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2022

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Abstract

We sought to explore how Latina adolescent immigrants experience immigration across adolescence as they seek to know and express their authentic selves through dress and appearance. Our work was informed by theories of acculturation, identity, and authenticity. Participants included 12 immigrant women who identified as Latina and who immigrated before age 16. Open-ended interviews focused on participants' memories of their immigration experiences during adolescence. Data were analyzed using constant comparison processes. Findings revealed that, for participants, the typical challenges of adolescence were complicated by immigration that included constructing an authentic identity at the intersection of two cultures. Immigration produced a disjointed dance towards authenticity with many uneven steps, sharp turns, and the occasional reversal. Dress was a key means for the expression of the authentic self; a self that communicated to the culture of settlement who they were and how their culture of origin was part of their authentic self.

Keywords: Authenticity, adolescent, acculturation, identity, immigrant, dress, Latina

In 2018, Latinx[1] individuals accounted for 50% of all immigrants to the United States (US) (Pew Research Center, 2020). For Latinx adolescent migrants—or those between the ages 10 and 19 years (World Health Organization, 2022)—immigration coincides with lifespan stages during which key forms of personal and social development take place (Erikson, 1968). Latinx immigrant youth often experience dissonance between the societal messages they receive about the self from dominant culture and the messages they receive from their home culture shared with their families and communities of origin (Hogg, 2011). These conflicting messages pervade the social, familial, and educational spaces Latinx youth must navigate in coming of age. As they adapt to new environments, they must negotiate who they are across contexts and who they want to become (Kaiser & Green, 2021). This adaptation involves *acculturation* (Sam & Oppedal, 2003). In this study, we adopt a seminal definition of acculturation as, "changes that individuals undergo as they move from their culture of origin to a culture of settlement" and where the individuals are a culturally non-dominant group (Berry, 1997, 2001; Skuza, 2007, p. 448).

With the present work, we explore how Latina adolescent immigrants experience immigration across adolescence as they seek to know and express their evolving sense of their authentic selves through their dress and appearance. Here, we adopt Roach-Higgins and Eicher's (1992) conceptualization of dress and appearance to include body supplements and modifications (dress) as well as features of the "undress[ed] body … such as its shape and color" (appearance) (p. 3). Dress and appearance are a key way that people communicate an evolving sense of identity—or a "sense of *who* [they] are (becoming) … as [they] "decipher and express *when* and *where* they are" (Kaiser & Green, 2021, p. 1). To date, researchers have yet to undertake an in-depth exploration of the role of dress and appearance in adolescent Latina immigrants' acculturation experiences and the way in which these young immigrants use dress and appearance to express a sense of who they are or are becoming as authentic selves.

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1. Throughout the paper, we use the word, "Latinx" as a gender-neutral, pan-ethnic label to describe Americans with roots in Latin America (including the Caribbean) and Spain. We use the word, "Latina" to describe Latinx individuals who identify as women or girls, including participants in the present study, who responded to a call for individuals who identified as Latina, immigrated to the United States (US) before age 16, and were aged 20 to 24 years at the time of the study.

Theorizing Acculturation

Acculturation theory addresses cultural and psychological processes and outcomes of intercultural contact, including how that contact prompts changes in either culture (Berry, 1997, 2001). Acculturation is an ongoing, iterative process; strategies adopted by individuals may shift over time as personal characteristics and contexts change (Berry, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Thus, the process of acculturation is not linear; it is dynamic and fluid (Sam, 2000; Yeh & Hwang, 2000). Given the variable and fluid nature of acculturation, we are interested in adolescent, Latina immigrants' past and ongoing self and identity expressions through dress and appearance as part of the process of acculturation. To explore this topic, we use Berry's (1997, 2001) theoretical framework as a foundation. This framework delineates four acculturation strategies that explain different levels of orientation toward the culture of origin (COO) and settlement (COS): assimilation (adopting the COS, rejecting the COO), integration (aligning towards both cultures), separation (retaining only the COO), and marginalization (rejecting both cultures). Integration, the most commonly used strategy, provides the best chance of successful acculturation (Berry, 1997). The term "bicultural" has been used in place of integration as it reflects a positive relationship with both the COO and the COS, does not require a preference for either culture, and has been shown to be especially effective for immigrant youth (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Constructing Latina Immigrant Identities Through Dress and Appearance

Identity, Acculturation and Adolescence

Identity has been conceptualized as the "self-in-context" or the socially-situated self and as the product of social interaction (Kaiser, 1997). The agentic aspect of identity is acknowledged through the concept of "identity work," which references the way individuals perform or "manufacture" identity in an on-going cycle as they strive to develop a coherent and distinctive notion of the self while struggling to

navigate various social influences in their surrounding milieu (Watson, 2008). So conceptualized, identity work therefore references "how people signify qualities and identities" through interaction (Schwalbe & Shay, 2014, p. 156).

