August 2023

The Browning of a White Passing, Mixed-Race Latina: A Critical Autoethnographic Exploration of the Mixed-Race Experience in Rural Wisconsin

Marissa D. Medina
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

THE BROWNING OF A WHITE PASSING, MIXED-RACE LATINA: A CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF THE MIXED-RACE EXPERIENCE IN RURAL WISCONSIN

by

Marissa Medina

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in Communication

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2023

ABSTRACT

THE BROWNING OF A WHITE PASSING, MIXED-RACE LATINA: A CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF THE MIXED-RACE EXPERIENCE IN RURAL WISCONSIN

by

Marissa D. Medina

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2023
Under the Supervision of Professor Dr. Anjana Mudambi

With an estimated 4.5 million U.S. citizen children live in families in which one or both parents are undocumented (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2013, as cited in Gulbas & Zayas 2017), and with apprehensions (arrests) and deportations tripling within five years from 2002 to 2007 (Passel et al., 2020), there is an entire generation of people like myself whose parent(s) have been detained and deported. I use my story of witnessing my dad's detention and deportation as a central narrative of how I perform my mixed-race identity. To further explore this phenomenon, I used my own experience through critical autoethnographic research to examine the role of browning in my white-passing, mixed-race Mexican identity. In this project, I reflected upon three different experiences in my life where browning was manifested. I discuss browning as marking those outside of citizenship normativity and belonging as threats and browning is not inherently tied to or constituted within the brown body; it is a discursive process that conveys a sense of national insecurity when norms of citizenships are challenged (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010; Mudambi, 2015). In other words, browning happens in spaces where white citizenship is dominant and centered. The browning of my identity with my family was exemplified through social interactions living in rural Wisconsin as well as through witnessing discourses about "illegal" immigration on news media, which were influences that led to the browning of my identity. Through this critical autoethnographic study, I contribute to the notion

of browning within communication by showing the fluidity of this racialization and that it is not always necessarily connected to a brown body. The external browning labeled me as an outside threat to citizenship, which then influenced my internalized browning of identity, meaning I was starting to associate my own Otherness as "illegal." I also discussed how the disclosure of my dad's deportation resulted in my browning, which made me even more insecure about how and to whom I disclose this deportation to. I further internalized this browning by rejecting certain cultural characteristics in my public identity performance. By assimilating to whiteness, I protected myself from the browning of my identity in public spaces and exploited my privilege of whiteness. In the following analysis, I embodied the experience of negotiating between my racial identities while living in rural Wisconsin.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my dad and my mom, whose strength and resilience carry through me every day. Despite our struggles, I am forever grateful for the time we had together as a family. Dad, thank you for always loving me no matter how far you are and mom, thank you for your trust in me, it pushes me to go farther than I could ever imagine for myself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction **1**

Chapter Two: Literature Review **4**

Black and White Binary: Framing Exclusion 6

Understanding the Racialization of Immigrants from Mexico 7

Browning Effect Towards Mixed-Race Bodies 8

Chapter Three: Methods **12**

Discovering Autoethnography 13

Chapter Four: Autoethnography **19**

Browned as a Family 20

News Media Producing Fear 25

"Wait…Where's Your Dad?" 28

Chapter Five: Conclusion **34**

Implications from Critical Autoethnography 38

References ***40***

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge the overwhelming support, compassion, and guidance from my advisor, Anjana Mudambi PhD. She has been a lifeline throughout the entirety of my thesis project and throughout my master program at UW-Milwaukee. Thank you for introducing me to critical intercultural communication scholarship, it truly has been lifesaving and changing.

Second, I would like to thank my committee members Sarah Riforgiate PhD and Lia Wolock PhD for your fantastic feedback and support. You gave me a safe space to be vulnerable and that has been invaluable for my thesis project. Not only that, but all of your experience and expertise in the field has helped this project immensely.

Furthermore, I want to acknowledge all the support and love I have received from my friends, family, as well as my department colleagues/friends who encouraged and reassured me throughout this process. Thank you for the late-night writing sessions and for lending an ear to listen to ideas or to hear me vent.

Lastly, I would like to thank my loving partner, Trevor. I appreciate the times you made me meals when I had no time or energy to do so. Thank you for doing my laundry and walking the dogs when I couldn't. Thank you for picking up extra shifts at work so that I didn't have to work my part-time job. Thank you for your love and care. Without your support at home, writing a thesis and going to graduate school would not have been possible.

Introduction

On the morning of January 17th, 2007, I witnessed my dad get arrested and detained by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and local police in my childhood home. I was 10 years old, and my niece (who was also raised by mom and dad) had just celebrated her 10th birthday the day before in the same living room where my dad now sat on his knees with his hands cuffed behind his back and chains around his ankles. I think about the chains a lot when I reflect back to this moment. Seeing them wrapped around my dad's hands and feet was terrifying. As they pulled against my dad's skin, they imprinted red marks along his wrist. They looked old, used, and heavy. They were also noisy; their presence was known with every move he made. The noise felt as cold as the snow and ice outside. Not only did the chains sound cold, but they looked cold too. Everything about that day was cold. The agents in my home that morning did not care about his children witnessing this, because somehow, they justified this act in their minds by using the language in his criminal record: "illegal alien residing unlawfully." To them, my dad was an "illegal alien" that required strict containment. I never saw a human being get treated like that before, let alone my own dad.

