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Americans' Willingness to Communicate With Mexican Immigrants: Effects of Ethnocentrism and Immigration Status

Stephanie Leanne Harris
Old Dominion University

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**AMERICANS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE WITH MEXICAN
IMMIGRANTS: EFFECTS OF ETHNOCENTRISM AND IMMIGRATION STATUS**

by

Stephanie Leanne Harris
B.A. December 2002, University of Arkansas

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Approved by:

Thomas J. Socha (Director)

Frances Hassencahl (Member)

Tim Anderson (Member)

ABSTRACT

AMERICANS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE WITH MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS: EFFECTS OF ETHNOCENTRISM AND IMMIGRATION STATUS

Stephanie Leanne Harris
Old Dominion University, 2017
Director: Dr. Thomas J. Socha

Prompted by the 2016 United States (US) Presidential election, the topic of Mexican immigration has come to figure prominently in contemporary societal discourse. This study explores the willingness of US citizens to communicate with Mexicans as a function of US citizens' ethnocentrism and Mexicans' immigration documentation status. Specifically, this study measured ethnocentrism (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997) and general willingness to communicate (McCroskey, 1992) of US citizens and then considered the relationship of these variables to their willingness to communicate with documented and undocumented Mexican immigrants. The study also explored the potential role that various lifespan variables, such as early communication with Mexicans, close relationships with Mexicans, age, geographic location, and political affiliation may have on ethnocentrism and willingness to communicate with documented and undocumented Mexicans in the US.

One hundred and eighty-seven people (a non-random sample) completed an online instrument. The results of the study show that as expected ethnocentricity is negatively correlated with willingness to communicate with both documented and undocumented Mexicans. In addition, the results show that there is a stronger negative correlation between ethnocentricity when it comes to communicating with undocumented than documented Mexican immigrants. Further, the study found that close relationships with Mexicans matter in willingness to communicate as well as political affiliation. Although the study's external validity is limited by a

sample of mostly White women, the results argue for the need for future intercultural studies to more closely examine the role of a person's immigration documentation status alongside of other major cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1984) as a factor that can negatively affect intercultural communication.

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This thesis is dedicated to my children. May they always be open to new cultures, languages, and people.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The topic of immigration is familiar in the United States (US). One could argue that the concept of “citizenship” and “nationality” have been important subjects since the founding of countries and creating of constitutions. Then, as now, the messages shared formally and informally about these two topics affect not only US citizens, but also immigrants in a wide array of circumstances such as looking for a better future, immigrant families trying to support each other, and immigrant children who are without citizenship status, but have only ever known the US as home. Although the focus of discourse about the many nationalities of US immigrants has changed over time, current US political and cultural discourse has focused heavily on Mexican immigrants (documented and undocumented) in the US, attributed in large part to the 2016 Presidential campaign rhetoric of now President Donald Trump (“Subtract and divide”, 2016, “Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid”, 2015).

According to Homeland Security Population Estimates (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2012), undocumented Mexican immigrants comprised 59% of the total unauthorized immigrant population in 2011. Between 2000 and 2011, the percent of undocumented Mexican immigrants grew 45% in the United States. Despite a Pew Research Center (2015) study showing that 51% of US citizens think that immigrants can help improve society, the same study also found that 41% of the same population believe that “immigrants are a burden because they take jobs, housing, and healthcare” (p. 1). In addition, the study found that the sentiment “immigrants are good for the US” declined by 6% from 2014.

For some, negative attitudes towards Mexicans are formed, in part, for a variety of reasons including: the way in which Mexicans enter the country, their lack of English-language knowledge, the US's misunderstanding of Latino culture, and more. It is important to acknowledge that racism and prejudice, as communicative performance, are displayed toward this group interpersonally (Chavez, 1992, J. Daniels, 1997). There is online disparity when it comes to communicating about Mexicans (Gómez-Peña, 2001); and the topic of race, in general, is very much alive within digital social media (Chun, 2012; J. Daniels, 2009; Hines, 2001; Nakamura, 2002, 2008). In sum, it can be argued that the current state of US Mexican immigrants includes lacking voice in political, cultural, and even legal circles, all with negative repercussions.

It is also necessary to better understand how negative messages about Mexicans affect US citizens' willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants, and how this lack of communication perpetuates a vicious cycle preventing immigrants from making progress on these various fronts. Recognizing how these prejudices are showcased within our society may make it possible to change and improve attitudes toward the group through better communication and understanding.

In order to better understand the various kinds of breakdowns in communication between US citizens and Mexican immigrants, this MA thesis focuses on the effects of ethnocentrism of in-group members (Americans) and their willingness (or lack thereof) to communicate with Mexicans who reside in the US, as a function of whether Mexicans are here legally (documented) or illegally (undocumented). While previous studies have examined the topics of ethnocentrism and willingness to communicate (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997; McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987), there has yet to be research studies seeking to explain how

ethnocentrism and, in particular, the Trump-invoked variable of immigration status (documented and undocumented) may affect the willingness to communicate of non-Mexicans in the US with Mexican immigrants (or of immigrants from any country). In addition, a lifespan framing affords additional insights about the changing attitudes toward ethnic cultural groups in the US over time. For example, it is important to study what, if any, early lifespan experiences with Mexicans may affect individuals' willingness to communicate with undocumented immigrants. Further, communication experiences during middle or later-life with Mexicans and their effects on willingness to communication should also be examined. Of course, individuals' cultural development ebbs and flows across a lifetime; it is not static. Because of this, it is also necessary to take into account the historical-contextual framing of immigration for different generations of people in the US. Further, studies also need to be conducted concerning whether low willingness to communicate in general increases the likelihood of individual's sharing information about undocumented immigrants online. Relatedly, online discourse surrounding undocumented Mexican immigrants is also understudied. Much of the studies of digital prejudice and usage focus on racial issues among Black or African-American citizens. Communication theories and digital frameworks regarding race can be used to analyze the topic anew by turning attention to the world's many cultures.

In particular, this thesis builds on the work of Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) using their *Ethnocentricity (GENE)* scale to measure respondents' levels of ethnocentricity, and a modified version of McCroskey's *Willingness to Communicate (WTC)* scale (McCroskey, 1992) to measure subjects' willingness to communicate, both overall, and with Mexican immigrants in particular. Willingness to communicate was chosen as a primary focus as it is a critical starting point to manage prejudice and racism. That is, this thesis seeks to add to the intercultural

communication literature not only by providing insights into US citizens communicating with Mexican immigrants but equally important, it poses a larger challenge to intercultural communication studies of prejudice and racism by arguing that a person's immigration status, either alone or combined with ethnic culture, has significant implications in making interpersonal judgments about culturally-different others. Or, in other words, that prejudice communicated towards undocumented immigrants is qualitatively different from prejudice in general.

Discourse matters and in particular it matters regarding how immigration and ethnicity have been communicated or avoided in the US. It is important to better understand how non-immigrant voices can move forward to bridge digital and non-digital inequalities in this country with those entering the US. Before turning to the literature review that supports the study, let me provide a brief cultural and legal history of Mexicans in the US.

Brief History

In order to contextualize study of communication between US citizens and Mexican immigrants, it is important to understand key moments in the history of immigration laws and social/cultural belief structures as they evolve over time. This section offers a selected overview of the significant changes in US societal prejudices toward Mexican immigrants during specific times within US history. The purpose of this section is to point out that any study looking at prejudices towards groups of people should be studied within the context of the culture of the time and the historic sentiment toward the group. This overview will focus only on the immigration changes for Mexicans within the US, although similar parallels can be made for any group coming into the country during different times.

Prior to 1847, the US Government's concern of immigration and citizenship was based upon whether a person in the US was considered a free person or not, and whether their heritage was of Irish Catholic descent (R. Daniels, 2004, pp. 10 – 11). During this period the US Government worked to define the number of immigrants allowed into the country, their allowable origins, and US citizenship status in general. With respect to Mexicans, in 1848, the Mexican-American War was settled with the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* that allowed the US to gain territory from Mexico which would later become the US States of Texas, New Mexico, California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado. Mexicans living in this territory were given one year to decide whether they wanted to keep their Mexican citizenship and return to dwell in what are Mexican territories today or become US citizens and stay. Estimates show that out of the approximately 80,000 Mexicans in the new US territories, only about 3,000 returned to Mexico and remained Mexican citizens (R. Daniels, 2004, pp. 62 – 63). This statistic is important to US / Mexican cultural history because in less than 100 years since the country's beginnings, a great portion of the US citizenry included people of direct Mexican heritage. Indeed, Mexican culture is rooted deep within the overall culture of the US.

For many years after the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, immigration reform and prejudices turned to focus on: immigrants from Asia (specifically the Chinese and Japanese), Europeans who continued to seek new homes in the US, and whether or not certain immigrant groups were deemed “moral-enough” or “healthy-enough” to enter the US, thus worthy of staying in the country (R. Daniels, 2004, pp. 12 – 26, 150). The idea of “illegal” immigration had not yet been created. In fact, “prior to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 there was no such thing as an illegal immigrant, since no permission was necessary to enter the country” (R. Daniels,

2002, p. 311). After 1910, at the start of the Mexican Revolution, the first Mexican political refugees made their way to the US According to Gonzales:

The years immediately after the revolutionary upheaval, the decade of the 1920s, witnessed the largest exodus from Mexico, particularly from the western states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán. Flight was facilitated by the reconstruction of the railroad lines, which had been largely destroyed during the years of heavy fighting. Altogether, during the Revolution and its aftermath, a million people, some of them political exiles representing every class of society, most of them starving peasants, moved north to seek a better life across the border. (p. 120)

As R. Daniels (2002, 2004) explains, the revolution in Mexico redefined the US as a safe haven for those suffering during the unrest. During the years after this, Congress enacted literacy requirements for immigrants to decrease the chances that the very poor would enter the US. In addition, while the *Oriental Exclusion Act* prohibited most immigration from Asia, no laws were put into place to limit immigration to the US from the Western Hemisphere. This meant that US employers could look to Mexican immigrants for low-cost labor. The restrictions against Asian immigrants created a high need for labor forces during World War I as many of the US working class were shifted to military needs. Programs in the US temporarily brought in Mexican workers (such as the ninth proviso of Section 3 of the 1917 *Immigration Act* and later, the Bracero Program) during and after World War II. Mexicans became the backbone of American infrastructure. The *Immigration Act*, that begun in 1917 lasted until 1921:

Perhaps 500,000 Mexicans came, most of them after the Armistice, and about half of those were actually registered under the program. Whether legal or illegal they worked not only on farms, but also on railroads, in mining, and in manufacturing

establishments. Arrangements were left largely to employers and the role of the government, once the programs was authorized, was all but invisible. (R. Daniels, 2004, pp. 89 – 90)

Due to the lack of government control and so few people registering for the program, when a similar program was needed during World War II (Bracero), the government in Mexico City required certain assurances from the US before allowing workers to cross the border. Such assurances included that workers were guaranteed minimum wages (and in many cases prevailing wages), decent working and living conditions, and round-trip transportation. As a part of the agreement, Mexico and the US jointly instituted a savings program that put 10% of the earned wages into a savings account which was to be paid to the Mexican worker upon return to Mexico. Unfortunately, “given the notorious corruption endemic in Mexican institutions, it is not surprising that many—perhaps most—of the braceros never got the money that was rightly due them” (R. Daniels, 2004, pp. 90 – 91). While the US Government’s attempt to entice the braceros back to Mexico was well intentioned, the lack of knowledge of Mexican government / Mexican citizen interaction did not improve the sentiment of Mexican workers to legally use these programs. In addition to the issues with the program itself, due to the two world wars the US was involved in, there was a climate of “ultrapatriotism, xenophobia, and jingoism that accompanied American preparations for war [and] Mexican Americans and other minority groups were subjected to even greater pressures to conform to American norms” (Gutiérrez, 1995, p. 118).