Hermans (2001) posits that multiple selves can inhabit diametrically opposed positions—for instance, at the intersection of two cultures—ultimately resulting in a "complex, narratively structured self" (p. 248). Furthermore, moving from one culture to another includes significant shifts in context resulting in inventive redefinitions and/or reorganizations of someone's individual and collective identities (Thoits & Virshup, 1997).

One of the primary tasks of adolescence is identity formation (Erikson, 1968). During adolescence, commitments are made to various aspects of identity through a process of exploration. Identification with two different cultural groups can be problematic for adolescents' sense of identity for varied reasons, including negative attitudes towards the COO and complex emotions related to the immigration/acculturation experience (Collie et al., 2010; Phinney, 1990). Immigration during adolescence often obliges the choice of one culture over the other or the development of a completely new cultural identity (biculturalism) alongside the ordinary transition from a childhood identity into an adult identity (Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Ong 2007).

Adolescent Identity and Dress and Appearance

Dress and appearance are linked to identity formation and expression (Guy & Banim, 2000; Kaiser & Green, 2021) and adolescent identity specifically (Badaoui et al., 2018). In turn, the accessibility and range of choices in dress and appearance are culturally situated (Bourdieu 1984) as well as constrained by individuals' perceptions of and desire to express their identity in public, "front stage" spaces (Goffman, 1963; Kaiser & Green, 2021). Of importance to adolescents for the expression of identity are the symbolic possibilities of dress and appearance, which can be "customize[d]" and connected to "personal aspects of … identity" (Badaoui et al., 2018, p. 74).

Adolescent Immigrant Identity and Dress and Appearance

Adolescent immigrants navigate the intersection of cultures with access to the symbolic aspects of dress from multiple cultures. As a result, immigrants may choose to express one culture more than the other or even combine them (Safdar et al., 2020). Context influences immigrants' inclinations (and sense of agency) for their dress to reflect either cultural standards and expectations of other members of their COO and/or of their COS (Safdar et al., 2020). Immigrant adolescents often prefer that their dress not cause them to stand out from their COS peers (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Safdar et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2002). Nyugen and Brown (2010) determined that Hmong immigrant youth attached higher status to dress aligned with American dress while simultaneously expressing Hmong peer group membership. Fitting in was important but so was maintaining connections to a Hmong identity.

Although researchers have yet to undertake an in-depth exploration of the role of dress and appearance in adolescent Latina immigrants' acculturation experiences, broader explorations of these youths' lived realities have revealed that dress and appearance may be a salient facet of their immigration experiences. This work suggests that young Latina immigrants to the US sense that their appearances mark them as "outsiders," making it difficult for them to gain acceptance at school and positioning them as targets of discrimination (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2009; Mendez, et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2002). At the same time, however, adolescent Latina immigrants may not identify with U.S. fashions and may resist adopting these looks. For instance, in their study of Latina immigrants, Williams et al. (2002) found that participants struggled to fit in concurrent with the knowledge that by too closely mirroring American dress and appearance, they could diminish a desired cultural identity.

Theorizing Authenticity

Authenticity often is used to refer to ideas such as sincerity, originality, and truthfulness. Thus, many theories of authenticity reference the notion of a "true self" (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). However, in the

spirit of Goffman (1959) and Kaiser and Green (2021), we adopt not so much the notion of a static, true self, but rather, the fluid notion of a possible, "truer" self (Goffman, 1959, p. 19)—the self that people feel they are (currently) or are becoming. At the same time, we acknowledge Vannini and Franzese's (2008) supposition that to be "authentic" is to be "true to one's self" (p. 621) or to a person's sense of who they feel they actually are (now) or are becoming. Thus, in studying authenticity, researchers must consider both "people's emotional experiences of being true or untrue to one's self" as well as their "ideas about what their true(r) self is" (Vannini & Franzese, 2008, p. 634).

Drawing on the work of Goffman (1963), Vannini and Franzese (2008) also argue that authenticity is both a reflexive and an emotional experience that is entangled with people's ideas about the self, identity, roles, personal goals, and values. Situational demands may, at times, repress the capacity to express the authentic self, such as when people find themselves in circumstances where they must engage in presentations of the self that are at odds with their self-values. Conversely, presenting one's most authentic self in given social situations may prompt disapproval from others. In both cases, tension may ensue (Vannini & Franzese, 2008).

Like Vannini and Franzese (2008), Erickson (1995) acknowledges a relationship between authenticity and personal values, conceptualizing authenticity as a commitment to self-values. Erickson does not regard authenticity as something that one does or does not possess but proposes that one is more or less authentic. Thus, although Erickson suggests that one's core value system has a stable quality such that it is robust enough to transcend particular interactional situations, she argues that in varying social contexts, differing values may take precedence, affording individuals a feeling of "relative authenticity" (p. 134). Certainly, such a conceptualization of authenticity invites consideration of those aspects of the self that are "perceived … as being in conflict" (p. 140)—such as efforts to straddle or navigate two different cultures—and affords the opportunity to consider both the individual and the interactional facets of authenticity and its relationship to identity and self-presentation (Hutson, 2010). Interactionist underpinnings also are apparent in Vannini and Franzese's articulation of authenticity, insomuch as they propose that, because authenticity shapes self-views as well as how we relate to others, authenticity must "take both self and other into account" (2008, p. 1625).

