage, that too has made me feel right at home. And I hadn't realized that was one of the things I needed. Like, I have a ton of friends who are English speakers, and I love being with them, but I hadn't realized how much—how I am my complete self when I can be Spanish Noelia.

This completeness of self that Noelia described is something other interviewees sought by finding ways to preserve their host country identities. Some recounted their efforts to maintain a smaller cultural community within their new host community, like Carla (permanent status), who explained that “in our case, in my house so to speak, we live like [we're] in Ecuador. We cook like we're in Ecuador, we always speak Spanish, we try to have decor that reminds us of our country. So, we conserve our own values”. By finding ties to their home country's culture, migrants are able to maintain a sense of belonging even within larger and mainstream US culture, like Beth (permanent status), who felt “at home” when she was with her Filipino community.

### *A lack of cultural belonging*

A small segment of the interviewees expressed difficulty in fitting into Utah culture in spite of being able to understand it. Santiago (permanent status), for example, describes integration as “having an understanding of the culture and the way of life and what is expected” and “using that knowledge to act appropriately in the culture you live in.” Santiago understands US culture and regards this understanding as important to integration. However, in spite of his understanding, he “was not always so comfortable with the culture and I needed a place to belong.” William (permanent status) grew up being familiar with American culture. He understood, for example, that sports were a big part of American culture, and “sports were the big thing in [his] childhood.” However, “in Canada everyone loved hockey and then coming to America very few people [did] so having the shift to where everyone loved football, it was a big change.” Though cultural understanding seems to lead to cultural belonging, these migrants’ experiences show that belonging is complex and does not always come as a result of understanding or participating in one single sphere.

In sum: cultural familiarity and affinity are typically facilitators of integration in Utah. There are four main ways in which migrants exhibit this familiarity and affinity. First, familiarity with local subculture(s). Many interviewees were members of the LDS Church prior to arrival in the US. This gave them knowledge and familiarity with Church culture which did not require them to become familiar with a whole new culture and instead allowed them to seamlessly participate in the (dominant) LDS culture in Utah. Second, participate in and find connection with the general US culture. For migrants, doing things similarly to those in mainstream society was a signifier of integration and belonging. Third, many migrants indicated that mastery of the English language was needed to participate socially and belong in US society. Finally, some

migrants expressed a desire to participate in US culture and embrace the things they identify with while at the same time preserving their own home culture. Some migrants end up integrating into the culture or building one of their own. Interviewees expressed they enjoyed this cultural inclusion regardless of their legal status and they found belonging outside of a legal status.

### *The Role of Race & Racism*

Race and ethnicity came into play in the lives of many migrants and was explicitly mentioned by more than a third of the sample, even though they were not asked about race. Although race is not one of the spheres on which I focused, I found that migrants often mentioned race when speaking of their belonging (or lack thereof). The prominence of racialized experiences in interviewee responses made me feel compelled to discuss how race and racism shapes belonging outside of and beyond the spheres discussed above. I found that some interviewees experienced discrimination, while others struggled to find diversity in their communities. For migrants perceived as non-white, their race and ethnicity were noticed by those around them and has been used by others as a mechanism to exclude in formal and informal interactions.

### *Racism in informal settings*

Migrants experienced racial discrimination in informal interactions with friends and family. Mandy (permanent status) noted that when she would go to “other people's houses and they've never seen like a Hispanic in their home or something and it might have made me feel like they were kind of scared that I was just going to do something.” Similarly, Alfonso (permanent status) went on a hike with friends and noticed there “was this white guy who was so annoyed I was there, and I didn't know why...come to realize he didn't really like Hispanics that

much.” Carolina (permanent status) was told to “go back”, even after being in the US for over two decades.

