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Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2022, Volume 10, Issue 4, Pages 39–52
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v10i4.5253

Article

Immigrant Children's Connections to People and the World Around Them: A Critical Discourse Review of Academic Literature

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Submitted: 11 January 2022 | Accepted: 4 March 2022 | Published: 20 October 2022

Abstract
A primary goal of the welfare state is to ensure that children and young people have a good upbringing and that families feel secure. However, several studies indicate that the risk of marginalisation and social exclusion increases, especially among children of low-income and immigrant families. Why some children seem to be more loosely connected to people and the world around them is poorly understood. Based on a Foucauldian critical discourse review, this article aims to explore the most cited academic discourses on children's connections to the social and material environment—typically referred to by terms such as "social inclusion," "social participation," "social integration," and "social exclusion." The main research questions are: What has been addressed in this literature, by whom, and what are the knowledge gaps? Some of the most important observations are that the most influential literature on children's connections is typically written by psychologists, address children settled in the US, and tends to neglect important explanation factors, such as the material conditions of children's everyday life. Implications for the (re)production of knowledge and knowledge gaps are discussed.

Keywords
academic discourse; belonging; children; migration; social inclusion; social integration; social participation

Issue
This article is part of the issue "New Approaches to the Study of Social Inclusion of Poor Children and Youth" edited by Anita Borch (OsloMet) and Kirsi Laitala (OsloMet).

1. Introduction

In 2020, 24.2% of children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Most at risk are children in vulnerable situations, such as children from low-income families with immigrant backgrounds (Eurostat, 2022). It is poorly understood why children in vulnerable situations seem to be more loosely connected to people and the world around them. This article explores how children's experiences of attachment to people and the world around them have been examined in highly cited articles published in international peer-reviewed journals. The aim is to obtain an overview of the most influential literature on children's connections and the discussions within this literature. The main research questions are: What is typically addressed in the highly cited literature, and what are the research gaps? The analysis is based on a quantitative Foucauldian critical discourse review. Critical discourse reviews typically pay more attention to structures of interest and power in fields of knowledge than other forms of review (Wall et al., 2015). An underlying assumption is that researchers of different scientific disciplines (psychologists, sociologists, etc.) have different perceptions of "good" and "important" knowledge. If one or a few disciplines dominate fields of knowledge, the knowledge that is (re)produced within these fields is at risk of becoming biased in highlighting some knowledge and ignoring others (Borch, 2019; Borch & Kjærnes, 2016). If these biases are not revealed, structures of interest and power that have made their mark in fields of knowledge will tend to stabilise or reduce (Borch, 2012) at the expense of scientific novelty and progress. The article starts with a section that provides an overview of the previous literature on children's connections. The next section describes the methodology on which the analysis is based, followed by a report and discussion of the main results.

2. Immigrant Children's Connections

Children are deeply dependent on other people and the world around them—caregivers, peers, and other adults. Children copy other people's skills and practices and learn how to interact and cooperate with them (Over, 2016). At stake is their connection to a greater community that, ultimately, ensures their access to fundamental needs, such as food, clothes, and shelter. In welfare societies, access to fundamental needs is a human right ensured by law. However, the need to be part of a greater community is still imperative, as it gives people a sense of ontological security and self-value, without which life would be difficult (May, 2011). The character of the children's connections, their quantity, strength, and composition, may vary, here below by ethnic background. As immigrant children's connections may influence their access to choices, resources, and social positions later in life, a study of these connections may provide valuable insight into processes and mechanisms behind social inequality, mobility, stability, and change.

In this article, "connections" is used as a collective term covering partially overlapping terms addressing children's relations to people and the world around them, such as "social inclusion," "social exclusion," "social participation," "integration," and "belonging." "Children," too, is used as a generic term encompassing preschool children and young adults. As pointed out by Alanen (2016), children are not only children; they are girls/boys (i.e., gendered), and they are also, in many cases, "raced," dis/abled, classed, and ascribed ethnicity. Regardless of the children's various backgrounds and characteristics, the research literature addressing their connection can roughly be divided into two bodies of literature: those dealing with children's relationship to people (e.g., individuals, groups and communities) and those focusing more on the settings in which children's connections are played out (e.g., schools and sports). This section provides an overview of some of the best-known (i.e., most cited) literature in this field of knowledge.

2.1. Relations to People

In the first body of literature, immigrant children's relationships with other people are emphasised. Immigrant children report the highest levels of ethnic belonging with their parents (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009). Adolescence is a period in life during which they often question the conventions of society. The questioning may be particularly strong among adolescents with immigrant adults, as they reconcile the often-conflicting values of the home and the school and encounter racism in their daily lives. Some experience different role ascriptions for males and females, and their parents' religions may differ from the secular ethos of their school's curricula. For example, Indian boys may experience more freedom in their choice of clothes, dating, going out, and spending money than girls, who should not show their legs and should always cover their hair, according to the dictum of the Koran (*Haddii*). Moreover, elders' views should not be questioned, which differs from the school curricula that encourage critical approaches to all ideas irrespective of their origin (Ghuman, 2009).