The pursuit of authenticity and the search for the truer self begin in adolescence, around age 12 or 13 (Harter et al., 1997), unfolding through interactions with others (Perry, 2015). Across adolescence, views of being authentic shift, with younger adolescents focusing on the disclosure of facts about the self and older adolescents focusing on the expression of their "true" beliefs and characteristics (Ullman, 1987). Research suggests that, during adolescence, dressing the self is a matter of the quest for (a) authenticity, or attempting to express the truer self, (b) reflexivity, or conforming to meet situational and social demands, and (c) individuality, or conveying unique identities to others (Riley & Cahill, 2005; van der Laan & Velthuis, 2016). Research also demonstrates that, for adolescents, establishing authenticity of the self may be related to membership in a youth subculture and adoption of dress symbols associated with that subculture (e.g., Beal & Weidman, 2003; Perry, 2015). Understanding regarding the way immigrant adolescents pursue an authentic self or identity through dress and appearance is limited, but Williams et al. (2002) found that non-English speaking Latina immigrant adolescents to the US resisted developing a look that would undermine their truer self or that would change their cultural identity (e.g., spending lots of money on clothes, engaging in behaviors such as smoking or fighting).

Research Questions and Approach

With this study, we seek to answer the following research questions: How do adolescent Latina immigrants express a sense of authenticity—or remain true to their developing sense of self—through dress and appearance? In what ways are adolescent Latina immigrants' expressions of authenticity— or their slippery and evolving expressions of the truer self through dress and appearance—complicated (e.g., by virtue of living at the intersection of two cultures)? To answer these questions, we adopted the inductive methods associated with the constant comparison approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Such an approach has been suggested as apt for conducting acculturation research, insomuch as it privileges the voices of immigrant participants and captures the ambivalence and complexity that so often characterizes their acculturation experiences (Kennedy & MacNeela, 2014). We

limited our focus to Latinas because prior work suggests that appearance norms and processes of "fitting in" for adolescent Latinx immigrants are highly gendered (Williams et al., 2002).

Method

The Research Team

We are four faculty members and one graduate student. Collectively, our team possesses expertise in aesthetic, cultural, and social-psychological aspects of dress and appearance; Latina identity development and socialization; and interpretive methods. All members of our team identify as cisgender women, three identify as Euro-American, one identifies as Chicana, and one identifies as Latina.

Participants

We recruited 12 immigrant women who identified as Latina, who immigrated to the US before age 16, and who resided in the western Midwest to participate in in-depth interviews. Participants were women aged 20–23 (mean =21.25) years at the time of the study, as we were interested in acculturation experiences during adolescence, and young adults still have access to their memories of adolescence but bring a maturity to interpreting their adolescent experiences that adolescents, themselves, may not possess (Skuza, 2007). Also, collecting data from young adult immigrants about their adolescent immigration experiences allowed us to capture reflections upon changes across time (Skuza, 2007).

We recruited participants from two state university campuses by distributing information about the study through flyers shared with Latina serving campus organizations, through in-class announcements, and through messages sent via the universities' mass emailing systems. Snowball sampling also was employed. All participants were currently enrolled in one of two large state universities at the time of the study. Ten participants were from Mexico, one was from Cuba, and one was from Belize. Seven participants self-identified as Latina, which includes participants who indicated dualities of Latina/

Mexican (n =2) Latina/Hispanic (n =2), and Latina/Mayan (n=1); four self-identified as Mexican; and one self-identified as Hispanic. Age of (first) immigration ranged from 2–15 years (mean =8), with two participants who immigrated again after returning to the COO during adolescence. Immigration experiences varied from relatively painless, outside of separation from extended family, to highly traumatic; one participant was diagnosed with PTSD as a result of her immigration experience.

In the US, participants experienced a range of ethnic/racial diversity in their neighborhoods and schools (i.e., from primarily White to primarily Latinx to highly ethnically/racially diverse). Further, many participants moved around in the US both within one state or nationally, which resulted in shifts in the ethnic/racial diversity of their experiences. Based on participants' descriptions of their lifestyles in the US and their COO, their socio-economic status ranged from lower to middle-class. However many indicated that their family moved to and/or stayed in the US because of greater economic and educational opportunities and that in the US they were able to improve their socioeconomic status.