### *Racism in formal settings*

Migrants also experienced discrimination in formal interactions with law enforcement and government authorities. When Diego (permanent status) passed through customs at the airport, he was asked whether he had enough money to travel, and when answering that his family owned a hotel, the officer asked him whether it was a “two-room hotel full of cockroaches.” Also at the airport, Emilia (permanent status) has expressed that immigration officers “looking at me with suspicious eyes...I feel like ugh they're looking at me like I'm a Hispanic.” When Santiago (permanent status) was crossing the US border with Canada, an officer realized he was Colombian, asked how he received his citizenship, and then went on to search his car. Santiago added that he and his companions “had been in a line forever and no other cars were searched.” When Enrique (temporary status) got pulled over with two other friends, they believed it was because the officers “saw it was three Hispanics in the car.” Similarly, although Sebastian (unauthorized status) was only driving slightly above the speed limit one night, he was pulled over and arrested.

### *A lack of racial diversity*

A lack of racial diversity also affected the way that migrants saw their belonging. Valeria (permanent status) grew up in a diverse neighborhood in New Jersey, but when she moved to Utah, she noticed that “there are a lot of blonde people, a lot of white people”. When Diego (permanent status) first arrived at his Utah school, he realized he “was the only brown kid. I was the only colored kid in the whole school.” Li Jun (temporary status) noted that there “aren't many Asians in Utah and it was easy to be singled out as the only Asian in class.” He also noted that “Utah is pretty white.” Others noticed that their ethnicity (based on the country they were born in, or the country their parents were born in) made them different. Alex’s (permanent status)

daughter, who is half white and half Finnish, had friends who told her “she wasn't American, and American equaled white to them” and therefore assumed “she wasn't white.”

Conversely, migrants with lighter skin or hailing from countries that are considered “whiter” can experience racial inclusion. Alejandra (permanent status) noted that “because I am fair, my skin is light, I have not experienced that same discrimination from peers from the same country.” Georgi (permanent status) noted that in his interactions “everybody was nice to me. Sadly, I think it's because I was an immigrant from Belgium. It would have been different if I was from Mexico or Haiti.” Guido (permanent status) also said that for those from South America (like himself), the “migratory experience is quite pleasant, it's not easy, but it's possible.” Migrants who can fit into the racial or ethnic majority expressed they had an easier path to finding a sense of belonging in the US. This is because their race or ethnicity did not single them out as being different. They had fewer challenges in finding belonging in other spheres. Participants' experiences showed that race and legal status matter, yet many were able to find belonging in other spheres.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

I embarked on this study to understand the ways in which migrants belong, asking the question: Is legal status a master status for migrant belonging? If not, how do other factors shape belonging? The literature suggests that legal status may act as the “master status” that determines whether migrants belong or not, especially for migrants with liminal or unauthorized status. As suggested by the work of Laura Enriquez (2017), I found that though legal status matters, migrants' lives, experiences, and identities are incredibly complex and should be viewed through an interrelation lens. Besides the legal sphere, migrants also operate in economic, cultural, and

social spheres. There is more than one factor that affects belonging, and there is more than one way to achieve belonging.

My results indicate that legal status is not the only thing that determines belonging. However, I was not able to determine which type of inclusion matters the most. In reality, I found that all of these spheres matter. I also found that there are barriers to entry (such as a lack of a social network or language ability), as well as facilitators of integration (such as religious participation or cultural familiarity) into each of these spheres. I was able to show that, in spite of barriers to entry into the legal sphere, migrants find more than one way to belong in social and cultural spheres.

These results confirm the importance of formal factors (such as legal status) in shaping belonging yet challenge the notion that formal factors (such as legal status) are the only factors that determine belonging. My sample was made up by a diverse group of migrants: they varied in age, gender, birth country, religion, and length of stay in the US. They also varied in their legal status: some were students, some were permanent residents or citizens, some were refugees, and some were unauthorized individuals. In total, 42 interviewees, felt like they belong; 17 interviewees felt like they sometimes belong; and 14 interviewees felt like they did not belong. These amounts and percentages did not break down equally by the migrant's legal status. There were permanent migrants who felt like they did not belong, and unauthorized migrants who felt like they did. Although there are bright boundaries surrounding belonging in the legal sphere, migrants were able to find belonging within the blurred boundaries of the social and cultural spheres (Alba 2005). This suggests that informal factors, such as social networks, mastery of the English language, or forming part of the majority religion, help migrants find belonging beyond their legal status.