Children and youth with immigrant backgrounds are largely abandoned by their parents' patterns of assimilation. Portes (1995) described different forms of "segmented assimilation." Immigrant parents may assimilate into the majority middle class of their host country (classical pattern of assimilation). These parents tend to have more than average income when they arrive and to have successful children who easily move into the middle class. There are, however, cases where this classical pattern does not lead to economic progress or social acceptance. Parents may, for example, settle in ghettos (downward assimilation) or remain in their ethnic communities to utilise their resources and thereby decrease their chance of educational and economic mobility (pluralistic integration). Bullying, discrimination, and the family's socio-economic position in the community are strongly associated with migrant children's sense of belonging and well-being (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Moreover, "lifestyle incongruity," that is, inconsistency between the family's lifestyle and its socio-economic status, is a main source of stress among youth (McDade, 2001).

The next categories of people to whom children and youth of immigrant backgrounds feel most attached are same-ethnic peers and different-ethnic peers (Klang & Fuligni, 2008). Immigrant girls report a higher sense of peer group belonging than immigrant boys, and immigrant children who report a higher sense of peer group belonging tend to have fewer behavioural problems (Newman et al., 2007). Killen et al. (2013) differ between "interpersonal rejection" and "intergroup exclusion" in childhood. Interpersonal rejection regards individual differences in personality traits such as wariness and fear explaining bully–victim relationships. Intergroup exclusion focuses on in-group and out-group attitudes contributing to social exclusion based on group membership, such as gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality. What appears to be interpersonal rejection in some contexts may, in fact, reflect intergroup exclusion. Whereas research on interpersonal exclusion focuses on how victims promote rejection themselves, research on intergroup exclusion focuses on how excluders reject members of out-groups to maintain status differences.

According to Raabe and Beelmann (2011), children demonstrate evidence of intergroup attitudes by three and four years of age and a peek in prejudice between four and seven years. Most children between seven and thirteen years of age rejected exclusions of children only justified by stereotypes. However, the oldest children in these groups were more likely to accept the rejections of younger children if the group's functioning was at stake (Killen et al., 2013). Youths who are not well-liked by peers have fewer options for friendships and group membership. The rejected youth who continue to seek group

membership tend to be part of smaller cliques comprising other rejected youths and are further excluded when they come to be recognised as antagonistic relationships (Brown, 2004). Whereas aggressive youths often find a place within a friendship group, youth who have withdrawn from peer groups are less likely to find supportive friendships and more likely to be victimised (Bagwell et al., 2000; Goldbaum et al., 2003). The position "outside" makes it difficult to learn and practice the social skills that are expected to be accepted as a member of larger peer groups (Brown, 2004).

2.2. Relations to Settings

The second body of literature deals with immigrant children's and youth's relation to settings—be it in institutions or at arenas for leisure activities and geographical areas. One of the institutional settings is schools. Research conducted among Hispanic, Afro-American, and Anglo/White students settled in the US indicates that a sense of school belonging influences academic motivation, engagement and participation, especially among students from groups at risk of school dropout. It also indicated that school belonging is more strongly associated with expectancy for success among Hispanic students than Afro-American students and more among girls than boys (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Based on research among Latino adolescents, Sánchez et al. (2005) observed that sense of school belonging significantly predicted academic outcomes, including academic motivation, effort, and absenteeism, and that females consistently had more positive academic outcomes than males. Also, parents' involvement may increase academic adjustment among Latino youth, especially in high school (Kuperminc et al., 2008). Drawing on research on immigrant youth from North Africa and Southern and Eastern Europe, Valls and Kyriakides (2013) found that lower school misconduct was associated with higher perceived teacher support and school belonging, whereas higher school misconduct was associated with higher peer attachment.

Another setting addressed in previous research is organised activities, such as sports. Sport plays a significant role in the everyday lives of many young people with refugee backgrounds. One reason is that sports provide a setting in which young people can express themselves through bodily practices, connecting emotional bonds to or distance themselves from other people (e.g., Walseth, 2006; Walseth & Fasting, 2004). Playing and watching sports is a common activity and a frequent subject of discussion, not least among young men and therefore a way to get in contact and socialise with others. For some immigrant youth, being good at sports represents a way to "make it" in a new country (Amara et al., 2004).

A third setting is unorganised activities that take place during leisure time. A well-known example is a study conducted among pupils and teachers in selected schools in Zurich investigating leisure activities in urban forests and public green spaces and their potential to facilitate social interactions between Swiss and immigrant young people. Patterns of socialising and making friends in these outdoor locations were found to vary by age, school level, gender, and the percentage of immigrants in each residential area. A main observation was that public urban green spaces play an important role for children and youths in making contact and friends across cultures (Seeland et al., 2009).

Like public parks, local communities and countries represent geographical areas that can be objects of affiliation and places at which social relationships are played out. For refugee youth, establishing a sense of belonging to their host country in early resettlement is foundational to well-being (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Undocumented migrants who resettle as children tend to experience more confusion and conflicting feelings of inclusion and exclusion than those who arrive as adults (Gonzales et al., 2013).

As indicated by this overview, children's connections to people and settings have been addressed in several studies. The extent to which these objects of affiliation are more frequently researched than others will be explored in the results section. The next section describes the methodology on which the analysis is based.

3. Method

The review of children's connections is based on a Foucauldian critical discourse review (Borch, 2012; Borch & Kjærnes, 2016; Wall et al., 2015). Discourses are understood here as culturally and historically transmitted knowledge about children's connections embedded in social practices, including those of writing and publishing peer-reviewed academic articles. Discourses are created and recreated in social practices carried by social actors ("spokesmen") with vested interests (Borch, 2012, 2019; Borch & Kjærnes, 2016). For example, psychologists and sociologists would most likely tend to emphasise the importance of studying individual/cognitive and contextual/social factors influencing children's connections, respectively. Consequently, if a field of knowledge addressing children's connections tends to be dominated by one or a few disciplines, the knowledge produced will tend to be biased.