Data Collection and Analysis

Face-to-face, open-ended interviews were conducted to gather topic narratives as a means of representing the voices of Latina immigrant women in relation to memories about their dress and appearance, shifting acculturation experiences, and sense of identity and authenticity across their adolescence. Interview questions focused on participants' immigration stories; their use of dress and appearance to express various aspects of the self during their adolescent years; their transitions in dress and appearance/identity/sense of self across adolescence; influences on their dress and appearance during adolescence; and their degree of identification with their COO/COS across adolescence. During their interviews, participants were invited to select pseudonyms to be used in the reporting of the results.

All interviews were audio-recorded and were conducted in English; Spanish-speaking interviewers were on hand for all interviews to clarify terminology or cultural references for participants and/or English-speaking researchers. Interviews lasted between one and two

hours (mean=92.25 min), and sampling continued until saturation in meanings within the data was attained (Morse, 1995). Throughout the data collection process, we recorded interpretive insights through reflexive journaling.

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and were unitized into meaningful "chunks" of data (Guetzkow, 1950). Next, we built upon our interpretive insights and grounded theory analytical processes (e.g., open, axial, and selective coding) to develop a coding guide, to apply this coding guide to the data, and to generate a set of emergent themes and subthemes characterizing the essence of the participants' experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

We adapted varied measures to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of our work. As noted, throughout data collection process, we engaged in reflexive journaling, developing detailed analytic memos to search for meaningful ideas and patterns within the data. We also engaged in member checks, sharing interview transcripts with participants for their approval, and we met throughout the research process to mutually develop and practice applying the coding guide and to review interpretations of the data. Disagreements in understanding were mutually negotiated across researchers. Taken together, these processes helped to increase the likelihood that participants' realities were reflected in the final analysis (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Results and Discussion: Authenticity and Dressing the Truer Self

Among participants, the typical developmental intersection of dress and identity formation in adolescence was complicated by the navigation of two sets of cultural ideals, expectations, and behaviors. With this in view, participants' dress and appearance choices were made to balance what were oftentimes conflicting identity goals, including the desire to express a truer self, to understand new culturally situated dress and appearance codes, and to simultaneously create a unique identity incorporating two cultures (Riley & Cahill, 2005; van der Laan & Velthuis, 2016). For participants, this truer self reflected a weaving together of diverse identities, relationships, and values (cf., Erickson, 1995). As a result, much like Hermans (2001) posited, participants

engaged with multiple selves that included (sometimes) conflicting definitions, from their families, peers, and the dominant COS, of what it means to look like an adolescent, Latina, immigrant to the US.

In the following sections, we explore themes that emerged from our analysis, specifically examining participants' search for authenticity within a dominant COS and considering how dress and appearance express the truer self in conversation with new dress codes and a desire to be unique. We also examine complications such as identity dilemmas and circumstantial obstacles in achieving an expression of authenticity.

Participants' discussion of authenticity as expressed through dress aligned with Erickson's (1995) supposition that individuals are true to the self not so much "for all time," but rather, in relation to specific contexts (p. 139), which is consistent with the notion of authentic selves as shifting and becoming. Though, for all participants, there were many twists and turns in what might be characterized as a disjointed dance of authenticity and acculturation, at the time of their interviews they had resolved that their COO was an essential part of their truer self. However, even though the expression of their COO was a priority as part of their idea of being true to the self, they struggled to adequately communicate, through dress and appearance, the "most" authentic version of that self in the context of the COS.

Interpreting Cultural Dress

Recalling their dress before immigration, participants indicated a sense of successful adherence to cultural norms and/or understanding of how their dress choices intersected with their larger COO as well as the various social/collective identities within their COO. For instance, in discussing her dress before immigration, Tenaile (immigrated at [i.a.] 14) stated "how I dressed was fine, because … I was wearing the same thing they were wearing … so I felt like myself because … that was my culture, that is my culture." However, she went on to explain that in her COO people would often wear "short shorts or like jeans, really kind of low key [but] still nice" much like the dress in US but that even though the garments were the same, they were worn "in a [name of region where she lived] way" that was less detectable to an outsider.

Many participants discussed the diversity of appearance norms within their COO as opposed to stereotypes of their COO's dress in the COS. Participants, like Nelly (i.a. 15), whose home was far from the capitol city, located her COO dress within a specific region. Nelly clarified this distinction by contrasting the dress (and behaviors) of her home with that of residents of the capitol region on national holidays, explaining "people will wear those dresses and dance along to traditional [music] and just being proud of their culture, [of] which I was kind of jealous because I never had that connection … ." While Nelly perceived separation from some aspects of her COO's traditional dress because of the impact of geography, climate, and regional distinctiveness, she clearly understood how her dress still represented a unique region and how her regional dress fit within the larger national, cultural context.