In looking more closely at the data, we can confirm that some characteristics, such as legal status or race, strongly affect sense of belonging. Those individuals who are unauthorized have no work authorization, no right to reside in the US, no path to citizenship, are at risk of deportation and might experience family separation. These limitations cause stress and trauma, and hinder migrants' feelings of belonging in the US, primarily because they cannot access the rights, protections, and opportunities awarded to permanent residents and citizens. Even when migrants are able to achieve a legal status, it comes at a price. Adjusting your legal status requires vast amounts of time, money, stress and other challenges. Oftentimes, issues regarding legal status seemed to be out of the control of the migrants I interviewed. Other migrants were also limited by the racism and racial exclusion they faced due to their race or ethnicity. Many of them experienced discrimination in formal and informal interactions. They moved to a state that lacks diversity, and the white majority has made them feel like outsiders. Race and legal status often interacted to negatively affect the migrants interviewed.

Despite these restrictions, many interviewees were able to find integration and belonging in social and cultural spheres. In the social sphere, migrants built social networks based on friends, family, coworkers, religious acquaintances, and fellow students. Oftentimes these social networks were established previous to arrival and provided migrants with needed support upon arrival. These social networks also signaled their integration and a connection to the greater community. In the cultural sphere, migrants established and developed familiarity of both US and LDS culture. They also used their mastery of the English language and connections to other subcultures to enjoy cultural inclusion. Overall, this study shows there are various ways in which migrants are able to belong in social and cultural spheres.

However, this study has its limitations. As acknowledged previously, migrants' experiences are incredibly complex. Belonging is not solely impacted by migrants' legal, economic, cultural, and social characteristics. Other characteristics such as gender or family structure may affect their sense of belonging. Those factors were not included in this study, though they can be explored in future studies of belonging. This study was also limited by its sample size. The 73 individuals I included in my study do not represent a fraction of the almost 50 million migrants present in the US (Budiman 2020). More work has to be done to understand the individual and group experiences of migrants in diverse contexts.

Despite these limitations, my study offers several contributions to migration literature. First and foremost, it focuses on migrants' sense of belonging rather than their marginalization. A more positive outlook and approach can be taken in studying the migrant experience. This study also invites larger questions of what it means to belong to a community. It invites an examination of what elements or factors in an individual's life facilitate or hinder belonging in a community. It also suggests that there are more informal processes that have a powerful influence on belonging. This qualitative study has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of belonging, especially regarding the individual experience. Findings demonstrate that multiple factors interact to influence belonging, and therefore, that individuals show different pathways to belonging. This study offers a blueprint for other researchers examining what it means for any individual to belong and offers a guide of how different elements of the human experience interact to build community.

This study also has several policy implications and recommendations that local, state, and federal lawmakers can implement to help migrants feel like they belong. These could lead to improvements for migrants in each of the spheres mentioned (legal, economic, cultural, and

social). First, we discuss changes that could better facilitate migrants' participation in formal, legal and economic spheres. Migrants should have a wider variety of paths to permanent residency and citizenship. With more flexible (and efficient) paths to legalization, more migrants (including students and workers) will be able to contribute to US society. Furthermore, work authorization should be more accessible for temporary and unauthorized migrants. This will allow them to more fully contribute to the US economy. Both legal and economic changes would require federal government action by policy makers.

Policy changes are also needed within informal, cultural and social spheres. These changes will be achievable by local governments and private individuals. Within the cultural sphere, I highlighted the importance of cultural familiarity, religiosity, language, and smaller ethnic enclaves. Local and state governments (and organizations) may be particularly effective in innovating policies to aid the cultural inclusion for migrants. They can expand language training, promote outreach to ethnic enclaves and strengthen those ethnic enclaves, and fund organizations that increase cultural understanding. Within the social sphere, local and state governments and organizations can also foster social connections between migrants and the rest of the population, whether that be co-ethnics or not. Not only do migrants need cross-cultural relationships to increase belonging, but they may benefit from resources and opportunities that come from such networks. Any of the abovementioned policy suggestions will aid and encourage belonging for migrants from all legal, economic, social, and cultural backgrounds. My hope is that in spite of barriers to belonging, we can encourage and enact the change necessary to help any migrant achieve belonging.