There are more than 60 types of review methodologies (Sutton et al., 2019). Like most reviews, critical discourse reviews aim to provide an overview of the previous literature and identify knowledge gaps. The aim of revealing structures of power and interests of knowledge often understood as dominating ideologies, is, however, a special characteristic of this type of review (Wall et al., 2015). As reviews synthesise previous research, a general criticism has been that they tend to reproduce structures of knowledge and ideologies in society. A critical discourse review aims to reveal and combat these structures (Wall et al., 2015). Most critical discourse reviews are based on either Habermas's or Foucault's perceptions

of discourses. Reviews based on Habermas are primarily concerned with structures of interest and power in dialogues between two parties. This article is based on Foucault's work in terms of focusing on knowledge structures operating at cultural and historical levels.

Critical discourse reviews belong to what Snyder (2019) calls "semi-systematic reviews," the category of review methodologies that is developing most in academia today. Semi-systematic reviews have systematic reviews as an ideal, yet they have a more pragmatic approach to the choice of sample and quality assessments. They are also more frequently based on analyses of qualitative research than systematic reviews, which are primarily based on analyses of quantitative studies. The aim is often to produce sufficiently robust research results by using fewer resources than the most time-consuming systematic or narrative/interpretative reviews. As part of this pragmatic approach, the critical discourse review conducted in this article concentrates on peer-reviewed, highly cited academic literature, rather than all academic literature addressing children's connections. By analysing high-cited literature, the focus is on the literature that most researchers know and most researchers will most likely read when they attempt to learn a new field of knowledge. If this field is biased, the researchers' knowledge will be biased as well, and the biased field of knowledge will be stabilised or strengthened—at the expense of another knowledge that could have enriched and developed the field.

Revealing biased structures to combat knowledge bias and ensure scientific progress is particularly important within academia. One reason is that the literature produced in this context is generally regarded as more reliable than texts produced in other contexts, such as in the press or in policy. Due to its trustworthiness, academic literature often represents the source of knowledge on which other texts are based and spread in society. This article's focus on peer-reviewed, highly cited research may have some weaknesses, some of which will be discussed in the last chapter of this article.

3.1. The Sample

The study is based on a sample of articles published in peer-reviewed journals on the online database Web of Science from January to April 2021. The selection criteria were as follows:

- Published on Web of Science;
- Published in the Social Science Citation Index (from 1987–2022) and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (2015–2022);
- Published as articles (peer-reviewed);
- Written in the English language;
- Addressing children's experiences of connection;
- Includes different terms of children (child*, young*, peer*, youth, kids, teen*, and adolescent*) combined with different terms of connections (belong*, inclu*, exclu*, integrat*, and participat*) in the title.

Although the sample includes the most-cited articles and, hence, are regarded as "influential," it should be noted that it does not include articles that do not use terms referring to children and connection in the title; nor does it include articles that have not yet reached a high level of citation and articles that are regarded as influential based on measures other than the number of citations (e.g., due to their high quality or novelty). Table 1 shows the number of articles selected from the total number of hits.

As shown in Table 1, the sample included 20 of the most cited articles from each of the five search terms indicating connections, for a total of 100 articles. Many of the hit articles were irrelevant, as they have more related, multiple meanings and hence, to a lesser extent, were used to address children's connections. This especially regards articles with participation in the title, followed by integration and inclusion. Notably, articles addressing inclusive or integrative settings, most frequently "inclusive/integrative schools," were excluded from the sample, as they primarily regarded the extent to which schools facilitate children's connections regardless of children's experience of these connections. Also, articles addressing children's participation in research and other ad hoc activities were excluded, as they did not cover the more durable form of experiences focused on in this research.

The 100 articles were coded into an SPSS matrix and made into dummy variables covering aspects of children's connections. An overview of the variables appears in Table 3. The variables are, for the most part, self-explanatory. It should, however, be noted that the spokesmen of this analysis are two representatives of academic disciplines: scientific journals and 1st authors

Table 1. Number of hits and number of selected articles.

	Total number of hits	Number of selected articles
Belonging	369	20
Inclusion	1076	20
Exclusion	508	20
Integration	1933	20
Participation	3725	20
Total		100

of articles. This research is expected to address different aspects of children's connections. For example, psychological spokesmen are assumed to keep their analysis at an individual level, focusing on cognitive and mental factors and human behaviour, whereas sociologists are believed to operate at a societal level, putting more emphasis on conditions of social, economic, and political kind. It should also be noted that the variable "arena" refers to the place at which the connection takes place. The variable often overlaps, yet is not like the variable "object of affiliation," that is, the object to which children feel a connection. For example, the object of affiliation may be peers, but the arena may be schools.

Four articles were represented twice in the sample, as they included two terms of connections (e.g., belonging and inclusion, or inclusion and exclusion). One of the four articles was excluded, so the sample included 96 articles. From these articles, three samples were obtained:

- Sample 1 includes 19 articles addressing children with immigrant backgrounds—from now on called "immigrant children" for simplicity reasons.
- Sample 2 includes 77 articles dealing with children without an immigrant background.
- Sample 3 includes all 96 articles, including children, both with and without an immigrant background. These are sometimes referred to as "children in general.''
- Sample 1 is the focus of this article. Samples 2 and 3 were analysed for comparison reasons.