Communicating Culture Through Dress

Although participants generally understood what their regional dress and appearance norms communicated within their COO, they often found that elements of dress that clearly demarcated regional, familial and/or ethnic/national identities in their COO were misunderstood in their COS. As part of her clarification that her dress reflected a unique region of her COO, Nelly (i.a. 15) stated, that in [her hometown] people don't wear shorts, that, "even if it's hot, people wear jeans." Post-immigration wearing jeans in hot weather was an area of contention with her American stepfather who did not understand that her discomfort with showing her legs was related to cultural norms of dress and thus part of the expression of a truer self from a particular region of her COO. Here the misunderstanding was connected to the perception of similar climates; however, residents of the COS often mistakenly assumed that only one version of Latina (or a specific nation's) dress and appearance existed. As a result, participants frequently faced the imposition of ethnic and racial (and national) stereotypes in interpretations of their dress and appearance by members of the COS.

As Davis (1992) argues, clothing's potential ambiguity as a communicative tool makes it prone to misinterpretation. More specifically, without clear agreement of the meanings of dress (such as might occur

across cultures) people tend to infer meanings based on context, setting, expressions *and* their personal and cultural biases. This tendency, along with stereotyping by the COS, made it challenging for participants to clearly communicate their truer (authentic) self. Therefore, as part of the acculturation process, participants recalibrated their dress and appearance to include items that more clearly expressed the COO aspect of their truer self to members of the COS. However, the process of acculturation is non-linear and fluid; its path is often unpredictable (Sam, 2000; Yeh & Hwang, 2000).

Identity Dilemmas

Among the participants, navigating cultural differences associated with immigration frequently prompted feelings of conflict and tension that were tightly bound with dress and appearance, which we characterized as "identity dilemmas" (cf., Collie et al., 2010; Hedegaard, 2005). Insomuch as these dilemmas often stemmed from participants' difficulty in reconciling commitments from a multiply defined self (Hermans, 2001), they paralleled closely Baumeister et al.'s (1985) concept of "identity conflict" and in some ways complicated participants' journeys toward the expression of an authentic self through dress and appearance, reminding us of the ways in which authenticity is relative and complex (Erickson, 1995). Three key identity dilemmas emerged. In turn, each of these dilemmas was shaped in different ways by participants' efforts to straddle (at least) two cultures and to answer the question, "Who Am I?".

Ambivalence About Ethnoracial Appearance.

First, Goffman's premise of the body as a "sign vehicle" that shapes interactions in significant ways (1966, p. 33) set a context for participants' growing-up experiences and ensuing identity dilemmas. For instance, as young adolescents, many participants expressed that they felt ambivalent about or did not identify with their ethnoracial appearances, perhaps because they sensed that this aspect of their personal front (Goffman, 1959) made them "stand out" from their majority culture peers in ways that they did not desire (cf., Nyugen & Brown, 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Safdar et al., 2020; Williams et

al., 2002). This identity dilemma was especially common among participants who attended largely White schools[2] and is aptly captured in the following excerpt:

> "... I looked at my friends ... and ... they were very pretty. They were light skinned, and whenever I looked in the mirror, I really wanted to be that ... The way I felt on the inside was not matching anything that like I was looking at on the outside. I really didn't like that ... I just like looked at myself and I just didn't identify with that person. (Jane, i.a. 6)

Implicit in Jane's association of light-skin with "prettiness" and the lack of identification with her own appearance is the internalization or "social mirroring" of "dark skin bias" and "white skin envy"— attitudes that could circulate within both her COO (i.e., as reflected in colorism) and in her COS (Montalvo, 2005, p. 26; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The struggle to fit in prompted participants such as Eli (i.a. 3) to try to "pass" as "White" or "ethnically ambiguous" by "not bringing attention to the self ... because I wanted to assimilate. I wanted to not feel as 'The Other' because anything that was 'The Other' was not okay." In other instances, participants such as Carmen (i.a. 8 and again at 15) actually came to *see themselves* as White, for a time, during their growing up years in the US, owing to their immersion in a largely White media and social milieu. Carmen came to feel regretful about this as an older adolescent, remarking that "I wish I would have realized sooner that I saw myself as a White woman ... that would have helped me ... [realize I] could have worn other things, too." Here, then, Carmen's sense of who she was—her sense of her "authentic self"—shifted over time and context, resulting in redefinitions of how she could present the self to others through her dress and appearance (cf., Thoits & Virshup, 1997).

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2. It was our hunch that participants who immigrated at a younger age, whose memories of their COO were more distant, might have a smoother transition to their COS and thus, may experience fewer identity dilemmas. However, this hunch was not confirmed through our analysis. Rather, age of immigration did not seem to give rise to specific identity dilemma experiences. More salient, perhaps, in shaping selected identity dilemma experiences was the ethnic/racial composition of the school the participants attended.

Ambivalence About Expressing COO Identity Through Dress.