When the police arrived at my house, my older siblings had already left for school. My niece and I were still getting ready when she heard a knock on our front door. Naively, she answered the door and retrieved my mom to let the officers in. I had not even noticed the knock. They entered our home with a search warrant based on a suspicion of drug dealing/trafficking, and because my dad was an immigrant from Mexico[1], ICE detectives were also on scene. I remember looking out my bedroom window, which was on the second floor of the house and faced the driveway. This was a full-on raid; I mean, there had to have been over a dozen cars in

[1] I use the language "immigrant from Mexico" instead of "Latino/a/x" to avoid grouping a diverse, diasporic group as a whole racial entity. I specified immigrant Mexican community to separate this experience from other Latino/a/x populations within the U.S. Furthermore, I wish to avoid the assumption that all Mexican Americans are immigrants, recognizing that immigrants come to the U.S. from all corners of the globe at various times in history.

my driveway. Big black SUVS, police vehicles, K9 units, tons of armed police officers and agents were dispersed throughout my home and yard. I was just a child put in a situation out of my control, and the seriousness of their presence filled my little body with fear and confusion. I somehow knew the cops were there for my dad…I thought, am I in trouble too?

Scared and in shock, I spent most of the time hiding in my upstairs bedroom. I heard radio noises and heavy footsteps all throughout my house. Eventually, they got closer and made it up the steps and into my room. I kept my head down and acted distracted looking for an outfit to wear to school. One of them asked my niece and me a question, but I have no idea what was said. My mom called us down to say goodbye to my dad. He was still sleeping when the officers arrived. They did not even afford him the decency to put warmer clothes on over his boxers and t-shirt before going outside although it was mid-January in rural Wisconsin. Again, another dehumanizing aspect of his detainment that haunts my memory. My dad could not hide his tears and whimpers as we "hugged" (the chains kept his arms tight behind his back) and I kissed him goodbye. I remember forcing myself not to cry because I did not want to upset my dad even more. I did not realize that would be my last time seeing him. My mom forced us to go to school that day; she wanted us to act like nothing had happened. All I could think of was, why is this happening to him? To me? January 17th, 2007, was the last day I saw him in person, in my home. I am now 26 years old, and it has been 16 years since I've seen my dad.

After discovering some of my dad's court documents and personal statements from immigration court, I found out that before I was born, my dad, who had obtained a Green Card after coming to the US from Mexico in the 1970s, had gotten into an incident that resulted in his first deportation. At this time, my family lived in Tucson, AZ, and the border was only an hour away. My dad simply came back home the next day after this deportation sentence. I have since

discovered this is actually quite common among immigrants who live close to the border, especially those who have U.S. citizen children at home (Flores, 2021; Ojeda et. al, 2020). But unfortunately, this is unlawful, and the law did not play nice with my dad despite him having a family here. The law perceived him as an "illegal alien," but to me, he was just an amazing dad who loved, and still loves, me and the rest of my siblings very much.

We are a blended bunch of six kids. My dad had two children, my brother and sister, with his previous white girlfriend, who are also mixed-race like me. My four siblings on my mom's side from her previous relationships are fully white. My family would blend even more when I was born in 1996 because all the siblings would share a biological baby sister (me). Even before I was born, my siblings would call each other brother and sister whether they were biologically related or not. I honestly did not even realize what a half- or stepsibling was until middle school. After we moved to Wisconsin from Arizona, the years leading up to my dad's permanent discharge from the US were probably the best years of my life and some of my favorite childhood memories come from this era. We had the best birthdays, family vacations and holiday celebrations. From road trips across the country and week-long camping trips in northern Wisconsin to shopping sprees at my favorite malls—my parents did everything they could to give us a fun and happy childhood. I am forever grateful for this time in my life and for the memories my family created. Even though it wasn't always perfect, it was much better than what life would turn into next. There is nothing I think my family and I could have done to prepare ourselves for this next chapter in our lives.

With an estimated 4.5 million U.S. citizen children that live in families in which one or both parents are undocumented (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2013, as cited in Gulbas & Zayas, 2017), I know I am not the only one out there living with this experience. Apprehensions

(arrests) and deportations almost tripled within the five-year span from 2002 to 2007 (Passel et al., 2020), meaning that there is an entire generation of people (kids) like myself whose parent(s) have been detained and deported. Growing up in a small, rural, predominantly white, working-to-middle-class, politically conservative community, immigrant deportations were not discussed and certainly not ideal. I lived most of my public life as if this did not happen to me to fit in with the rest of my classmates and, ultimately, the world. I grew ashamed of the situation, leading to conflicting and confusing perceptions of my mixed-race identity. I did not have the words or awareness to make sense of this situation. I never talked about it. I never really felt safe talking about it. Until now.