Table 2 provides an overview of the articles in sample 1.

3.2. The Analysis

This analysis is based on a critical discourse review methodology conducted by Borch (2012, 2019) and Borch and Kjærnes (2015). The methodology is built on several assumptions about the technical construction of discourses and fields of knowledge, drawing on Foucault's work on discourses in general and the book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) in particular. First, it is assumed that the smallest components in discourse are statements. The statements addressed in this article concern the term of connection used in the articles' title (e.g., "belonging," "inclusion," "exclusion," "integration," or "participation"), the year of publication, the spokesmen—here defined as the discipline of the journal and the 1st author of the article (e.g., social sciences, education, psychology, social work, medicine), the country of the explored children (the US, Europe, Australia, or others), the age of the explored children, the type

Table 2. Overview of articles addressing children with immigrant backgrounds (sample 1).

Term in title	Reference	Title	No. of citations
Belonging	Goodenow and Grady (1993)	"The Relationship of School Belonging and Friends Value to Academic Motivation Among Urban Adolescent Students''	358
	Correa-Velez et al. (2010)	"Longing to Belong: Social Inclusion and Well-Being Among Youth With Refugee Backgrounds in the First Three Years in Melbourne, Australia''	181
	Gonzales et al. (2013)	"No Place to Belong: Contextualising Concepts of Mental Health Among Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the United States''	134
	Sánchez et al. (2005)	"The Role of Sense of School Belonging and Gender in the Academic Adjustment of Latino Adolescents''	126
	Bartholet (1991)	"Where Do Black Children Belong—The Politics of Race Matching Adoption"	98
	Newman et al. (2007)	"Peer Group Membership and Sense of Belonging: Their Relationship to Adolescent Behavior Problems''	86
	Kuperminc et al. (2008)	"Parent Involvement in the Academic Adjustment of Latino Middle and High School Youth: Teacher Expectations and School Belonging as Mediators''	68
	Demanet and Van Houtte (2012)	"School Belonging and School Misconduct: The Differing Role of Teacher and Peer Attachment''	66
	Mcmahon et al. (2008)	"School Belonging Among Low-Income Urban Youth With Disabilities: Testing a Theoretical Model"	56
	Kiang and Fuligni (2009)	"Ethnic Identity in Context: Variations in Ethnic Exploration and Belonging Within Parent, Same-ethnic Peer, and Different-ethnic Peer Relationships''	50
	Spaaij (2015)	"Refugee Youth, Belonging and Community Sport"	47

Table 2. (Cont.) Overview of articles addressing children with immigrant backgrounds (sample 1).

Term in title	Reference	Title	No. of citations
Inclusion	Killen and Stangor (2001)	"Children's Social Reasoning About Inclusion and Exclusion in Gender and Race Peer Group Contexts''	212
	Seeland et al. (2009)	"Making Friends in Zurich's Urban Forests and Parks: The Role of Public Green Space for Social Inclusion of Youths From Different Cultures''	84
	Valls and Kyriakides (2013)	"The Power Of Interactive Groups: How Diversity of Adults Volunteering in Classroom Groups Can Promote Inclusion And Success for Children of Vulnerable Minority Ethnic Populations''	75
Exclusion			
Integration	McDade (2001)	"Lifestyle Incongruity, Social Integration, and Immune Function in Samoan Adolescents''	49
	Ghuman (2009)	"Assimilation or integration? A study of Asian adolescents"	34
	Vermeulen (2010)	"Segmented Assimilation and Cross-National Comparative Research on the Integration of Immigrants and Their Children''	32
	Myers (1999)	"Childhood Migration and Social Integration in Adulthood"	32
Participation	Orellana et al. (2001)	"Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration''	270

of children explored (e.g., children with majority background, children with an immigrant background, children with disabilities, children from poor families), the arena in which the connections are played out (e.g., home, school, organised leisure activities, unorganised leisure activities, digital media), the object of affiliation (e.g., family, peers, geographical areas, things, or activities), methods (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, review, or experiment), and the article's number of citations.

Second, it is assumed that statements tend to cluster into discourses that constitute seemingly logical reasoning. For example, a discourse dealing with children's school belonging will differ from a discourse dealing with children's relationships with peers or local society.

Third, the field of knowledge is assumed to constitute "a static, but movable web of statements from which statements flow between discourses that partially overlap and partially contradict each other" (Borch, 2012, p. 59) and in which "discourses and statements are constantly established, maintained and dissolved" (Borch & Kjærnes, 2015, p. 141). The stronger a discourse, the greater its influence on how children's connections are generally perceived and handled in society.

Fourth, the statements, discourses and how they change can be analysed through statistical analysis. In this research, the articles were coded in line with the above-mentioned statement. Then, the statements were analysed through frequency analyses and the clustering into discourses was analysed through factor analyses. The strength of the discourses is indicated by the explained variance of the factor analyses. In the cluster analyses conducted in this research, the number of variables included in the factor analyses was systematically reduced. First, all variables with less than two units were excluded. Next, the variables with a score lower than .5 were excluded one by one. Finally, two factors of each model that gave no substantial meanings were removed. Bivariate crosstab analyses were used to compare statements about immigrant children (sample 1) and all children except immigrant children (sample 2).