Second, analyses revealed that selected participants shared a decided sense of hesitation and/or ambivalence about expressing a COO identity through their dress and appearance. For example, as young adolescents, a couple of participants built their identities around an "assimilation" orientation (Berry, 1997, 2001), nurturing links to their COS and distancing themselves from their COO. Here, participants expressed concern about expressing their COO through their dress at a time when fitting in with their new COS peers was especially important (cf., Nyugen & Brown, 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Safdar et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2002):

> I wanted to look very American … I just didn't want any part of my culture. I didn't want to be Latina, and I didn't want to be Mayan … I wanted to be the way like my friends looked …. My mom actually, like through middle school … made me wear these … gold earrings. She was like, "Your grandma gave you those, you need to be a bit appreciative about that." So I always kept them on, but I'd always have to try to hide them with like my hair …. like trying to make sure I didn't look or dress like my culture. (Jane, i.a. 6)

Implicit in Jane's remarks above are her mother's attempts to maintain traditions associated with Jane's COO (cf., Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) and the attendant identity work (Watson, 2008) Jane undertook in response, trying to mask the expression of her COO. Jane spoke about this work to simultaneously meet her family's expectations of "who" she should be in her dress and appearance and "who" she wanted to be in her dress and appearance (Guy & Banim, 2000), explaining, "I felt like I had a split wardrobe with what my family wanted and then what I wanted kind of thing." Here, we see evidence not only of the ways in which Jane's movement toward authenticity in the self was complicated by her efforts to conform to varying social demands, as she took "both self and other into account" (Erickson, 1995, p. 1625).

In other cases, participants such as Lola (i.a. 7) expressed ambivalence—or feelings of conflict and perhaps confusion—about

expressing their ethnic/COO identities in specific, "front stage" spaces shaped by U.S. cultural expectations of so-called "appropriateness" (Bourdieu, 1984; Goffman 1963). Specifically, as Lola looked ahead to her future career as a teacher, she wondered how much she could "safely" express her authentic ethnic identity within the American workplace, invoking an example of Alexandria Ocasio Cortez being "called out" as "unprofessional" for wearing "bright red lipstick and the hoops." A clear current of injustice ran through Lola's narrative here and was embodied by her question of "Why is [doing that] wrong?". Implicit here is her impression that what is considered to be "appropriate" may be underpinned by perhaps specific attitudes circulating within the U.S. culture and constraining individuals' perceptions of the identities available for expression in given cultural spaces (Goffman, 1963; Kaiser & Green, 2021). Here, questions of "Who can I be?" and "How can I successfully straddle two cultures" were at play.

Ambivalence About Living "At the Margins" of Two Cultures.

Finally, participants' narratives reflected the way in which immigrants live at "the margins of two cultures," not fully belonging to either (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 92; see also Berry, 1997). That is, immigrants do not gain full admission to their new COS, as their experiences are filtered through the lenses of their COO, and at the same time, their experiences in their COS change them such that they no longer wholly "belong" in their COO. Carmen (i.a. 8 and again at 15) attempted to "overcome gaps" associated with being at the margins of two cultures and feeling a sense of lack, melding her Latin and American cultures into a single, bi- or trans-cultural appearance (cf., Deepak, 2005; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997), but this at times resulted in "missing" one culture or the other, which seemed to complicate her sense of authenticity, which she characterized as a experiencing "hole" in herself.

Xiomara (i.a. 3 or 4) discussed how, in the American cultural context, she had to do "compensatory" identity work (Schwalbe & Shay, 2014) to clarify such ambiguity by validating or confirming her Mexican and American identities based upon her marginalized immigrant

status, dressing in ways that highlighted these respective cultural identities to ensure her admission or acceptance by her COO and COS peers. As reflected in her comments below, Xiomara's efforts to confirm her views of the self (Swann, 1984) also were complicated and perhaps fueled by others' identifications of her as "White":

> I think the biggest thing ... is like if you've ever seen the Selena movie, her dad is always like, "You being Mexican-American is so hard, because you gotta be more Mexican than the Mexicans for them to accept you, and you gotta be more American than the Americans for them to accept you." And, you're kind of caught in this leeway of like being both at once, so I think it was very much like everyone in my high school who identified as Mexican ... If Mexico's playing that day in soccer, we'd all show up in our jerseys and things like that to like ... And it's almost like you want to present yourself as like, "Look at me, look at me, look at me, I'm Latina, or like I'm Mexican." And I definitely felt that way, especially because I'm a White passing Latina, so if I don't tell you, you'd probably assume I was White. And I get that all the time. (Xiomara)

Here, Xiomara's journey to locate authenticity in the self was shaped both by her marginalized status as caught in the "leeway of ... being both at once" and by being a "White passing Latina." Particularly, her body functioned as a signifier which elicited certain kinds of meanings that seemingly shaped her expressive agency in certain ways that she experienced as somewhat constraining or "tricky" (Schwalbe & Shay, 2014, p. 170).

Participants' identity dilemmas highlight the diverseness of their paths toward a more authentic and integrated expression of their identity. Still, as they worked through these dilemmas and other challenges post immigration, most participants described—as might be expected, given the typical trajectory of identity development in adolescence—significant movement towards a cohesive use of dress to express their truer self as part of an authentic identity (Perry, 2015; Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Ong 2007).