Post World War II, the need for Mexican labor requested for the Bracero program decreased as American soldiers returned to the US. The Bracero program was temporarily halted and *Operation Wetback* forced the return of many undocumented workers to Mexico (R. Daniels,

2004, p. 312). The 1952 *Immigration and Nationality Act* (known also as the *McCarran-Walter Act*) greatly expanded the reasons that “unnaturalized aliens” could be deported “regardless of his or her character, length of stay in the United States, employment record, or familial relationship to bona fide American citizens” (Gutiérrez, 1995, p. 161).

By 1986, the *Immigration Reform and Control Act* gave amnesty to some undocumented immigrants, but also created diversity visas for qualified immigrants who were affected by previous immigration laws. The recipients were to be selected by a lottery conducted by the US State Department. The “winners” of the lottery would then have to prove they were qualified for entry under immigration law and then had to meet many administrative conditions. This act “not only increase[d] significantly the number of legal immigrants in the United States but also created a well-publicized precedent for future liberalizations” (R. Daniels, 2002, pp. 423 – 424). The 1986 act gave hope to future undocumented immigrants for future legalization or permanent visas by showing residency for prolonged periods of time.

The strain between Mexican immigrants and the US grew further as noted in Holmes’s (2013) book *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* as the State of California made a move to limit the rights of undocumented immigrants in 1994 when Proposition 187 was passed. This initiative denied public services to anyone suspected to be undocumented. More recently, the *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* of 1996: denied earned Social Security benefits to any immigrant not legally present in the United States, forbade them from receiving college education benefits, increased funding for Border Patrol, and improved information sharing between Immigration and Naturalization Service with other agencies to assure these benefits were not received (R. Daniels, 2002, pp. 437 – 438). In addition, the act “facilitated the deportation of undocumented immigrants, strengthened control of the borders, and ramped up

penalties for those engaged in the business of bringing people to the United States illegally” (Kinder & Kam, 2010, p. 126).

While US laws were tightening, as Holmes (2013) pointed out, the year 2003 saw the deregulation of agricultural trade by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the raising of farm subsidies in the US by 300 percent, and the reduction of financial support for corn producers in Mexico that lead increased numbers of Mexican farmers to look north to survive. Then, following in the footsteps of Proposition 187 in California, Arizona passed the *Arizona Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act* in 2004 which required proof of status to receive any public benefits and legal retaliation for public employees who did not report possible undocumented persons in the State.

Due in part to a history of waxing and waning between openness-closeness, welcoming versus walling, as well as making the US a “prize” to be won concerning immigration for Mexicans to the United States, it is understandable why perceptions of distrust linger concerning immigration. As R. Daniels (2002) mentions,

Whatever they were called and wherever they lived in the Southwest and Far West, Mexican Americans were dispossessed of much of their land and subject to discriminatory treatment in every aspect of their lives: in employment, in housing, and in education. (p. 313)

The history of lands and the symbiotic relationship between Mexican immigrants and the US makes it very difficult to remove the culture from the people and the people from a culture. Because of the historic population movement of Mexicans back and forth across borders, the idea that Mexicans should “acculturate” was not as strong for other groups who expected to remain in the US indefinitely. Gutiérrez (1995) notes that, from a legal standpoint, “while the

Mexicans are not easily assimilated, this is not a very great importance as long as most of them return to their native land after a short time” (p. 47). Further, Gutiérrez argues a sentiment of blame growing from the Great Depression:

Despite the fact that few Mexicans were formally deported, repatriation for most individuals and families was a traumatic, disorienting, and sorrowful course undertaken under extreme duress. Many of the repatriates believed the Mexicans had been unfairly blamed for events over which they had no control. Despised and vilified after spending ten, fifteen, or even twenty or more productive years as hard-working, though isolated, members of the American working class, Mexican immigrant workers seemed to bear the brunt of Americans’ resentment about the economic catastrophe. (p. 73)

More recently, during the 2016 presidential race in the US, then Republican nominee Donald Trump focused his platform on immigration issues, and specifically called out Mexican immigrants:

When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (“Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid”, 2015)

As the above history and literature show, political science has been focusing on the condition of Latinos in the US in recent years, but especially during the 2016 presidential race. In order to understand the prejudice or distrust non-immigrants may have toward Mexican immigrants in the US during the time this MA thesis was being written, we must acknowledge

where in the cultural discourse cycle the American and Mexican publics are, and where the participants have been throughout their lives. This waxing and waning of public sentiments towards immigration in the US will, no doubt, affect the outcome of similar studies in later times.

In addition, it is important to note that for this MA thesis, the history listed in this study began from a White-European historical lens. The history of the Mexican people on the land that is now the US goes back further than this history covers. This period of time was chosen for the study as the focus since the research is based upon the ethnocentrism and willingness to communicate of citizens who live within the White / Caucasian macro system in the US.

Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the primary conceptual elements that will frame the study to be described in Chapter 3: (1) lifespan perspective, (2) theories of socialization/enculturation, (3) Muted Group Theory, (4) intercultural communication values, (5) ethnocentrism, and (6) the individual difference variable, willingness to communicate.

It must be remembered that family migration includes multiple generations from children to the elderly. Theoretically, it is important to consider both the lifespan development of non-Mexican immigrants in the US when considering citizens' prejudices towards, and potential to communicate with Mexicans. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1989) postulated in his Bioecological Model that during our development we are most strongly affected by those people, experiences, and so on that are closest to us (proximal) and less so by those influences further from us (distal). Distal influences, however, still assist or inhibit in our growth to some level. Our parents, to the extent they participate in our lives during our development, for example, probably help build our

personal culture more so than distal messages heard periodically through life. This includes direct messages as well as indirect messages and symbols (such as an American flag, etc.). This combination of messages from these varying spheres of influences creates our “culture” that shapes our development.

Segall (1979) also explained that we are creations of our socialization (i.e., what is taught to us directly) and enculturation (what is learned by us indirectly) during development. These two items create our “culture.” For socialization, he argued, like Bronfenbrenner, that “most often these include parents, teachers, and other elders” and that “under certain circumstances, however, even peers can effect socialization” (p. 14). In regards to enculturation (a term coined by Herskovits, 1948), according to Segall (1979) children learn culture unconsciously from experiencing habits and practices that have existed for many generations. Interestingly, he also makes the point that this cycle leads to a paradox. Those most enculturated are least aware of their own culture’s part in creating their personal culture and that “such values are widely transmitted, both directly and indirectly, and are learned very well because they are hardly ever questioned” (p. 15). In other words, it is difficult to step outside, or even recognize one’s own culture if it is all he or she has ever known, in part also because metaphorically-speaking like fish do not stop to examine the water in which they swim, people don’t stop to examine the cultures in which they live.

With regards to human nature and socialization/enculturation, Segall argued the importance of understanding these ideas for each person, that “without this starting point, one could not possibly understand either the uniformities or the diversities in the behavior patterns of the human animal” (p. 3). In order to better understand one’s prejudices toward other groups, it is

important to understand that person's developmental journey and their sociocultural context of origin.

Culture itself is multi-faceted and is difficult to fully capture in any one study. Over time, the idea of culture is encapsulated with beliefs, practices, language, food, music, art, history, fears, hopes, and so much more. Each journey is different; each response to new cultural stimuli manifests differently. The overall culture of what makes a person "American" may be overgeneralized in order to move forward with research, but researchers are required to acknowledge that these are simply overgeneralizations. In terms of immigration, historical reference is helpful in contextualizing socialization and enculturation of participants in any given study. Various generations will be affected differently due to these cultural factors. Lifespan development is also not set in stone, and it is important to note that an individual's culture is a living, breathing thing that is constantly in flux. As Segall (1979) noted, "not only is every one of us shaped by the traditional norms and teachings that prevail in our culture; each of us is subjected to lifelong changing influences" (p. 185).

Also related to immigration, the factor of nationalism must be considered. Symbols and messages of nationalism may take a more distal stance in a person's development, but the meanings of those messages change over time. Nationalism can be a strong connecting force for a country like the US. In order for its citizenry to feel at one with each other, Segall argues that "at the social level, political leadership and institutional forces of one kind or another are required to mobilize those psychological dispositions and to mold them into national consciousness" (p. 212). It is essential for our leadership to create a oneness to solidify what is means to be "American." Allport (1933), believed this to be true long before Segall. He stated:

There are certain traditions, historical perspectives, and principles possessed in common by the members of every national group which are both the evidence and the substance of their nationality. If an individual shares these ideas with the other of his group, and like the others is loyal to them, he belongs to their nation. (p. 138)

This creates the conceptual in-group and out-group for a nation, and is arguably necessary in times of economic, social, and political distress. This realization of an American group creates two divisive sides: an in-group of Americans and an out-group of everyone else. Because of this, even with immigration studies, it is essential for intercultural communication to consider the role of power. Of use in understanding the role of powers, culture and its effects on communication is Muted Group Theory (MGT).

Since Mexican immigrants in the US are not a part of the dominant, White, English-speaking culture, they are a muted group within the country. MGT was originally developed based upon differences between men (dominant group) and women (subordinate group) by Edwin and Shirley Ardener (1975). The basis was that while women made up a large part of society, the decisions and power in the US was decisively controlled by men. This had the effect of muting the feelings, needs, and voices of women. Kramarae (1981) further argued that women could not effectively communicate within society since men created the rules of engagement. While the beginnings of the theory focused on the disparity between the two sexes, Kramarae (2005) began questioning whether MGT could extend to any subordinate groups based on more social hierarchies (such as race, language, etc.). As race (and not necessarily nationality) is often tied to Mexicans in the US, they are, arguably, a muted group within the society that creates laws governing their ability to exist within this country. A key feature of this dynamic, and the

primary subject of this thesis, is ascertaining the dominate group's willingness to communicate with the subordinate group. Without such communication opportunities, Mexicans may become further muted in the US.