4. Field Dominated by Psychology

Table 3 shows the statements of children's connections in the three samples of articles dealing with "children with immigrant background," "children without immigrant background," and "children with and without immigrant background."

Table 3 indicates that most articles dealing with immigrant children use the term "belonging" to describe children's connections. The articles were published between 1989 and 2015. The number increased from 1989–1999 to 2000–2009 but decreased from 2000–2009 to 2010–2015. The decrease probably reflects that it takes time to get a high number of citations.

Most articles dealing with immigrant children's connections are published in psychological journals and have a psychologist as the first author. The children participating in the research were, for the most part, settled in the US and were between six and 16 years old. The object of affiliation was usually peers, but schools and geographical areas were also addressed. The connections were usually explored in a school context, and the methodology tended to be quantitatively oriented.

Table 3. Number of articles on children's connections (samples 1, 2, and 3).

	Sample 1: Children with immigrant background (N = 19)	Sample 2: Children without immigrant background (N = 77)	Sample 3: Children with and without immigrant background (N = 96)	Parsons Chi-Square on the difference between samples 1 and 2 (N = 96)
Term in title				
Belonging	11 (58%)	9 (12%)	20 (21%)	
Inclusion	3 (16%)	16 (21%)	19 (20%)	
Exclusion	0	18 (25%)	18 (20%)	
Integration	4 (21%)	16 (21%)	20 (21%)	
Participation	1 (5%)	18 (23%)	19 (18%)	
Year of publication				
1989–1999	4 (21%)	11 (14%)	15 (16%)	.467
2000–2009	9 (47%)	46 (60%)	55 (57%)	.329
2010–2015	6 (32%)	20 (26%)	26 (27%)	.622
Discipline of journal				
Social sciences	5 (26%)	13 (17%)	18 (19%)	.345
Education	3 (16%)	5 (7%)	8 (8%)	.189
Psychology	8 (42%)	32 (42%)	40 (42%)	.965
Social work	0	2 (3%)	2 (2%)	.478
Medicine	2 (11%)	17 (22%)	19 (20%)	.258
Other	1 (5%)	7 (9%)	8 (8%)	.589
Discipline of 1st author				
Social science	6 (32%)	12 (16%)	18 (19%)	.110
Education	2 (11%)	9 (12%)	11 (12%)	.887
Psychology	8 (42%)	39 (51%)	47 (49%)	.505
Social work	1 (5%)	2 (3%)	3 (3%)	.550
Other/not found	2 (5%)	14 (18%)	15 (16%)	.165
Children's country of residence				
USA	12 (63%)	40 (52%)	52 (52%)	.380
Europe	5 (26%)	26 (34%)	31 (32%)	.534
Australia	2 (11%)	4 (5%)	6 (6%)	.390
Other	0	7 (9%)	7 (7%)	.172
Children's age				
0–5	0	7 (9%)	7 (7%)	.172
6–12	9 (47%)	24 (31%)	33 (34%)	,183
13–16	9 (47%)	30 (39%)	39 (41%)	.504
17–19	5 (26%)	12 (16%)	19 (20%)	.425
20+	3 (16%)	15 (20%)	15 (16%)	.982
Not specified	4 (21%)	14 (18%)	19 (20%)	.878
Group of children				
Majority children	1 (5%)	44 (57%)	45 (47%)	.000***
Disability	1 (5%)	26 (34%)	27 (28%)	.013*
Poor	1 (5%)	3 (4%)	4 (4%)	.789
Other vulnerable groups	0	8 (10%)	8 (8%)	.142
Arena				
Home	3 (16%)	2 (3%)	5 (5%)	.020*
Education	7 (37%)	34 (44%)	41 (43%)	.564
Organised leisure time	1 (5%)	13 (17%)	14 (15%)	.199
Unorganised leisure time	2 (11%)	14 (18%)	16 (17%)	.423
Geographical area	4 (21%)	4 (5%)	8 (8%)	.025*
Digital media	0	7 (19%)	7 (7%)	.172
Other/not specified	5 (26%)	18 (23%)	23 (24%)	.789

Table 3. (Cont.) Number of articles on children's connections (samples 1, 2, and 3).

	Sample 1: Children with immigrant background (N = 19)	Sample 2: Children without immigrant background (N = 77)	Sample 3: Children with and without immigrant background (N = 96)	Parsons Chi-Square on the difference between samples 1 and 2 (N = 96)
Object of affiliation				
Family	3 (16%)	3 (4%)	6 (6%)	.055
Peers	6 (32%)	34 (44%)	40 (42%)	.319
Geographical area	5 (26%)	3 (4%)	8 (8%)	.002**
Materials	0	2 (3%)	2 (2%)	.478
Activities	1 (5%)	13 (17%)	14 (15%)	.199
School	6 (32%)	16 (21%)	22 (23%)	.316
Other/not specified	0	8 (10%)	8 (8%)	.142
Method				
Qualitative	4 (21%)	13 (17%)	17 (18%)	.670
Quantitative	13 (68%)	44 (57%)	57 (59%)	.370
Review	1 (5%)	8 (10%)	9 (9%)	.492
Experiment	0	8 (10%)	8 (8%)	.142
Other	1 (5%)	2 (3%)	3 (3%)	.550
Citation				
0–99	13 (68%)	33 (43%)	46 (48%)	.046*
100–199	3 (16%)	25 (33%)	28 (29%)	.052
200–629	3 (16%)	19 (25%)	22 (23%)	.409

Notes: Univariate frequencies and bivariate cross table analysis (N = 96, 19, 77); ***p < .0.001, **p < .0,01, * p < .0,05.