Dress at the Intersection of Cultures

Creating a cohesive expression of identity was accomplished in unique ways and at different points in participants' acculturation processes. Though not all participants chose to include both cultures in their dress *at all times*, all participants reached a stage in their identity development where some connection to their COO was considered essential for authenticity. And, as Safdar et al. (2020) contended, we found that dress and appearance were an important means for participants to express their COO identity within the dominant COS. Participants described an authentic identity—one that reflected the truer self—as one of fitting in (up to a point) within the COS while strategically aligning aspects of their dress and appearance with their COO. Participants used two primary methods to accomplish this: integrated or situational.

In the integrated category, participants combined aspects of both cultures into an interconnected look, one that strategically incorporated dress (hair, makeup, dress) from both cultures. Lola (i.a. 7), who exemplifies this approach, stated, "I don't wake up and think, 'I'm going to be more Mexican today, or I'm going to be more American today.' ... it's just who I've become as a person, as a whole. They've kind of intertwined and become one with me." For Lola, huaraches performed the role of signifying her COO. She explained that she intentionally "kept a lot of [her] culture['s] aspect in [her] dress" and "wasn't ... afraid to wear [her] huaraches to school ... " because she made her "huaraches fashion in a way." In other words, Lola created an expression of her truer self by incorporating the dress of both cultures in a way that corresponded to current fashions within the COS. Like Lola, other participant's integrated dress included at least one signifier of their COO.

What signified a Latina identity in the COS could be quite dissimilar to styles worn by family/ friends still residing in their COO. Rather than copying the dress of their COO, signifiers were chosen for their ability to express Latinx culture in a manner that diminished the likelihood of misinterpretation (Davis, 1992; Williams et al. 2002). Some examples of highly overt signifiers are Xiomara's (i.a. 3 or 4) Mexican jersey or Catalina's (i.a. 11) "Made in Coahuila" tattoo. However, most participants' choices were less explicit, such as Nelly's (i.a. 15)

"flared skirts," which she explained "mimic[ed] the traditional, folk-loric dress and look" of Mexico's central region and were intended to "showcase the beautiful side" of her COO. The more covert the signifier, the more personal, such as a necklace worn by Victoria (i.a. 2), who explained, "... I have my necklace that has my name on it from Mexico ... I still have it on. My mom gave it to me when I was 12 ... she got it when I was a baby ... it is ... a traditional thing ... in Mexican families."

Signifiers were chosen based on COS member's ability to interpret it as Latina and/or a participant's personal associations with their COO. It often was less about the item chosen and more about the item's particular characteristics. For instance, Eli (i.a. 3) stated, that "the red lipstick or wearing a little bit more gold or embroidered things or heels ... accessoriz[ing] ... thinking about it as [a] Latina kind of perspective." It is the *gold* jewelry, the *red* lipstick, and *embroidered* design on the garment that signaled the Latina aspect of her identity. Gold jewelry, especially hoops, and red lipstick were common items added to what participants labeled as more typically American (or culturally ambiguous) dress such as jeans, t-shirts, hoodies, sneakers, and sweatpants (Nyugen & Brown, 2010; Williams et al., 2002). Regardless of the explicitness, participants' ultimate goal was to accurately express the multiplicity of their cultural connections—to express the truer self.

Participants who used the situational mode aligned their dress more closely with one culture or the other often based on which culture was perceived as dominant in particular social contexts (Safdar et al., 2020). For instance, Carmen (i.a. 8 and again at 15) described her dress at the end of high school as integrated with its mixture of floral dresses and blouses, representing Mexico, and Doc Martins representing the US as well as the edginess of Mexico City's rock scene, but her dress changed in college. She explained that "... I feel like ... when I came to college ... that I started dressing more with traditional Mexican blouses and colorful things. Because in a ... predominantly White institution I wanted to take up space." While Carmen's shift was in response to a major change in contexts, for Nelly motivations for shifting were internal. She stated that, "... when I really, really miss Mexico is when I am wearing ... lots of things with flowers ... ". Though both modes were present in the data, most participants

described the authentic dress of their truer self as integrated rather than situational. However, across both categories, participants commented on the importance of access to resources for expressing their truer self through dress.

Obstacles to Authenticity in Dress

As discussed, various identity dilemmas impeded progress towards the expression of a truer self via dress. However, circumstances, independent of identity dilemmas, impacted many participants' ability to realize an expression of their truer self even when they had clear sense of who they were as part of both cultures. Of the obstacles mentioned by participants, financial limitations figured prominently. Specifically, it was common for participants to cite their first job and having their own money, as a turning point toward a more cohesive expression of their truer self. Jane (i.a. 6) described the impact of her job,

> I think when we first immigrated, we were lower class. It wasn't until I had a job that I really felt like I could express myself … I had my own money, and I had a discount at the store. I was dressing myself.