In terms of communication between cultures, Hofstede (1983; Hofstede & Bond, 1984) presented six values that are navigated during intercultural communication and are common in all cultures: (1) power distance, (2) individualism vs. collectivism, (3) uncertainty avoidance, (4) masculinity vs. femininity, (5) long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation, and (6) indulgence vs. restraint. The added layer of nationalism, however, does not exactly fit within these values since the values are based upon organizational communication. Outside of management situations, is it possible that ingroups and outgroups are formed somewhat due to national status during intercultural communication in the US? If so, documentation of national status could play a major role in intercultural communication across cultures and may be an additional element that has yet to be, but should be considered when communicating interculturally.

Finally, related to power, the concept of "ethnocentrism" is key to understanding how power is held communicatively and is also a key concept in this this MA thesis in understanding what might affect willingness to communicate with those not of the same culture. Ethnocentrism was a term coined in 1906 by William Graham Sumner. Neuliep (2012) described ethnocentrism as "a cognitive orientation about outgroups" and that "persons high in ethnocentrism *think* that their ingroup is superior than other, different, groups" (p. 12). Studies by Levinson (1949), authoritarian-focused research by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950), as well as Stenner (2005) and Kinder and Kam (2010) supported the general understanding of ethnocentrism that Sumner had and Neuliep echoed. Research on the topic of social identity

(Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and intergroup attitudes (Brewer & Campbell, 1976) also strengthened the literature on this topic. The most current common definition of ethnocentricity, according to Merriam-Webster, is that it is “characterized by or based on the attitude that one’s own group is superior.” It is seen more as a generalized predisposition rather than a specific prejudice (such as racism). As US citizen’s level of ethnocentrism climbs it may prompt them to be more or less willing to communicate with someone who falls outside of their own group/culture.

Much of the history regarding willingness to communicate is linked with studies of social anxiety, sociability, and research volunteering (Hayes, Meltzer, & Lundberg, 1968; MacDonald, 1972a, 1972b; Martin & Marcuse, 1957; Richmond & McCroskey, 1985; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969, 1985; and Schubert, 1964) within the fields of communication, political science and psychology. Early work on reticence (Phillips, 1965) was also a building block. Collectively, these works later came under the umbrella of communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1977, 1984). These latter studies focused on social and communication anxiety, and looked at trends based on traits (i.e., consistent personality indicators) versus states (i.e., situational changes affecting personality) in a person’s communicative behavior. Researchers found that people were generally more or less likely to communicate, and that the situation in which communication takes place may only slightly affect one’s willingness to communicate. The study reported in this thesis uses the *Willingness to Communicate (WTC)* scale (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987) to measure participants’ willingness to communicate generally (trait), but also revised the scale to include the target or communication recipient (state), that is, undocumented Mexican immigrants or documented Mexican immigrants. This represents a new extension of prior work on willingness to communicate.

The study of willingness to communicate and ethnocentrism with regards to non-immigrant feelings toward Mexican immigrants in the US is optimally approached using many perspectives in order to attempt a better grasp of the social situation. In choosing to use a lifespan perspective, we acknowledge that each generation has different cultural and social experiences. Through socialization and enculturation, we consider the importance of social surroundings and direct socialization received by caretakers during development. Further, Muted Group Theory points out that prejudices can be formed without the out-group's direct input, pointing out the importance of understanding the social power structure in the discourse within the US. Each of these elements help create a person's ethnocentrism through development, and may affect their willingness to communicate with specific groups.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The claims of this MA thesis do not argue for or against the acceptance of, or the criminalization of, undocumented immigration. Rather, its purpose is better understand the dynamics of communication that underpin the fact that Mexican immigrants are already, and have been for some time, a large part of American culture. It is also to show how willingness to communicate is a key factor in the acculturation of Mexican immigrants and examine the role that US citizens' ethnocentrism and social prejudice in supporting or inhibiting willingness to communicate interculturally. Last, it raises a question for intercultural communication research: Does documentation status affect citizens' willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants? Or more generally what role does individuals' national documentation status have, along with culture, on processes of prejudice and racism?

It is first necessary to review literature on these topics, specifically: (1) discourse (both interpersonal and media-driven) about out-groups and how it develops and influences our social/cultural system; (2) racial prejudice in online spaces; (3) how acculturation of immigrants requires willingness to communicate of non-immigrants and how nationalism helps define the level of "Americanness" one must attain; and (4) how developmental ethnocentrism plays a role in our willingness to communicate with out-groups.

The Influence of Discourse

When considering the way a certain group is talked about in society, one may ask, “Why does it matter?” Throughout the history of communication studies, theorists have focused on the popular discourses of nations, the world, small groups, and so on as a way to focus a lens on the social culture of that group being studied, as well as to find the power structure of the entity. In his interactional sociolinguistic studies, Gumperz (1982) focused on understanding the role of language in public life by trying to understand how linguistic knowledge and social factors interact in discourse interpretation. He looked at the way that words are used to create and reinforce societal and cultural ideals. He worked on the idea that people must communicate with each other in order to form a collective linguistic culture. He argued that we must try to include all cultural and socio-economic groups within the conversation: “What is to be interpreted must first be created through interaction, before interpretation can begin, and to that end speakers must enlist others’ cooperation and actively seek to create conversational involvement” (p. 206). We cannot fully interpret the meanings of our cultural discourse without creating it by involving everyone within that culture. In order to involve everyone, we must be willing to communicate with all of society, no matter the power structure within the culture. This carries forward when looking at the digital divide and cultural assumptions within technology, showing a hole in inclusion as we work to create our digital discourse and language.

Chavez’s (1992) work, *Shadowed Lives*, used information gathered during an extensive ethnographic study to illuminate the societal discourse situated around undocumented immigrants in American society. In addition, for his study, he posed the question: “Does the larger society imagine undocumented immigrants to be a part of the community?” (p. 5). In order to answer that, he focused heavily on language-use and prejudices formed about undocumented

Latinos by Americans citizens. The first important point that he made apparent is based on the language-use surrounding immigrants. Some Americans use the term “illegal aliens” to refer to undocumented immigrants. This focuses meanings about the group on their legal status and positions them solidly as “others.” Another example he gave showed the feelings of the San Diego County police toward the immigrants: “These new criminals are undocumented aliens from Mexico, some of whom live here but many of whom sleep in their native land and cross daily into the United States to commit their crimes” (p. 16). Chavez also quoted a candidate for the County Board of Supervisors who stated:

Nowhere else in San Diego County do you find the huge gangs of illegal aliens that line our streets, shake down our schoolchildren, spread diseases like malaria, and roam our neighborhoods looking for work or homes to rob. We are under siege in North County, and we have been deserted by those whose job it is to protect us for this flood of illegal aliens. (p. 17)

His research showed that the prejudiced views towards Latinos were not only those of the citizens in general, but also those of some government and law enforcement officials. This means that the generalized ideas about Latinos were used within the citizenry as well as at the governing level. Throughout his book, Chavez showcased examples of racial based crime against immigrants, other people in power spreading misinformation about the group, and general xenophobia shown by the American people toward this group of immigrant workers.

Chavez’s research further showed that the discourse in the US *about* immigrants was not created *with* immigrants’ conversations or understandings. Therefore, unlike Gumperz’s ideal way to create cultural discourse, the group in question was being left out of the language creation, leaving the linguistic development to the hegemonic groups in power. This resulted in

an overarching commentary from US citizens surrounding immigrants that centered on: illegal acts by immigrants; their desire to rob and bother US women; their inebriation; and their generally problematic, and possibly public health destroying, hygiene. At the end of his study, however, Chavez learned the following common goals of the undocumented immigrants included: find somewhere to stay, work and live cheaply, survive economically, send money back home, and reduce loneliness and boredom, live more comfortably, satisfy domestic needs, minimize disruption caused by apprehension, and assist others in migrating. Following Muted Group Theory, the needs of undocumented immigrants were, or are, rarely communicated to the general public, only the rhetoric of fear associated with their illegal status permeated discussions by non-immigrants. Even if US citizens were willing to communicate with and better understand the livelihood of Mexican immigrants, the language barrier exacerbates the separation of groups as it becomes difficult for an out-group to speak for itself within a larger, in-group society if the out-group expects acculturation in at least language and is not likely to communicate with the out-group.

While the hegemonic groups in power may be helping create the way in which we communicate about immigrants, it is not only the greater majority that adds to the fear, mistrust, and prejudice against immigrants in the US. In *White Lies* (1997), Jesse Daniels pointed out that, while a relatively small group, the ideas and beliefs from white supremacists cannot be ignored. That, in fact, extremist discourse “shares much in common with the white supremacists discourse produced by elected officials, Madison Avenue, mainstream political debate, academic intellectuals, and popular cultural representations” (p. 2). The groups mentioned help create the news, laws, ideas, and feelings toward others within our society. While this may not seem as

important since the groups are small, if one is within the non-white group, one's daily life is threatened by this discourse. In addition, Daniels noted that:

While it is true that surveys consistently show a trend over time toward increasing attitudes of "racial tolerance", public opinion polls also show that a majority of white Americans agree with many of the basic ideas white supremacists espouse.
(p. 4 – 5)

Daniels also made a point to help us understand why changing the discourse is so difficult, arguing that "all whites benefit from white supremacy, and some whites benefit more than others, and that the presence of extremist groups works to sustain white supremacy as an ideological justification for institutionalized privilege" and that "on a subconscious level they know they benefit, from a certain amount of low-grade racism in the environment" (p. 22). While the majority of Daniel's book focused on the divide between White Americans and Black/African-Americans, the racial divide can also be seen between White, US citizens and Latinos/Hispanics in the US. Daniels used a propaganda example from 1985 that was meant for the "white worker" specifically about immigrants coming to the United States in search for work. One of the images was a caricature of a Mexican with the words "White Men Beware! We want your jobs – We want your homes – We want your Country. Wake Up!" (p. 43). This type of propaganda portrayed an immigrant as someone who was in the US to take away jobs and homes from those already in the country. The picture cannot be unseen by the public, whether they are, or are not, within the white supremacist groups. Daniel argued that "the fact that this discourse shares much in common with mainstream political discourse and popular culture representations has serious political implications" (p. 135).

For Daniels, even a small group's discourse can permeate society at the cultural level. Since the creation of the language within the discourse is not all encompassing, and holistic cultural creation requires communication between all groups, the hegemonic ideals are reinforced by society's communication surrounding other groups by leaving out minority groups. This becomes even more of a problem as we consider the communication taking place rapidly online, particularly when some believing that race does not exist in digital spaces.