When comparing the sample of articles addressing children with and without immigrant backgrounds, the general observation is that the two samples do not differ significantly. However, some exceptions are worth noting. For example, articles addressing immigrant children rarely address majority children at the same time, indicating that minority and majority children seldom are compared, nor do they deal with children with disabilities. These observations may indicate that some aspects of immigrant children's intersectionality are seldom explored.

Moreover, articles dealing with immigrant children are more often dealing with children's connections to geographical arenas and are more frequently explored in specified areas, for example, a country or a local society. Immigrant children's connections are also more frequently explored at home and tend to be less cited than articles addressing children without immigrant backgrounds. Overall, Table 3 reveals several knowledge gaps in the high-cited literature on immigrant children. Most striking is the lack of articles addressing preschool children, children with disabilities, poor children, and children's connection to digital media and other materials.

5. American and European Discourses on School Belonging

Table 4 shows how the statements tended to cluster into discourses in articles dealing with immigrant children.

In Table 4, three discourses on immigrant children's connection can be identified. Two of them are here entitled "the American tradition" and "the European tradition." The American tradition was developed in the early 2000s and dealt primarily with belonging (and not integration) to schools, and children's ages tend to be unspecified. The spokesmen were typically psychological journals with psychologists as 1st author. The methodology was most frequently quantitative. The spokesmen tended not to be social scientists, and the articles tended not to be geographically rooted, either with regards to arena or object of affiliation.

On the other hand, the European tradition tends to be basically educational and has, to a little extent, engaged American researchers. The focus has been on children 13–16 years old. This tradition, too, is focused on schools, both as arenas and objects of affiliations and tends not to be concerned with connections taking place at home.

The third discourse deals with "integration." The discourse was at its strongest in the 1990s and at its weakest in the 2010s. For the most part, the discourse is based on quantitative methodologies and is, to a little extent, associated with qualitative methodologies. Overall, the discourse is relatively weak, with an explained variance of 14.

6. The Participation of Children in General

Table 5 shows the discourses on the connections of children in general.

Table 4. Discourses of immigrant children's connections (sample 1).

Statements	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Title: Belonging	0,553	−0,048	−0,294
Title: Integration	−0,578	0,185	0,595
Year: 1989–1999	−0,259	0,201	0,581
Year: 2000–2009	0,645	−0,385	0,202
Year: 2010–2015	−0,466	0,237	−0,726
Journal: Social science	−0,642	−0,353	−0,015
Journal: Education	−0,101	0,703	0,036
Journal: Psychology	0,758	−0,105	−0,119
1st author: Psychology	0,736	0,187	0,395
Country: USA	0,555	−0,542	0,374
Country: European	−0,430	0,597	−0,171
Children's age: 13–16	0,115	0,717	0,004
Children's age: Not spesified	−0,594	−0,492	0,267
Arena: Home	0,003	−0,644	0,045
Arena: School	0,418	0,717	−0,078
Arena: Geographical arena	−0,674	0,285	0,461
Object of affiliation: Geographical area	−0,659	0,186	0,258
Object of affiliation: School	0,536	0,509	−0,265
Method: Qualitative	−0,288	−0,229	−0,717
Method: Quantitative	0,537	0,354	0,572
Total variance explained	27,299	19,168	14,789

Note: Factor analyses (N = 19).

Table 5 indicates the statements about immigrant children largely differ from those identified in the general sample. In the general sample, three academic discourses on children's connections can be identified: "the discourse of participation," "the discourse on place," and "the discourse on disability." The discourse on participation deals with children's participation in organised and unorganised leisure-time activities. This discourse tends to include the most cited and not the least cited articles. The discourse on place tends to be published in social

Table 5. Discourses of the connections of children in general (sample 3).

Statements	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Title: Inclusion	−0,166	−0,282	0,596
Title: Participation	0,861	0,048	−0,082
Journal: Social science	0,134	0,694	0,076
Journal: Psychology	−0,159	−0,554	−0,491
1st author: Education	−0,064	−0,105	0,766
1st author: Psychology	−0,098	−0,581	−0,517
Group of children: Disability	0,053	−0,304	0,605
Arena: Organised leisure time	0,858	0,024	0,066
Arena: Unorganised leisure time	0,614	0,031	0,168
Arena: Geographical arena	−0,225	0,811	−0,119
Object of affiliation: Geographical arena	−0,220	0,763	−0,148
Object of affiliation: Activity	0,899	0,055	0,080
Citation: 0–99	−0,555	0,115	0,130
Citation: 200–629	0,614	0,017	−0,280
Total variance explained	25,249	18,345	14,294

Note: Factor analyses (N = 96).

scientific journals, not in psychological journals; nor does it tend to have psychologist as 1st author. The discourse tends to be geographically rooted, both with regard to the arena and the object of affiliation. The disability discourse deals with the inclusion of children with disabilities and tends to have an educationist as 1st author and not a psychologist. This discourse is relatively weak, with an explained variance of 14.

7. Belonging vs Participation

In this article, the literature on children's connections has been analysed as "statements" and "discourses," providing an overview of this field of knowledge as well as the smaller discussions going on within it. The statements and discourses identified have been compared with those identified in other samples of children. In this section, the research results reported in the last section are discussed in light of the previous literature on children's connections.