Additionally, having their own money provided stylistic freedom from family, as Victoria (i.a. 2), explained, "[Once] I started working I was able to dress how I wanted and not how my parents wanted me to look." With access to funds and greater independence from family expectations, participants were freer to create unique combinations of dress, makeup, hairstyles, and accessories at the intersection of their two cultures and thereby express an authentic identity.

Conclusions

Among our participants, immigration produced a disjointed dance towards authenticity with many uneven steps, sharp turns, and the occasional reversal, reminding us of the ways that immigration is dynamic (Sam, 2000; Yeh & Hwang, 2000). Most notably, analyses illuminated how an exploration of the role of dress in the acculturation process

can further complicate the idea of authenticity as expressed through dress as a fluid, possible truer self that is in the process of becoming and that shifts across the experience of acculturation (cf., Goffman, 1959; Kaiser & Green, 2021; Vannini & Franzese, 2008). The fluidity or disjointedness of participants' paths to authenticity was materially reflected in the varying emphases placed upon the COS and COO in their dress presentations and their sense of the truer self as they sought to answer the questions of "Who am I/who am I becoming, now that I live in the COS?" and "How do I express who I am/who I am becoming?" (cf., Kaiser & Green, 2021).

Although all participants eventually concluded that their COO was an essential aspect of their authentic identity, one that they were unwilling to forgo, many described how during early and mid- adolescence they partially or completely denied connections to their COO in their dress and appearance, desiring instead to align themselves more with their COS peers. As both cultures became increasingly integrated into their sense of authenticity or their truer self, participants either combined aspects of the COS and COO into a single look or aligned their dress with one culture or the other depending upon the context (cf., Safdar et al., 2020). Additionally, along their journeys to locate authenticity in the self through dress, participants experienced a variety of identity dilemmas, many of which reflected complex feelings of ambivalence and marginalization around issues of race, ethnicity, and culture. These identity dilemmas were part of the unevenness and disjointedness in the path toward authenticity—the trajectory towards authenticity was not clean or linear.

Thus, the experience of immigration for adolescent Latina immigrants was at times difficult and confusing. Participants often contended with stereotypes based upon race, nationality, and ethnoracial appearances and dress that eroded their sense of agency to fully express an authentic identity that included their COO, which is consistent with work suggesting that Latina immigrants are targets of appearance discrimination (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2009; Mendez et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2002). However, at the same time, as part of identity work and in conjunction with acculturation, participants routinely reflected on their COO and brought those conclusions to bear in their new cultural context. Dress emerged in this identity work as a significant vehicle for participants' exploration,

negotiation, and communication of ideas, memories, and experiences of their COO, as immigrants, and with their COS. The result often was the blending of cultural forms of dress to express a new, multi-faceted complex identity—one that acknowledged the reality of immigration as part of their story and one that, ultimately, was essential to their sense of becoming their truer self, with an authentic, bicultural identity. Dress's role in developing a bicultural identity is significant because biculturalism is considered to be the most positive outcome of the four main modes of acculturation (Berry, 1997; Suàrez-Orozco & Suàrez-Orozco, 2001). Further solidifying the positive impact of biculturalism for our participants is the finding that, appearing Latina brought participants personal joy, a sense of pride in their family heritage, and an intimate connection to their culture. Thus, as we consider how to assist young Latina immigrants to the US navigate transitions to their new culture, perhaps we should address how dress may be a powerful tool for adjustment as cultural identities and ideas about the truer self shift.

One limitation of the study is the difficulty of disentangling the challenges and behaviors that are part of typical adolescent identity development from those of acculturation. Each process includes the movement either mentally (child to adult) or physically (COO to COS) from one culture to another. Both require modes of discovery and experimentation that are similar, though acculturation was not always by choice for participants and so this likely added a layer of anxiety to the process. Still, some of what participants described could be attributed to typical adolescent experiences. Future studies should consider examining older immigrants and the process of acculturation as it relates to adult experiences such as dress for work. Another limitation is that all participants were at the end of adolescence, which while providing a more longitudinal view for this study, also meant that accounts were based on recollections. Future studies should consider investigating immigrants who are still in middle school or high school, though again it may be difficult to disentangle identity formation from acculturation. Future work also may wish to explore more deeply how various identities may set a context for participants' acculturation experiences. For instance, although age of immigration did not seem to give rise to specific types of lived experiences among our participants, a larger sample size and the use of a mixed methods

data collection might well reveal such connections. Lastly, while this study focused on examining the relationship between dress and identity in the acculturation process primarily through the lenses of age and ethnicity, the experience of acculturation and the ensuing identity work intersect in significant ways with other aspects of identity such as gender, sexuality, and class. Thus, future studies should consider how varying gender roles and expectations of the COO and COS impact Latina, adolescent immigrants, and their expression of an authentic identity through dress.

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