Racial Prejudice in Online Spaces

As of 2017, in history and social science research, it is widely accepted that race exists in the US. Some have argued, however, that the creation of digital spaces allows us to have communication without a consideration of race, that the digital era of discourse is a race-free utopian space. Today, in a thesis that focuses on race, nationalism culture, and willingness to communicate, it is very important to consider all of the available means of communication that includes digital as well as interpersonal.

In *Cybertypes* (2002), Lisa Nakamura argues that like in face to face communication race does happen in cyberspace and within popular discourses comprising online culture. Not only does she argue that race exists online, but also that we should 'keep it real' when looking at race in the virtual space, that the communication in the 'real' world is also happening in virtual spaces. If racism is being communicated face-to-face, it is also being shared computer to computer, or phone to phone, and more.

In her book *Digitizing Race* (2008), Nakamura delves further into the way race is showcased in more specific online and digital spaces. Instead of focusing only on verbal communication of race online, Nakamura looks into the representation of race through online

media, apps, avatar creations, and ads. The visual examples used in this book more easily support the argument that race exists in digital spaces as it is very evident through these examples. The exclusion of other cultural ideas and races in things like instant messaging, online petitions, quizzes, etc. further supports the idea that the exclusion of other group's language and culture only continues the already 'white' hegemonic discourse in society.

Jesse Daniels (2009) takes the idea of racial inequalities in digital spaces in a different direction by focusing on inequalities of the World Wide Web itself, along with the spread of white supremacy online in *Cyber Racism*. As Daniels argued previously, white supremacy groups are much smaller groups within society. Unfortunately, with the ease of internet access, she states that "anyone with an internet connection – from a sixth-grader doing a report on Martin Luther King, Jr. to a disaffected, potentially violent skinhead – can find white supremacy online" (p. 5). She further argues that the concerns about white supremacy online include: "(1) Easy access and global linkages; (2) [the] harm it may precipitate in real life; and (3) the challenge it presents to honoring cultural values such as racial equality" (p. 6). For her, not only does race exist online, it creates a further problem for society since information online is readily available, especially for other whites. Therefore, racial discourse exists online, and now it is even more easily accessed by those who use digital spaces.

Chun (2012) also discusses the importance of recognizing that race does exist online in her article *Race and/as Technology or How to do Things to Race*. For her, pretending that race does not exist in digital spaces is detrimental to our discourse because we only continue repeating the current hegemonic discourse that exists, not adding those who are not included in the verbal culture. As noted in the work of Gumperz and Chavez previously reviewed, this creates a problem by only showing one-sided, prejudiced views of 'others,' which then

strengthens the already prejudiced views against non-whites. In addition, the anonymous nature of online spaces allows hate speech to propagate.

In Everett's (2012) article, she also supports the idea that race very much exists in digital spaces as she focuses on the online movement during the 2008 presidential campaign while Barack Obama was running and the discourse shift since he has been in office. One item of note relevant to this this had to do with the use of technology by minorities to move the campaign forward before the elections. While society will state that minority support helped get Obama elected, since (stereotypically) minorities are often assumed to be not as proficient at technology, minorities' young are not given their due in technological prowess during the campaign. She argues that the technology and structure of the internet themselves create another layer of racism surrounding the idea of digital spaces.

Hines (2001) adds another layer of racism seen within digital spaces by focusing on the discourse that surrounds the technology itself, which constructs it "as a site of white male superiority" (p. 3). While it is not necessarily true that minorities are not as good at technology as whites, the over compassing discourse that repeats this idea creates a fear of technology for those groups. Because of this idea that people of color cannot keep pace in a high-tech world, "poor and working-class people of color have a technophobia that's hard to shake" (p. 2). He argues that if society continuously sees people of color as incapable or as victims of the technological divide, we will be more hesitant to entrust them with the technological tools of the future.

Gómez-Peña (2001), in one of the rare articles focusing exclusively on Latinos and communications technology, focuses on the prejudice of Latinos as technologically-lacking or that they prefer to avoid communications technology. When discussing communications

technology with other Latinos, common themes of access, privilege, and language bubbled to the surface. In addition, he writes that Latinos were perplexed when they heard others talk about the internet as being “equal: and having “equal access,” since that is not the reality that they face. Not only is language a barrier in creating both online and offline discourse (again, as supported by Chavez, 1992 and Gumperz, 1982), but the language surrounding communications technology creates an additional barrier, making Latinos *feel* inadequate for digital communication use.

Warschauer (2000) also supports the idea of a technological divide for non-whites versus whites when it comes to access. He explains the lack of equality in access to hardware and software throughout history based on race, and yet looks at the possibilities that the internet holds for the various groups in society:

The Internet is on the one hand a highly restrictive medium, based on the cost of access to computers and connections as well as its historical domination by a white, well-to-do, English-speaking North American community. On the other hand, the Internet is potentially the most democratic media yet developed, in that it places powers for broadcasting, research, and interaction into the hands of greater numbers of people than ever before. Because of this basic contradiction, the Internet can both magnify existing inequalities in society while also facilitating efforts to challenge these inequalities. (p. 157)

Like Gumperz noted with face to face discourse, within offline discourse, Warschauer also focuses on the importance of language use online, noting that it “represents a powerful and flexible medium for assertion of identity against cultural homogenization” (p. 167). If we know race and racial inequalities exist online, how do we equalize the medium and change the cultural

language usage? We can see the racial divide offline through studies of communication. The online world gives users the opportunity to widen their audience and share their thoughts and beliefs that are readily shared offline. Those who are facing linguistic barrier offline will face similar barriers online, in addition to technological and economic difficulties created by society.

Theorists and researchers have shown us why discourse is important to study and pay attention to within our society. They have also shown us that despite the utopian hope that race does not exist online, it very much does. But what does that claim mean moving forward? For Chun:

The formulation of race as technology also opens up the possibility that, although the idea and experience of technology have been used for racist ends, the best way to fight racisms might not be to deny the existence of race, but to make race do different things. (p. 57)

Groups can take the prejudices of technology and race and turn them around, empower themselves to change the discourse.

Gómez-Peña (2001) writes that it is important for Latinos to jump into technology and not ask to be a part of the hegemonic structure of digital spaces. They should create their own digital space, a space where they do not have to change their language to fit in with the main group, but to mirror how they communicate offline. He states that Latinos are more likely to use Spanish or Spanglish and communicate with those that they already know outside of virtual spaces. Instead of buying into the societal view that technology will be difficult for them, the group should strive to conquer technological barriers to join in the online discourse.

It is accepted widely that prejudices and xenophobia exist in many global societies, and since the virtual world is just an alternate space than the non-virtual world, prejudice and

xenophobia exist online, too. The way in which we speak about others, as well as the inclusion of others within that discourse greatly shapes the society we live in. It is important that we recognize race in digital spaces, recognize inequalities online, and work to improve the system to be more inclusive. By ignoring prejudice and xenophobia against undocumented immigrants online, we only repeat the same hegemonic ideas that society currently espouses. We thus create an uninformed and prejudiced society and will continue pushing the valuable input from immigrants and Latinos away from inclusion. For non-Latinos, finding ways to better communicate with that out-group will help create a voice in the already white-washed society. This requires recognition of racial prejudice in US society against Mexican immigrants and willingness for US citizens to engage in interpersonal communication with the group.

Acculturation and Nationalism

A term that was used by Plato and later became a focus of scholarly study beginning in 1918 (Rudmin, 2003), acculturation is the process of a person acquiring a second culture. Whereas enculturation (Segall, 1979) is a person's initial adaptation to culture during development, acculturation is the result of a person's adaptations and changes to fit a new culture. Pertaining to this thesis, it is telling that research (Kim, 1977, Kim, 1979, Mendoza, 1989, Ramelli, Florack, Kosic, & Rohmann, 2013) shows that interpersonal communication and socialization with people within the host culture (ingroup) is important to facilitating acculturation and reducing anxiety. The reason this is important is that in order for Mexican immigrants (outgroup) to acculturate, if that is their wish, the process is made easier if US citizens try to communicate with them. Willingness to communicate on the part of the host culture is an essential factor in order for immigrants to feel a part of and join the ingroup.

In addition, racism against the culture attempting to acculturate inhibits adaptation due to an absence of reception and a feeling of resentment toward the new society (Croucher 2009 & 2013b). In his work with Mexican immigrants settling in the US, Kvam (2017) found that “Mexican immigrants resettling in the United States engage in adaptation amid hostility and threats from the host society” (p. 13). In their attempt to become “American,” Mexican immigrants are faced with communicative and racial hurdles.

One question that the idea of acculturation brings up for immigrants is what amount of change makes an immigrant acceptable as “American?” What traits are shown to prove oneself as a part of the American nations? Acculturation thus becomes, in part, a question of American nationalism. In order to “pass” as American, immigrants must learn the rules of the nation. These rules, however, may be concrete (such as following US laws) or abstract (such as speaking English, although there is no legal official language in the US). The rules may be standard over time, or changing depending on the generation. Anderson (2006) argued that this idea of nationalism is in fact an “imagined political community” (p. 6), that nationalism is socially constructed by those who believe they are part of the community. A recent study by the Pew Research Center (2017) showed that those in the US find the ability to speak the English language as a marker for belonging. No matter the actual value that creates an in-group in the US, the commercial media assists in strengthening the idea of what is “American” and what is not. Such practices only solidify the imagined community. In order to fully acculturate Mexican immigrants must understand what the current imagined state of “Americanism” exists, and avoid that which goes against this idea or would further cultivate the stereotypes of Mexicans portrayed in the media.

Relevant to the purpose of this MA thesis, that is, to ascertain if national status functions as a deterrent in communication, a study of race versus immigration status comparing Canadian and Mexican immigrants in the US is relevant (i.e., Mukherjee, Molina, & Adams, 2013). Mukherjee et al. found that although documentation status was not a factor in how US citizens felt about matters of punishment, race was. One factor that led to citizens wanting harsher punishments for Mexicans than Canadians had to do with the perceived acculturation to the American identity (such as speaking English). The study concluded that “people may support tough measures to restrict immigration to defend against symbolic threats – especially threats that cultural ‘others’ pose to Anglocentric understandings of American identity” (p. 320). The study was meant to compare Canadians with Mexicans, and then compare the relative effect of documentation status. It found that race was a stronger factor in decisions of punishment. In this thesis, however, the focus is to compare documentation status of Mexican immigrants as a factor on willingness to communicate, that is, to determine the relative effect of nationalism when added to culture might be as a factor in willingness to engage in intercultural communication.