In the analyses of statements, articles dealing with immigrant children's connections were compared to the connections of other children. A general observation was that the two samples of articles tended not to differ from each other. For example, most research on children with and without immigrant backgrounds tends to have psychological spokesmen, are based on quantitative methodologies and address connections played out at school. The dominance of psychological spokesmen may imply that individual explanation factors are given priority at the expense of more structural factors of social, economic, political, or other kinds. In psychological studies, quantitative methodologies are often preferred (Wertz, 2014). The preference for quantitative methodologies may explain why research on children's connections tends to focus on school children and not preschool children, as school children are easily recruited through schools, and younger preschool children hardly can be examined by surveys. As such, psychological dominance may also partly explain why schools are frequent objects of research in articles dealing with children's connections. Another factor explaining why school belonging is focused is less pragmatic and more substantial, namely, that school belonging matters in immigrant children's lives in terms of being positively associated with their academic motivation and outcomes (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Sanzes, 2008), as well as with their peer attachment and teacher support (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013).

Another example is that articles addressing children with and without immigrant backgrounds tend to focus on children settled in the US. The high percentage of articles from the US, which, to some extent, reflects that the sample of articles is only based on articles written in English. Research results addressing children settled in the US are not necessarily transferable to children in other settings (Vermeulen, 2010). However, as articles written in English are probably more accessible to researchers who attempt to update themselves in this field of science, the research results of this article probably provide a representative picture of what researchers learn to perceive as the international discourse on children's connections. As much as one of every four articles explored in this research focused on immigrant children. This result, too, may reflect that most articles address children settled in the US, as the share of immigrant children is higher in the US than in Europe or other geographical areas. In other words, if the sample had included more articles addressing children settled in Europe or other geographical areas than in the US, the percentage of immigrant children would most likely be lower.

A third example is that research on children with and without immigrant backgrounds focuses on children's connections to their peers. One reason may be that social bonds between peers are more voluntarily created. Even though peers may mean less than their parents, they become increasingly important in children's lives as they get older (Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017). The research reported in this article does not show to what kind of peer groups children feel most connected: same-ethnic or different-ethnic groups, nor does it show from whom the children feel most excluded. Research indicates, however, that children with immigrant backgrounds can be victims of intergroup exclusion based on their race (Killen et al., 2013). This makes it difficult for them to learn and practice effective social skills within peer relationships, so that their social standing within the larger peer group could improve. Perhaps this explains why rejected peer status is more stable than other sociometric categories (Brown, 2004, p. 382).

Some articles addressing immigrant children's connections differ from articles dealing with other children. For example, connections at home are more frequently addressed, which may reflect the fact that immigrant children, to a larger extent, have parents with other religious and cultural backgrounds, and experience conflicting norms and values at home and in other contexts (Guhman, 2009). Previous research indicates that immigrant children's sense of well-being and belonging rely on their parents' history of segmentation and socio-economic position (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Portes, 1995, Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) and that "lifestyle inconsistency" is a main source of stress (McDade, 2001). Research also indicates that materials such as digital media and clothes are important in children's lives, both in terms of being objects of affiliation and as tools providing access to social groups and communities (Pugh, 2009; Rysst, 2013). From this perspective, the absence of articles dealing with poor children and their material conditions is striking.

Another example is that geographical areas are more frequently addressed in research dealing with immigrant children's connections. The focus on geographical areas may reflect that these objects of affiliation are more important in immigrant children's lives. Establishing a sense of belonging to the host country is essential for

their well-being (Correa-Velez et al., 2010) and even more so for those who arrive in this country as children (Gonzales et al., 2013). The focus may also reflect the fact that immigrant children relate to more countries, including their host country and their family's country of origin, which makes the question of belonging more current. Immigrant children's belonging to their family's country of origin and how this influences their connection to the host country were not addressed in the sample explored in this article.

Table 6 in the Supplementary File compares the research results of Tables 4 and 5. As shown here, the discourses of immigrant children and the discourses of children in general tend to vary. The discourses on immigrant children's connections reveal an American and European tradition dealing with school belonging, yet from a psychological and educationalist perspective. The discourse on children in general, in contrast, reveals a discourse on children's participation in leisure-time activities, a discourse on place dealing with children's connection to geographical areas, and a discourse of disability dealing with children with disabilities from an educationalist perspective. The deepest contrast can be found between the American tradition concerned with immigrant children's connections at school and the discourse of place dealing with children in general. The former is dominated by psychologists, and the latter is dominated by social scientists.

A weak discourse on immigrant children's "integration" has been observed in this study. However, the discourse seems to have diminished since the 1990s, indicating that the term has been replaced by other terms addressing immigrant children's connections. Considering that belonging seems to be the preferred term in studies of immigrant children's connections (cf. Table 3), it seems reasonable to believe that it is this term that—at least to some extent—has replaced integration. Belonging is also the preferred term in European discourse that addresses children's connection to schools. This contrasts with the discourse on connections to leisure activities, in which "participation" is the preferred term. The latter observation can be connected to the results reported in Table 1, indicating that participation is the preferred term in studies of children in general. Previous research has indicated that the different terms of connections tend to overlap (Koster et al., 2009). However, this study indicates that the use of the terms varies to some extent. All variations in the use of terms observed in this research are summarised in the Supplementary File (Table 7).