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TABLES

*Table 1: Summary of Interviewee Demographic Information*

Demographic Category	n	%
Sex		
Male	34	47
Female	39	53
Education Level		
At Least Some College	63	86
High School Diploma	7	10
Other	3	4
Age		
20-29	35	48
30-39	15	21
40+	23	32
Average	35.1	
Marital Status		
Never Married	24	33
Married	40	55
Divorced/Separated	9	12
Geographic Region of Birth		
Canada	2	3
Mexico	11	15
Central America	5	7

Caribbean	1	1
South America	22	30
Europe	7	10
Africa	8	11
Asia	17	23
Years in US		
4-9	30	41
10-19	21	29
20+	22	30
Average	15.8	
Employment Type		
Full Time	37	51
Part Time	18	25
Not Working	5	7
Other	13	18
Religious Affiliation		
LDS	44	60
Other	17	23
None	7	10
Not specified	5	7
Legal Status <sup>7</sup>		

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<sup>7</sup> Neither the questionnaire nor interview guide directly asked for migrants' legal status. Here, I use the interview data to deduce the migrants' legal status. Interviewees either mentioned their status or spoke of factors that helped me discern what their status is.

Permanent	38	52
Refugee	12	16
Temporary	14	19
Unauthorized	9	12

Table 2: (No) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status

Interviewee	Sense of Belonging	Legal Status
Abdul	No	Permanent
Alex	No	Permanent
Diego	No	Permanent
Emilia	No	Permanent
Gabrielle	No	Undocumented
Halima	No	Refugee
Ignacio	No	Undocumented
Isaro	No	Refugee
Lusamba	No	Refugee
Naomi	No	Temporary
Rodrigo	No	Undocumented
Santiago	No	Permanent
Sebastian	No	Undocumented
Yu Yan	No	Temporary

*Table 3: (Sometimes) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status*

Interviewee	Sense of Belonging	Legal Status
An	Sometimes	Permanent
Caleb	Sometimes	Refugee
Carolina	Sometimes	Permanent
Cristina	Sometimes	Permanent
David	Sometimes	Undocumented
Diana	Sometimes	Permanent
Emmanuel	Sometimes	Permanent
Enrique	Sometimes	Temporary
Fatima	Sometimes	Refugee
Georgi	Sometimes	Permanent
Juan	Sometimes	Undocumented
Juliana	Sometimes	Permanent
Lynn	Sometimes	Permanent
Mary	Sometimes	Permanent
Phil	Sometimes	Permanent
Samuel	Sometimes	Temporary
Valeria	Sometimes	Permanent

*Table 4: (Yes) Sense of Belonging by Legal Status*

Interviewee	Sense of Belonging	Legal Status
Achol	Yes	Refugee
Alejandra	Yes	Permanent
Alfonso	Yes	Permanent
Ali	Yes	Refugee
Amy	Yes	Permanent
Andres	Yes	Temporary
Antonio	Yes	Permanent
Ayaru	Yes	Permanent
Beth	Yes	Permanent
Carla	Yes	Permanent
Charlotte	Yes	Temporary
Desi	Yes	Permanent
Diana	Yes	Undocumented
Eva	Yes	Temporary
Gretta	Yes	Permanent
Guido	Yes	Permanent
Hannah	Yes	Temporary
Irene	Yes	Permanent
Jason	Yes	Permanent
Joe	Yes	Permanent
Jose	Yes	Refugee

Laura	Yes	Permanent
Lexi	Yes	Permanent
Li Jun	Yes	Temporary
Lucas	Yes	Undocumented
Lucy	Yes	Temporary
Luis	Yes	Temporary
Mandy	Yes	Permanent
Mohamed	Yes	Refugee
Nadim	Yes	Refugee
Nicolas	Yes	Undocumented
Noelia	Yes	Permanent
Pedro	Yes	Permanent
Raul	Yes	Permanent
Sam	Yes	Permanent
Sanja	Yes	Temporary
Sonam	Yes	Refugee
Susan	Yes	Temporary
Thao	Yes	Refugee
Veronica	Yes	Permanent
Wangmo	Yes	Refugee
William	Yes	Permanent