Ethnocentrism and Willingness to Communicate

Our own ethnocentrism plays a part in our willingness to communicate with people seen as “others.” After Sumner (1906) coined the term, and later studies framed the idea as authoritarian and supported Sumner’s research (Adorno et al., 1950; Kinder & Kam, 2010; Levinson, 1949; and Stenner, 2005), other researchers began to focus on the idea of ethnocentrism within social identity and intergroup attitudes (Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Tajfel, 1981; and Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Early on, it was believed to be a generalized trait a person had instead of a fleeting state. In an attempt to better study an individual’s level of ethnocentrism,

Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) developed the *Generalized Ethnocentrism (GENE) Scale* that has been validated in subsequent studies (Neuliep, 2002). The 22-item (15-scored) survey used a Likert scale to determine the level of an individual's ethnocentrism. The scale was not set up to ask specifically about a certain culture so that researchers could use it no matter the nationality of the participants being studied. However, the creators argued that ethnocentrism has "an important impact on an individual's communication behavior, particularly when the context of that communication involves people with diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, or regional backgrounds" (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997, p. 390). Interestingly, their original study during the scale's creation showed that "as interaction between persons who are culturally and nationally diverse increases, so does ethnocentrism" (pp. 39 – 396). The researchers were not sure why the results came out this way. Since specific questions were not asked about particular cultures, it is possible that varying senses of nationalism, in-group and out-group phenomena, or specific personal experiences contributed to these results. In this thesis study, questions regarding proximal and distal experiences with Mexicans in the US, as well as questions regarding conversations regarding Mexicans with parents during childhood were asked to see if the proximity of cultural experience shows any difference in ethnocentrism.

Since the creation of the GENE Scale, it has been used in many studies. Neuliep, Chaudoir, and McCroskey (2001) used the scale to compare US and Japanese men and women, finding that men in either culture, were more ethnocentric than the women. Lin and Rancer (2003) found that men were more ethnocentric than women and that they were also less willing to communicate interculturally. In 2008, Dong, Kay, and Collaço used the scale to compare ethnocentrism with intercultural sensitivity, attempting to solve the "problem" of ethnocentrism. They found that "promoting intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism is a

possible measure to overcome ethnocentrism and reduce conflicts among intergroup interactions” (p. 28). A later paper presented by Collaço (2011) also showed that those scoring lower on ethnocentrism had higher levels of intercultural willingness to communicate. Early researchers did not argue that ethnocentrism was a problem as much as it was something to be measured and that the results could possibly indicate how a person would react to certain situations. This thesis study was not an attempt to find a way to reduce ethnocentrism, but rather to see how it affected the willingness to communicate with groups different than those of the participants. Due, in part, to these studies, however, questions were added to the thesis survey to see if the participants had any early relationships with people of Mexican heritage, or if they had connections to Latino groups later in life to see if there was any correlation between those cultural relationships and the participants’ ethnocentrism levels.

Many of the more recent studies using the GENE Scale have focused on comparing the ethnocentrism levels of students in different cultures (Butcher & Haggard, 2010; Campbell, 2016; L. Rancer, & Lim, 2003, and Lin, Rancer, & Trimbitas, 2005) or have looked at how the perceptions of nonnative accents relate to levels of ethnocentrism (Neuliep & Speten-Hansen, 2013). In addition to Neuliep’s (2012) study, most of these argued that high levels of ethnocentrism makes intercultural communication more difficult or that low levels of ethnocentrism were found in those more willing to interact with other cultures.

While ethnocentrism has some pro-social benefits such as creating group cohesion and a sense of nationalism, with regards to immigration discourse in the US ethnocentrism would seem to have a negative effect on Mexican immigrants. In addition to high levels of ethnocentrism creating a barrier to intercultural communication, one study found patterns of ethnocentric exclusion in the treatment of immigrants in the US. Mukherjee, Molina, and Adams (2013)

researched immigration legislation and ethnocentric exclusion and found that participants supported tougher treatment of Mexican immigrants than of Canadian immigrants. Surprisingly, the study showed that participants wanted harsher treatment of Mexican immigrants who were in the US *legally* than Canadians who were here *illegally*. This thesis advances this literature by focusing on whether a person's willingness to communicate changes if participants are communicating with Mexicans immigrants in the US *with* legal documentation versus Mexican immigrants in the US *without* legal documentation. Ethnocentrism is also measured in this thesis study to see if there are any correlations between that and the participants' willingness to communicate. Ethnocentrism can certainly affect a person's willingness to communicate, as shown in past studies. Researchers focusing on race argued that communication between groups is essential for language and cultural development. But how does willingness to communicate change depending on communicative situations?

Once studies began to focus on communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1977, 1984) and researchers found that people's apprehensions varied and that the situation for communication may slightly affect one's willingness to communicate, Burgoon (1976) took this emerging research and created the Unwillingness to Communicate Scale. This scale focused on the lines of research on anomia, alienation, introversion, self-esteem, and communication apprehension. In 1987, McCroskey and Richmond shifted the idea of willingness to communicate to focus on a person's general personality orientation (trait) when speaking. The Willingness to Communicate scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, and McCroskey, 1992) was created and tested using a positive spin to Burgoon's earlier scale, and focused on receivers (strangers, acquaintances, friends) and communication contexts (public, meeting, group, dyad). This enabled researchers to validate the subject's willingness to communicate against the type of

person with whom they were speaking and the situation in which they were choosing to communicate. Zakahi and McCroskey (1989) also further investigated volunteers for participation by their willingness to communicate. It is the Willingness to Communicate scale itself that garnered new avenues of research. The premise of this scale, however, is understood to be that the subject has the choice to communicate, or not to. This particular point acknowledged some possible flaws in the scale:

While talking is central to interpersonal communication, people differ in the amount of talk in which they will choose to engage. Although willingness is seen as relatively constant across situations, situational variables may impact a person's willingness to communicate at a given time in a given context. Such things as how the person feels on a given day, previous communication with the other person, what that person looks like, or what might be gained or lost through communicating may have a major temporary impact on willingness.

(Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988, p. 188)

In addition, MacIntyre (1994) argued that while the McCroskey scale showed better reliability and validity than the Burgoon scale, it ignores situations where one does not have freedom of choice in communicating. He notes that the scale is really a representation of "a behavioral intention to *initiate* communication in various settings" (p. 139). He does find in his own research that the measured personality variables support McCroskey's scale, and adds that "situational variation also must be expected" (p. 140). While not offering a solution to the potential flaw, MacIntyre stated that it should be further researched.

In Barraclough et al.'s (1988) paper, the question of how culture affects one's willingness to communicate because of this potential temporary impact on willingness to communicate. The

study compared the perceptions of willingness to communicate of college students in the US and Australia. This begins a growing trend to include cultural comparisons or grow the scale to include culture in this field of study.

In the 1990s, willingness to communicate in communication research started to focus more on cultural perspectives. McCroskey and Richmond (1990) argued that “an understanding of the cultural impact on individual differences should be a vital component in the study of intercultural communication” and that “the development of strong interpersonal relationships, then, is heavily dependent on the amount of communication in which interactants [sic] are willing to engage” (p. 72). They argued that a person may be willing to communicate within their own culture, but when offered to speak to a person/group, and so on from another culture, the results may change. They compared five different countries with elements from four different scales. This study was important as it thrust research forward in this area to include a cultural comparison, but this, and subsequent studies (Aiello, Di Martino & Di Sabato, 2017; Cao, 2013; Denies, Yashima, & Janssen, 2015; Gallagher & Robins, 2015; Khatib & Nourzadeh, 2015; Lu & Hsu, 2008; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; and Munezane, 2016) focused on comparing communication styles in different countries (cultures) or how second-language acquisition affects willingness to communicate, not willingness to communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds within one’s own culture. Others took a different cultural approach by comparing willingness to communicate based on religion within the same culture (Croucher, 2013a). An MA thesis by Lu (2007) compares communication styles of people from two different cultures in two separate countries, but focused is on students at universities or teachers going overseas to teach. It is focused more on education, teaching, or international travel for students. No studies have taken willingness to communicate and compared it to non-immigrant

communication with immigrants in the US, nor how immigration status affects the desire to communicate.

While research continued on willingness to communicate, other researchers splintered from the original scale, focusing on intercultural willingness to communicate. Kassing's *Intercultural Willingness to Communicate* scale was published in 1997 to "investigate whether or not people vary in their willingness to engage in intercultural interactions" (p. 399). Stemming from the argument by McCroskey and Richmond (1990) that culture states may change the willingness to communicate trait indicators, Kassing's scale was created to focus on "people's willingness to engage in communication encounters with people of different races and cultures" (p. 400). In addition, Kassing sought to examine why intercultural communication does, or does not, occur. He also argued that when people are faced with communicating with other cultures, the person will have higher levels of stress. He designed his study to reflect McCroskey's *Willingness to Communicate* scale with changes to coincide with items added for intercultural communication: "(a) Talk with someone I perceive to be different than me; (b) Talk with someone from another country; (c) Talk with someone from a culture I know very little about; and (d) Talk with someone from another culture" (Kassing, 1997, p. 401). He also added a question to include the factor of race in intercultural communication ("talk with someone of a different race than mine"). The results of his study support the content validity of the *Intercultural Willingness to Communicate* scale and showed that people with higher scores had significantly more foreign friends than those who scored low on the scale. Some possible limitations included ambiguous affecting the scale include terminology, such as 'different' or 'culture' as no definitions were given to participants. Overall, however, the scale proved to begin a new line of study within communication: Intercultural Willingness to Communicate.

Despite the new arm, many studies under intercultural willingness to communicate also focused on intercultural aspects of teaching, education, and international second-language education opportunities (Campbell, 2016; Fatemi, Khajavy, & Choi, 2016; Mertins & Baus, 2010; Roach & Olaniran, 2001) and or comparisons of one culture versus another on intercultural willingness to communicate (Lin, et al., 2003; Lin et al., 2005). One study (Lin & Rancer, 2003) focused on sex differences in intercultural communication apprehension and intercultural willingness to communicate found that men were most likely to have higher levels of intercultural communication apprehension, but that biological sex was not a large enough indicator on intercultural willingness to communicate. This study was different than others in that it focused on differences between the sexes in communication while others focused on the cultural differences as indicators.

Specifically for this thesis, the factor of legal documentation is used ascertain a citizen's willingness to communicate specifically with Mexicans. The McCroskey *Willingness to Communicate* scale (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987); was chose to be used in this study instead of the Kassing's (1997) *Intercultural Willingness to Communicate* scale because the factor comparison is based on documentation status, and not necessarily comparing the willingness to communicate of citizens between two different cultures. Further, the *WTC* scale was been more widely used in previous research studies.

Clearly, discourse about out-groups assists in the development of society's prejudices. Despite the possible assumed neutrality to digital spaces, these prejudices are repeated in digital spaces. Ironically, the very communication needed from US citizens when Mexican immigrants attempt to acculturate becomes biased due to these prejudices. Mexican immigrants must navigate a sea of communicative expectations and unwritten national rules. Ultimately, these

racial biases and developmental ethnocentrism may hinder citizen's willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants, who arguably are in great need of this interpersonal communication in order to acculturate.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH STUDY

Introduction

This research study measured Willingness to Communicate (WTC) using questions from McCroskey's *Willingness to Communicate Scale* (1987) and ethnocentrism using Neuliep and McCroskey's *GENE* scale (1997). In addition, questions were added to the *WTC* scale and some were changed slightly to allow for a direct comparison between willingness to communicate and documented and undocumented Mexican immigrants. Seven research questions and two hypotheses organized this research.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: Among non-immigrants, is there a correlation between knowing a person from Mexican heritage during early life and their measured ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants?