Overall, this data material has a general tendency, suggesting that the term belonging is preferred in studies of immigrant children's connections, whereas participation is preferred in studies of children in general. On the one hand, it can be argued that children in general seem to be given a more dynamic and empowered role than immigrant children, as participation is more strongly associated with "activity" and "citizenship" than belonging. However, the concept of belonging does not necessarily perceive children as passive carriers of naturally given relationships but as dynamically involved in the co-creation of connections to people and the world around them (see, e.g., Pugh, 2009; Rysst, 2013). Indeed, they may face barriers and may react with withdrawal, but that can children who participate do as well.

Also interesting from a power perspective is the observation that the discourse on children's connection to leisure activities tends to be more cited than the other discourses, as this may imply that this is an attractive field of knowledge. In this respect, it contrasts with research on immigrant children's connections, which tends to be less cited than articles dealing with other children (cf. Table 5).

8. More Research on Socio-Material Contexts

Studies indicate that immigrant children are more at risk of marginalisation and social exclusion (Eurostat, 2022). This is poorly understood, diminishing the welfare state's ability to handle the problem (Hyggen et al., 2018). Based on a Foucauldian discourse analysis review, this article has explored the most cited academic literature addressing immigrant children's connections to people and the world around them. The main research questions have been: What is typically addressed in this literature, and what are the knowledge gaps? In this concluding section, the most important observations are summed up and considerations regarding the research's conclusion validity are highlighted.

One of the main observations is that the articles addressing immigrant children's connections tend not to differ from articles dealing with other children's connections. For example, both articles dealing with children with and without immigrant backgrounds tend to include psychologists as spokesmen. This has several implications. Let us look at a few: Most research on immigrant children's connections tends to be based on quantitative methodologies, which are preferred in psychological studies (Wertz, 2014). The use of methodology can explain why most research is conducted at schools and why school belonging is a frequent subject of research, as children are easily recruited for surveys at schools. It can also explain why school children are more often explored than preschool children, as preschool children hardly can participate in surveys.

The consequence of this psychological dominance should not be underestimated, as it most likely implies that structural factors of social, economic, and political kind influencing (in influenced by) children's connections are underexamined and need to be systematically explored. If not, the prevailing structure of knowledge and power will most likely stabilise or strengthen—at the expense of a more enrichened field of knowledge and scientific progress.

The dominance of psychological spokesmen does not mean that other disciplines do not play a role in

the (re)production of knowledge and knowledge gaps. Rather, they are present, though not necessarily concerned with the same subjects as psychologists. For example, educationalists and social scientists seem to be more concerned with children with disabilities, while social scientists seem to be more concerned with children's connection to place. This confirms that the discipline of the spokesmen plays a role in the (re)production of knowledge and knowledge gaps and should be considered in future review studies.

The third observation is that research on immigrant children's connections is seldom compared with research on majority children; nor are they concerned with how children's ethnicity intersects with other vulnerabilities, such as disabilities or low-income family backgrounds. Overall, there seems to be limited research addressing economic and material conditions, such as the role of digital media and other artefacts in children's everyday lives. This observation may cause concerns considering the important role artefacts like food, clothes, shelter, and digital media play in children's lives (Pugh, 2009; Rysst, 2013). As material conditions deal with environmental conditions rather than individuals, this result can also be the outcome of the psychological dominance observed in this study. However, the neglect of material conditions is also common in the social sciences and, to some extent, in the humanities.

The research results of this study should be tested in future research, not only limited to the 100 most influential articles measured by the number of citations but also larger samples of articles. As the number of citations increased over time, the articles addressed in this research were all published before 2016. As such, the research gaps identified in this research may have been covered in research published after this point in time. For example, the high citation of research dealing with children's leisure-time activities may indicate that this has been a popular research object in recent studies. An interesting follow-up study could analyse articles addressing children's connections published in the last 5–10 years. Such a study would not only provide insights into the state of the art when compared with the research results of this article, but it could also indicate how studies of children's connections have changed over time.

Another consideration regards the observation that most studies explored in this research address immigrant children settled in the US. The US is a big country, and research results addressed in one state are not necessarily transferrable to other geographical areas, either inside or outside US borders. "Local" discourse analytical reviews of research addressing the connections of immigrant children settled in other countries may therefore be needed to address knowledge and knowledge gaps in a specific area.

The sample of articles analysed in this article has all been written in English. As this means that the sample is biased in the sense of favouring articles addressing children settled in Anglo-Saxon countries, it may, to some extent, explain why the articles tend to address children settled in the US. However, the biased sample is also the most cited literature and, hence, the best-known literature to which most researchers all over the globe actively conduct in their everyday lives at work—be it to get familiar with a new research field or to be updated on an old. Exactly because this kind of literature forms the basis of new knowledge and knowledge development, doing critical reviews that not only explore what we know and do not know, but also discuss why the knowledge is as it is and its possible consequences, is important. When exploring the field of knowledge as a social construct, the field's strengths and weaknesses are more easily revealed, their potential for change is more easily utilised and political goals are more easily achieved.

Acknowledgments

The study is conducted as part of work package 1 of the project BELONG with the full title "Practices and Politics of belonging among minority and majority children of low-income families" (2021–2025) funded by the Research Council Norway. The work package aims to conduct a review of previous research on children's belonging and how the term "belonging" differs from familiar terms like "inclusion," "exclusion," "participation," and "integration." Thanks are due to the research group Consumer Policy and Economy at OsloMet/SIFO and to three reviewers commenting on the article.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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