Research Question 2: Among non-immigrants, is there a correlation between early close personal lifespan intercultural encounters during early life with Mexicans and ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants?

Research Question 3: Among non-immigrants, is there a correlation between current acquaintances with Mexicans and ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants?

Research Question 4: Among non-immigrants, is there a correlation between current close personal friendships with Mexicans and ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants?

Research Question 5: Does geographical location of non-immigrants affect the following: Ethnocentricity? Willingness to communicate overall? Willingness to communicate with documented Mexican immigrants? Willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants?

Research Question 6: Is there a correlation between ethnocentricity and the following variables: Willingness to communicate in general? Non-immigrants' concern that Mexicans in the US may or may not be in the country legally? Non-immigrants' assumption that Mexicans in the US are in the country legally? Non-immigrants' assumption that Mexicans in the US are in the country illegally? Non-immigrants' belief that undocumented immigrants should be welcomed into the country? Non-immigrants' belief that undocumented immigrants should not be counted as important parts of US society? Non-immigrants' belief that people from other cultures act strange when coming to the US legally. Non-immigrants' belief that people from other cultures act strange when coming to the US illegally.

Research Question 7: For non-immigrants, how do negative early lifespan family conversations about Mexican immigrants affect willingness to communicate with documented Mexican immigrants and willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants?

Research Question 8: For non-immigrants, how do positive early lifespan family conversations about Mexican immigrants affect willingness to communicate with documented Mexican immigrants and willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants?

Research Question 9: Is there a correlation between willingness to communicate and the following: The likelihood of reading a news story online about undocumented immigrants? The likelihood of sharing a news story online about undocumented immigrants? A non-immigrants active use of Facebook?

Research Question 10: Does the usage of terms like “illegal aliens” or “undocumented immigrant” in everyday communication differ as a function of: Ethnocentricity? Willingness to Communicate with undocumented Mexicans? Generation? Geographic location? Political affiliation? Size of area in which non-immigrants lived while under the age of 18?

Hypothesis 1: There will be a negative correlation between ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with *documented* Mexicans.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a negative correlation between ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with *undocumented* Mexicans.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a stronger negative correlation between ethnocentricity-undocumented than ethnocentricity-documented.

Methodological Approach

A quantitative approach was chosen and an online survey was built. McCroskey’s (1987) *Willingness to Communicate* scale was chosen instead of Kassing’s (1997) *Intercultural Willingness to Communicate* scale because the specific difference that was being measured had to do with a person’s general willingness to communicate, and whether that changed by adding a cultural aspect (communicating with immigrants from Mexico) and, additionally, an immigration status aspect. Neuliep and McCroskey’s (1997) *GENE* scale was used to get a measure of the participants’ general ethnocentricity to see if there were any correlations between

ethnocentricity, willingness to communicate, and willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants.

It was chosen that the survey should be available to naturally-born US citizens over the age of 18. Since the research was focused on the willingness to communicate of non-immigrants toward Mexican immigrants, the choice to only include US citizens who were born in the US was made to remove additional factors that may sway results (such as being an immigrant who became a citizen, not being a citizen, etc.).

Measures

The online questionnaire consisted of 91 questions administered using the Survey Monkey e-platform. Only one link was created for the survey for ease of sharing and insurance of anonymity. The questionnaire link was offered via social media (Facebook and Twitter), as well as via e-mail to a convenience sample. At least 200 participants were anticipated. 306 participants started the questionnaire, and a final sample of 187 completed it. During the initial post of the survey, the researcher had a convenience sample of 392 friends on Facebook and 73 followers on Twitter. The survey was posted as a public share, and friends/followers were asked to share the survey as well, thus allowing a quasi-snowball sampling procedure. No personally identifiable information was requested. The first question of the survey excluded anyone under 18 years of age, and anyone who was not a naturally born US citizen.

The original *Willingness to Communicate* scale (McCroskey, 1987) was given after the first exclusion question and included 20 questions regarding situations in which a person may choose to communicate or not communicate (assuming he or she has free will). The results score in sections of context (group discussion, meetings, interpersonal, and public speaking) and

receiver (stranger, acquaintance, and friend). Scoring is based on a number from 0, being never, to 100, being always. Results are tallied based upon the context or receiver sub-score calculations. Studies have shown it to be valid and reliable (Neuliep, 2002). The original *Willingness to Communicate* scale was created based upon research McCroskey (1984) worked on focusing on social and communication anxiety. The findings of his research showed that a willingness to communicate was based upon certain traits a person had. The ultimate scale was used to determine the likelihood of communicating in each of the twenty situations. Using this measurement, which is set up to be neutral to gender and race, a baseline was created for the study on each participant's initial willingness to communicate with others.

The *GENE Scale* (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997) was used to get baseline data from participants regarding their general ethnocentricity. Out of the original 22-question ethnocentrism scale, 7 of the filler questions were dropped, 3 were recoded for reverse scoring to receive the composite ethnocentrism score per the original scale instructions. A Likert scale was used with Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5. This scale was included as the second part of the survey in part to break the monotony of the survey, and also to separate the questions regarding willingness to communicate (without culture) and the later willingness to communicate questions regarding culture.

Immediately following the *GENE* scale, in varied order, participants were asked questions regarding their willingness to communicate with a Mexican legally in the US and again with a Mexican in the US without documentation. All scored questions from the original *WTC* scale were included with these revised situations.

Last, questions regarding lifespan generation, political affiliation, communication regarding immigrants during the lifespan, as well as a few other questions were asked to support the research questions.

Sampling

Prior to contacting potential participants, the study was reviewed by the Old Dominion University (ODU) College of Arts & Letters Human Subject Review Committee and was found to be in compliance with all rules and regulations and exempted from full IRB review (ODU File 928892, January 30, 2016, see Appendix A). The survey was created using a personal account on Survey Monkey that allowed for more than ten questions and more than 100 responses. A link to the survey was sent out via e-mail (to 20 potential participants), Facebook (392), and Twitter (73). On social media platforms, recipients were asked to share the survey link on their own pages. No e-mail addresses nor names were requested at any point during the sharing of the survey. Targeted subjects were at least 18-years old and natural-born US citizens. The first question of the survey confirmed these two required items for the participant to continue.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Reliability and Lens of Results

Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the four scales and all were found to be reliable between 0.76 and 0.96. The original *WTC* scale resulted in $\alpha=0.89$ (n=177), and the original *GENE* scale resulted in $\alpha=0.76$ (n=180). The willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants scale received a result of $\alpha=0.96$ (n=173), and the willingness to communicate with documented Mexican immigrants scale received a result of $\alpha=0.95$ (n=171). There was no statistically significant difference in ethnocentricity or willingness to communicate as a factor of gender or ethnicity, so the groups were not separated for the remainder of calculations. In addition, the participants were 75.4% female (n=141), 19.8% male (n=37), and 4.8% did not answer the question or chose other (n=9). For race / ethnicity, 84.5% of participants were white / Caucasian (n=158), 3.7% were black / African-American (n=7), 1.1% Asian (n=2), 3.2% Hispanic (n=6), 0.5% Native-American (n=1), 0% Pacific-Islander (n=0), and 2.7% reported more than one race (n=5), with 4.3% participants giving no response (n=8). In the end, the study mostly shows results from white / Caucasian women.

Findings

Research Question 1: Among non-immigrants, there were no statistically significant correlations between knowing a person from Mexican heritage during early life and ethnocentricity or willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants.

Research Question 2: Among non-immigrants, there was a negative and statistically significant correlation between early close personal lifespan intercultural encounters during early life with Mexicans and ethnocentricity ($r=-.218$, $n=180$, $p<.002$) and a positive statistically significant correlation between early close personal intercultural encounters and willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants ($r=.277$, $n=169$, $p<.000$).

Research Question 3: Among non-immigrants, there are statistically significant correlations between current acquaintances with Mexicans and ethnocentricity (a negative correlation, $r=-.368$, $n=180$, $p<.000$) and willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants (a positive correlation, $r=.313$, $n=169$, $p<.000$).

Research Question 4: Among non-immigrants, there are statistically significant correlations between current close personal friendships with Mexicans and ethnocentricity (a negative correlation, $r=-.345$, $n=180$, $p<.000$) and willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants (a positive correlation, $r=.326$, $n=169$, $p<.000$).

Research Question 5: There were no statistically significant differences based upon geographical location of non-immigrants and ethnocentricity, willingness to communicate overall, willingness to communicate with documented Mexican immigrants or willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants.

Research Question 6: With respect to ethnocentricity, two items—willingness to communicate in general and non-immigrants' assumption that Mexicans in the US are in the country legally—were not statistically related. However, statistically significant positive correlations were found between ethnocentrism and: non-immigrants' concern that Mexicans in the US may or may not be in the country legally ($r=.375$, $n=180$, $p<.000$); non-immigrants' assumption that Mexicans in the US are in the country illegally ($r=.153$, $n=180$, $p<.040$); non-

immigrants' belief that undocumented immigrants should not be counted as important parts of US society ($r=.257$, $n=180$, $p<.000$); non-immigrants' belief that people from other cultures act strange when coming to the US legally ($r=.527$, $n=180$, $p<.000$); non-immigrants' belief that people from other cultures act strange when coming to the US illegally ($r=.547$, $n=180$, $p<.000$). One negative correlation was found between ethnocentricity and non-immigrants' belief that undocumented immigrants should be welcomed into the country ($r=-.482$, $n=180$, $p<.000$)

Research Question 7: For non-immigrants, negative early lifespan family conversations about Mexican immigrants did not significantly affect: willingness to communicate with documented Mexican immigrants or willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants.

Research Question 8: For non-immigrants, there were statistically significant results supporting the idea that positive early lifespan family conversations about Mexican immigrants affect: willingness to communicate with documented Mexican immigrants ($r=.264$, $n=171$, $p<.000$) and willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants ($r=.309$, $n=173$, $p<.000$).

Research Question 9: There were no statistically significant correlations between willingness to communicate and the likelihood of reading a news story online about undocumented immigrants, the likelihood of sharing a news story online about undocumented immigrants or a non-immigrants active use of Facebook.

Research Question 10: Respondents used the term "illegal alien" versus "undocumented immigrant" differently in everyday communication as a function of willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexicans ($t=2.72$, $df=169$, $p<.007$) and political affiliation ($\chi^2=39.659$, $df=4$, $p<.000$), but not as a function of ethnocentricity, generation, geographic location, or size of

the area in which participants lived in growing up. Also, a post hoc Tukey HSD test indicated a significant difference between the use of “illegal alien” ($M=47.5532$, $SD=28.83883$) and “undocumented immigrant” ($M=71.4947$, $SD=25.04154$) as a function of participants’ score on willingness to communicate with undocumented immigrants (overall $f=17.354$, $df=2$, $p<.000$).

Hypothesis 1: There was a statistically significant negative correlation between ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with documented Mexicans ($r=-.313$, $n=171$, $p<.000$). The results support the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: There was a statistically significant negative correlation between ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexicans ($r=-.321$, $n=173$, $p<.000$). The results support the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: There also was a slightly stronger negative correlation between ethnocentricity-undocumented ($r = -.321$) than ethnocentricity-documented ($r = - .313$) which offers partial support of the hypothesis.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations of the thesis study as well as limitations that include concerns with sample size and sample composition.

Response to Findings

All three hypotheses were supported by the findings and many research questions resulted in statistically significant results. Although the sample was primarily Caucasian women, the results document trends that need to be examined in a larger and more gender-diverse sample.

For RQ 1, participants who reported that they knew a person of Mexican heritage during their early lives made no difference in their reported ethnocentrism nor were they any more or less willing to communicate with Mexican immigrants. Distal interpersonal relationships did not statistically change a participants' willingness to communicate with Mexicans in the US. However, proximal relationships did make a difference.

Results from RQ 2 showed that among non-immigrants, there are statistically significant correlations between early reported *close* personal lifespan intercultural encounters during early life with Mexicans and ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants. This shows that participants reporting they had close proximal interpersonal relationships in the sample were less ethnocentric and more open to communicating with Mexicans.

The difference between “knowing” Mexicans in early life versus having “close” relationships with Mexicans in early life aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) idea that proximal influences in society affect a person more strongly than those more distal.

Similarly, results from RQ 3 and 4 showed that timing also matters, that is, current acquaintances versus current close personal friendships with Mexicans both showed participants were less ethnocentric and more willing to communicate with Mexican immigrants. In addition, the close personal relationships showed that participants were even more willing to communicate with Mexican immigrants. This again shows that close, interpersonal relationships with Mexicans are a strong indicator for adults being willing to communicate with Mexicans later in life.

RQ 5 showed that for this sample there were no statistically significant results based upon geographical location of non-immigrants and ethnocentricity, willingness to communicate overall, willingness to communicate with documented Mexican immigrants, or willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexican immigrants. This may be attributed to the lack of geographic diversity of the sample and its relatively small size. Out of the participants who answered this question ($n = 187$), 3 were from the Northern Midwest, and 7 each from the Pacific Southwest and Great Lakes. Future studies should consider a more diverse geographic sample as well as a larger sample size from each region is needed to increase external validity. Most of the participants were from the South / Deep South (29.4%). Ideally, if statistics were needed regarding geographic location and the variables from RQ 5, the survey could be completed by the same number of participants in each region.

In response to RQ 6, that explored potential connections between reported ethnocentricity and a number of variables of interest, all but two items showed statistically significant results.

There was no correlation between the participants' ethnocentricity and their willingness to communicate in general. In addition, participants did not show a significant relationship between ethnocentrism and the assumption that Mexicans were in the country legally based upon their ethnocentricity. Participants reporting higher levels of ethnocentrism were, however, more concerned that Mexicans in the US may or may not be in the country legally and more likely to assume that Mexicans are in the US illegally. Additionally, as respondents' ethnocentricity increased participants were less likely to believe that undocumented immigrants should be welcomed into the country; the correlation of $-.482$, also indicates a moderately strong relationship. Further, as respondent ethnocentrism increased they were more moderately likely to believe that undocumented Mexican immigrants should not be counted as important parts of US society, were strongly more likely to feel that people from other cultures act strange when coming to the US legally, and strongly perceived that people from other cultures act strange when coming to the US illegally. The trends show that an increase in ethnocentrism is accompanied by concerns about illegal status and a less welcoming stance. This makes logical sense and is consistent with previous studies. Further, had the sample been more gender-diverse, these relationships might prove to be stronger.

RQs 7 and 8 offered an interesting discovery. In RQ 7, participants were asked about *negative* conversations about Mexican immigrants in early life. This did not statistically affect their willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants. However, in RQ 8, participants were asked about *positive* early lifespan family conversations about Mexican immigrants. The more positive the conversations, the more willing they were to communicate with both documented Mexican immigrants and undocumented Mexican immigrants. It is interesting because the negative conversations had no statistically significant effect, whereas the positive

conversations did. Again, Bronfenbrenner (1989) would argue that the proximal relationships have the most influence on our communicative lives, but these results show that the negative conversations were not as effective in changing a person's willingness to communicate as the positive conversations. This is an important result for future intercultural communication studies as well as future interpersonal communication that focus on lifespan communication development. Now that it has been demonstrated that positive communication memories can make a difference for non-Mexican's communication with Mexicans, in the future this study should be replicated to include other ethnic and racial groups in the US to see if this is an immigration status is unique to Mexicans or a significant trend overall when the label "undocumented" is added to an ethnic cultural label (e.g., undocumented Canadians).

For RQ 9, there were no statistically significant correlations between reported willingness to communicate with documented and undocumented Mexicans and the likelihood of reading a news story online about undocumented immigrants, the likelihood of sharing a news story online about undocumented immigrants, or participants' active use of Facebook. Future studies need to further examine the concept of willingness to communicate as an interpersonal variable and willingness to communicate digitally. Although a person's willingness to communicate (interpersonally) had no significant effect on their openness to reading about or sharing online information on undocumented immigrants, it is not known if this might also extend to more interactive social media use.

Due to the current rhetorical struggle between those who use the label "illegal alien" and those who use the label "undocumented immigrants," the results of RQ 10 are timely. Ethnocentricity, generation, geographic location, and the size of the area in which the participants lived in while growing up made no difference in which label was used. However,

willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexicans and participants' political affiliation did make a difference. Those who were more willing to communicate with undocumented Mexicans were more likely to use the label "undocumented immigrants" instead of "illegal aliens." And those who affiliated with the Democratic political party were also more likely to use the term "undocumented immigrants" instead of "illegal aliens" versus other parties. These results show that contemporary political discourse does matter regarding use of these terms and, because children are an audience to all forms of communication, future research should also examine the effects of contemporary political rhetoric on children. Further, it would be interesting to ascertain as the US political and social climate changes through the years does this parallel developmental intercultural communication changes. Of course, communication researchers should undertake a similar study regarding national status terms used and other racial and ethnic immigrant groups in the US.

As noted previously, the lack of diversity of the sample in terms of geographic location (as well as size of city / town where participants grew up) concluded in results that were not as externally valid had a more diverse sample been collected. Although not statistically significant, the results did potential trend of those growing up in suburban areas using the term "undocumented immigrants" more so than those growing up in rural areas or cities. It would be interesting to see if a more diverse and larger sample size would show these differences as statistically significant.

All three hypotheses were supported or partially supported by the results. There was a statistically significant negative correlation between ethnocentricity and willingness to communicate with documented Mexicans. That is, as ethnocentrism goes up, a person's willingness to communicate with both documented and undocumented Mexicans goes down. In

addition, the correlation between respondents' willingness to communicate with undocumented Mexicans and ethnocentrism ($r=-.321$) was slightly lower than the correlation between willingness to communicate with documented Mexicans and ethnocentrism ($r=-.313$). Because the difference in the magnitude of the correlation was very small, I can only say that there is partial support for hypothesis 3 and must leave it to future studies with more diverse samples to see if this finding holds up.

The results of this study certainly show that ethnocentricity is a factor in many aspects of how we communicate with and about Mexican immigrants in the US. Those who had or currently have close personal relationships with Mexicans are less ethnocentric, more willing to communicate with Mexican immigrants, worry less about the legal status of Mexican immigrants, and are more likely to want to welcome Mexican immigrants into the US culture.

Results also showed many important correlations with willingness to communicate and proximal interpersonal relationships with Mexicans, as well as past positive conversations about Mexicans. These results are important findings for future research in family communication and interpersonal relationships.

Limitations and Conclusion

The sample was relatively small and consisted of primarily Caucasian women. This limited generalizing these results beyond the sample. Although it is left for future study, it would seem plausible to argue that raising the number of men in the study would serve to augment these findings (i.e., increasing the strength of the correlations).

In addition, although the purpose of the study was primarily exploratory, the study's large number of questions about a limited data set potentially limits its external validity. While the

initial interest in many elements of communication with immigrants was tackled, the study could have focused more in depth on a single dependent variable instead of two as well as asking many research questions. By focusing on one dependent variable, the study could have compared multiple ethnic immigrant groups within willingness to communicate or ethnocentrism.

It is also not known if participants thought of immigrants as speaking English or Spanish while deciding whether to communicate. As shown in the Pew Research Center article “What It Takes to Truly Be” (2017), similar language is a major factor in acceptance of immigrants. In fact, people in the US were found to see language as the core of national identity far ahead of sharing customs and traditions or religion. It is not clear whether results would have changed if these items had been separated or made clearer to the participants. This is an important distinction that needs to be made in future research. As immigrants try to acculturate into the US culture, language is a major barrier. As noted by Kassing (1997), one of the necessary roles that English speakers should take with those learning English as a second language is to “talk with someone that speaks English as a second language” (p. 402). If a language is what is keeping citizens from speaking to Mexican immigrants, it becomes more difficult for Mexican immigrants to learn English.

In addition, it is not fully clear from this study to what extent the magnitude of individuals’ hesitations to communication with Mexicans can be attributed to documentation status alone. While some of the results did show a difference between having and not having documentation, future studies should be designed to more directly test the comparison between a non-minority immigrant group and a minority immigrant group like Mukherjee et al. (2013). That is, although this study found that adding the label “undocumented” to “Mexican” did slightly decrease persons’ willingness to communicate, because the magnitude was only slightly

different than documented, we do not know if this will hold for a more diverse sample or in a more controlled experiment.

This research purposely neglected input from citizens who were not born in the US. The focus of this research was on the willingness to communicate of natural-born, non-immigrants toward Mexican immigrants, but data including permanent residents in the US is also very important and a testament to the social climate toward immigrants.

Many follow-up questions are raised that would be helpful to better understand the early lifespan relationship between participants and Mexicans. Because this was purely a quantitative online survey, follow-up qualitative questions were not possible. In the future, researchers could benefit from a mixed-methods design in order to have even richer data. For example, it would be most interesting to find out more about the positive conversations between parents and participants in early life about Mexicans.

Lastly, additional research is needed to determine if “immigration status” has become a cultural value within US society and whether it should be added to Hofstede’s (1983) cultural value systems as a unique value separate from his others. With the mobility of people in the world, it is important to study how intercultural values may be shifting. While the values listed by Hofstede are essential to understanding cultural differences, beliefs and values are always shifting as the world changes along with the priorities of national political leadership.

The overall importance of continuing this type of research also reaches beyond communication studies in general. It is important to better understand how negative messages about Mexicans affect US citizens’ willingness to communicate with Mexican immigrants, and how this lack of communication perpetuates a vicious cycle preventing immigrants from effectively becoming a part of the in-group. Recognizing how these prejudices are showcased

within our society may make it possible to change and improve attitudes toward the group through better communication and understanding in US society.

In addition to further research, action can be taken to change society's willingness to communicate with immigrants now. While there may be opportunities for Mexican immigrants to attend community classes to learn English or the legalities of becoming a citizen, the societal fear created from the words "illegal alien" marks immigrants without documentation as criminals. The fear of retribution may keep immigrants from such opportunities due to the concern of being placed "in the system".

Social actions should be put forth to change the use of the term "illegal alien". This study shows the term is backed by those who are higher in ethnocentrism and is also used more by those conservatively minded. The Republican party in the US should recognize the criminalizing effects this term has and the cultural barriers it creates for those coming to the US. By changing the wording, perhaps the discourse surrounding Mexican immigrants can improve and social services offered can be less frightening for those in need of them.

Education policies could also be put into place that require diversification in classrooms, instead of separating students, for example based upon language proficiency, in early life. As the research shows, early life interpersonal relationships with people from different cultures increases the willingness to communicate of citizens. These interpersonal stories and relationships seem to be key during early development for openness later in life.

While some geographic areas will have higher Latino populations than others, reading requirements in early education can also help these narratives get into the school system and into the developmental learning of children. While this study specifically focuses on Mexican

immigrants, cultural learning activities and required readings from various immigrant groups could help develop an intercultural lens in children.

Administrators should recognize the importance of willingness to communicate with in- and out-groups for the full development of students. Brainstorming various ways to include narratives from other cultures, representation of other, non-White, non-western-European groups in school ads, posters, and textbooks, and finding new ways to let children socialize with out-groups could all help lead to a future of more open communication with the diverse group of people in the nation.

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APPENDIX A

IRB FORM



OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH



Physical Address

4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508

Mailing Address

Office of Research
1 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone(757) 683-3460
Fax(757) 683-5902

DATE: June 30, 2016

TO: Thomas Socha, PhD

FROM: Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [928892-1] Effect of culture and immigration status on willingness to communicate

REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE:

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 6.2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Randy Gainey at 757-683-4794 or rgainey@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Arts & Letters Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

ODU Thesis Study

Welcome to My Survey

The general nature of this study is to gather information from U.S. born citizen adults 18 years of age and older about communication about and with immigrants in the United States. It is being conducted as partial requirements for a Master's thesis. Aggregated results of the information obtained by this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

The participants in this study will remain anonymous as no personal identifying information is requested. Participating in this study may cause participants to experience some discomfort, but there are no known risks associated with the study. There is no direct benefit to you personally for your participation.

The survey should take no more than 10-15 minutes of your time. It is OK to say no to this survey. Even if you begin the survey, you may exit at any time without survey completion, and should you object to any item in the survey, please leave it blank.

By continuing to the survey, you are agreeing that you have read this information and that you understand the information indicated herein. To receive general results of the study, or if you have any questions / concerns about the study, please contact Stephanie Harris at sharr113@odu.edu or the study advisor, Dr. Thomas Socha at tsocha@odu.edu. You may also contact the Chair of the College Human Subjects Review Committee, Randy Gainey, at rgainey@odu.edu. IRB Study #928892-1

* 1. Are you at least 18 years of age and a US Citizen by birth?

Yes

No

ODU Thesis Study

Section 1

Directions: Below are 20 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate. Presume you have completely free choice. Indicate the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the text box for each item what percent of the time you would choose to communicate. (0 = Never to 100 = Always)

2. Talk with a service station attendant.

3. Talk with a physician.

4. Present a talk to a group of strangers.

5. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.

6. Talk with a salesperson in a store.

7. Talk in a large meeting of friends.

8. Talk with a police officer.

9. Talk in a small group of strangers.

10. Talk with a friend while standing in line.

11. Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.

12. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.

13. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.

14. Talk with a secretary.

15. Present a talk to a group of friends.

16. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.

17. Talk with a garbage collector.

18. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.

19. Talk with a spouse (or girl/boyfriend).

20. Talk in a small group of friends.

21. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

ODU Thesis Study

Section 2

Directions: Below are items that relate to the cultures of different parts of the world. Work quickly and record your first reaction to each item. There are no right or wrong answers. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each item using the following five-point scale:

Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5

* 22. Most other cultures are backward compared to my culture.

1 - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neutral 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

* 23. My culture should be the role model for other cultures.

1 - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neutral 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

* 24. People from other cultures act strange when they come to my culture.

1 - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neutral 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

* 25. Lifestyles in other cultures are just as valid as those in my culture.

1 - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neutral 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

* 26. Other cultures should try to be more like my culture.

1 - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neutral 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

* 27. I am not interested in the values and customs of other cultures.

1 - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neutral 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

* 28. People in my culture could learn a lot from people in other cultures.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 29. Most people from other cultures just don't know what's good for them.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 30. I respect the values and customs of other cultures.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 31. Other cultures are smart to look up to our culture.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 32. Most people would be happier if they lived like people in my culture.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 33. I have many friends from different cultures.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 34. People in my culture have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 35. Lifestyles in other cultures are not as valid as those in my culture.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 36. I am very interested in the values and customs of other cultures.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 37. I apply my values when judging people who are different.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 38. I see people who are similar to me as virtuous.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 39. I do not cooperate with people who are different.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 40. Most people in my culture just don't know what is good for them.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 41. I do not trust people who are different.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 42. I dislike interacting with people from different cultures.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 43. I have little respect for the values and customs of other cultures.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 44. People from other cultures act strange when they come to my culture legally.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 45. People from other cultures act strange when they come to my culture illegally.				
1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

ODU Thesis Study

Section 3

Directions: Below are a variety of statements and situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate while in the United States. Presume you have completely free choice to talk or not to talk. Indicate the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the text box for each item what percent of the time you would choose to communicate. (0 = Never to 100 = Always)

46. Present a talk to a group of Mexican friends who DO NOT have legal documentation.

47. Talk in a small group of strangers from Mexican heritage who DO have legal documentation.

48. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances from Mexican heritage who DO have legal documentation.

49. Talk with a Mexican stranger who DOES have legal documentation while standing in line.

50. Talk in a small group of Mexican strangers who DO NOT have legal documentation.

51. Talk in a small group of acquaintances from Mexican heritage who DO have legal documentation.

52. Talk with a Mexican friend who DOES NOT have legal documentation while standing in line.

53. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances who are Mexicans who DO NOT have legal documentation.

54. Talk in a large meeting of strangers who are Mexicans who DO NOT have legal documentation.

55. Talk in a small group of Mexican friends who DO NOT have legal documentation.

56. Present a talk to a group of Mexican acquaintances who DO NOT have legal documentation.

57. Present a talk to a group of Mexican strangers who DO NOT have legal documentation.

58. Talk with a Mexican acquaintance who DOES have legal documentation while standing in line.

59. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances from Mexican heritage who DO have legal documentation.

60. Present a talk to a group of Mexican friends who DO have legal documentation.

61. Present a talk to a group of Mexican strangers who DO have legal documentation.

62. Talk in a large meeting of Mexican friends who DO have legal documentation.

63. Talk in a large meeting of Mexican friends who DO NOT have legal documentation.

64. Talk with a friend from Mexican heritage who DOES have legal documentation while standing in line.

65. Talk in a large meeting of Mexican strangers who DO have legal documentation.

66. Talk in a small group of Mexican friends who DO have legal documentation.

67. Talk with a Mexican stranger who DOES NOT have legal documentation while standing in line.

68. Talk with a Mexican acquaintance who DOES NOT have legal documentation while standing in line.

69. Talk in a small group of Mexican acquaintances who DO NOT have legal documentation.

ODU Thesis Study**Section 5 - Demographics**

Please fill in the following demographic information. This information will remain anonymous.

84. Gender with which you identify:

- Male
 Female

85. Please choose one:

- Latino/a
 Not Latino/a

86. Race/Ethnicity:

- White / Caucasian
 Black / African-American
 Asian
 Hispanic
 Native American
 Pacific Islander
 More than one Race

87. Political Affiliation

- Democrat
 Republican
 Other / No affiliation

88. Please type in the year you were born (XXXX).

89. Please choose the geographical area of the United States in which you spent the MOST time in while you were under 18.

- Northeast
- Great Lakes
- Midwest
- Northern Midwest
- Mid-Atlantic
- South Atlantic
- South / Deep South
- Southwest
- Pacific Southwest
- Pacific Northwest

90. Please select the type of city/town in which you spent the MOST time in while you were under 18.

- City / Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

91. Please select the term that BEST represents a person who has come to the United States without legal documentation.

- Illegal Alien
- Undocumented Immigrant
- Neither of these / Other

ODU Thesis Study**Conclusion**

Thank you for taking the time to do this survey. If you are interested in receiving the results of the survey, please contact the researcher at sharr113@odu.edu.

VITA

Stephanie Leanne Harris
 Department of Communication
 Old Dominion University
 5115 Hampton Boulevard
 Norfolk, VA 23529

Educational Background

Bachelor of Arts, Spanish, University of Arkansas, 2002

Certificate in Nonprofit Management, Tidewater Community College Academy for Nonprofit Excellence, 2012

Professional Experience

2012-current Senior Grant & Contract Administrator, ODU Research Foundation

2010-2014 Instructor, Virginia Beach Adult Learning Center

2009-2011 Research Assistant, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

2008-2012 Grants Administrator, Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia

2006-2008 Facilities Scheduler and Bilingual Administrative Secretary, St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church

2005-2006 Instructor, Upward Bound, University of Arkansas

2003-2005 Executive Director and Hispanic Victim Services Coordinator, Northwest Arkansas Rape Crisis Center

2003 Migrant Tutor, Rogers Public Schools

2000-2001 Secretary II, Center for Management and Executive Development, University of Arkansas

Publications and Presentations

Socha, T. J., Bernat, S., Harris, S., Hill, B., & Hurd, V. (2016, April). *Peak Interpersonal Communication over the Lifespan: Conceptualization and Pilot Study*. A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern States Communication Association, Austin, Texas.

Ciampoli, L., Goode, M., Harris, S., Hurd, V., Mitchell, S., Mundzic, N., Petrovic-Mudzic, I., State, C., & Suggs, C. (2014). *Excerpts of Childhood Food Autobiographies*. A presentation at the 2014 Old Dominion University Literary Festival, Norfolk, Virginia.