Having this experience as a white-passing mixed-race Latina in rural Wisconsin, where whiteness is so dominant, I was not able to be open about it in fear of ostracization or of giving off the perception that I am "illegal" too. I was not Mexican enough to fully share the fact my dad was deported, nor was I white enough to completely ignore it. Morning (2012) describes this experience for mixed-race folks as alienation from both sides (whites and non-whites). Furthermore, we are often excluded from dominant narratives of racism that focus on the Black and white binary, so, when racism does happen, it is often not seen or acknowledged as racism (Campion, 2019). The lack of representation of immigrants from Mexico in a mostly white rural community led me to struggle with my identity and dissociate from the idea of racism. It never occurred to me that these moments of exclusion and alienation could have been racially motivated by power structures until I started to delve into critical intercultural communication scholarship and learned about the concept of browning.

Browning is a discursive racial Othering that articulates certain bodies as perceived national threats by merging subjects such as "illegal" immigration, terrorism, and same-sex

marriage across multiple ethnocultural groups. These perceptions are influenced by discourses found in in post-9/11 mainstream politics and media (Mudambi, 2015; Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010). I use my own experiences through critical autoethnographic research to explore the role of browning through communication in my white-passing, mixed-race Latina identity. Furthermore, I explore the role of browning in disclosing the deportation of my Mexican father to understand the discursive process of browning on two levels, internalized browning, and externalized browning. To accomplish this, I focus on literature around browning as a form of racial Othering within the context of critical intercultural communication. Then, I will explain my use of critical autoethnographic methodology for this project. Lastly, I share three personal narratives that highlight the discursive process of browning within the communication contexts of small-town living, media exposure, and my own disclosure of my dad's deportation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Critical approaches to identity have highlighted the relationship between identity, power, and Othering. While post-positivist perspectives primarily treated identity as static categories to be used as variables, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, intercultural communication scholarship turned its attention to the study of identity as a communication phenomenon (Collier, 1998, 1997; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Hecht, 1993; Kim, 2007; Mendoza et. al, 2002). The communication theory of identity (CTI) posited that identity was a form of cultural communication, not solely a product of communication (Jung & Hecht, 2004). This framing of identity helped move the field towards a poststructuralist approach where the human subject is decentered, constructed in symbolic language and through components of race, ethnicity, and class in relation to different bodies. This identification process is inherently iterative, ideological, and discursive, whereby individuals distinguish themselves from bodies outside of their own to establish who they are and what they are not (Jackson & Moshin, 2010; Kim, 2007; Sarup, 1996). Critical intercultural communication scholars further argued for the relevance of historical context and power hierarchies in understanding cultural identities (Collier, 1998; Mendoza et. al, 2002). Collier (1998) argues:

> Cultural identities have enduring (historical) as well as changing properties (Hecht et. al., 1993) and are commonly intelligible and accessible to group members (Carbaugh, 1990). Cultural identities emerge in everyday discourse and in social practices, rituals, norms, and myths that are handed down to new members. (p. 131)

Therefore, identity is socially influenced and constructed. In a similar vein, Sarup (1996) writes, "I think that if we look at identity in isolation, we lose something of value. We need, therefore, to place questions of identity in the context of history, language, and power" (p. 48), which echoes the critical approaches to identity proposed by Collier (1998). In other words, variations, and

intersections of these components of identity are influenced by various cultural and racial considerations, making identity complex, messy, and never fixed.

Race is a socially constructed component of identity that is not static, as it carries various meanings in different cultural and historical contexts. Omi and Winant (2015) define race as "a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (p. 110). They claim, "Race is a way of 'making up people' and 'race-making' can also be understood as a process of 'othering'" (p. 105). To Other is to distinguish one's race, religion, gender, class, sexuality, religion, culture, language, nationality, and age from your own, which often functions "to justify structures of inequality, differential treatment, subordinate status, and in some cases, violent conflict and war" (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 105). The ostracization of Others emerges from the negative connotations assigned by the in-group or dominate group. Ostracized Others are never able to acclimate with the in-group and are therefore positioned as an outsider (Liu & Kramer, 2018). Racialized Othering can impact members of these groups on both institutional and interpersonal levels. In what follows, I focus my attention on racial discourses that effect the immigrant, Mexican community in the United States, then I discuss how these discourses are reflected through browning. Lastly, I bring forward critical approaches to identity that frame the racialization of mixed-race identities.

Black and White Binary: Framing Exclusion

Dominant understandings of race typically operate within the Black and white binary, which functions to govern U.S. racial classification and racial politics (Alcoff, 2002; Delgado 1998; Pereat, 1998). Relying on this paradigm causes racial issues in the United States to be widely understood solely as anti-Black racism or as just a Black and white issue (Alcoff, 2002; Delgado, 2011; Perea, 1998). Alcoff (2002) mentioned that the binary/paradigm does not mean

that racism cannot affect other races but instead submits racism into one form or assumes that racism experienced by all marginalized people is universal.

However, racism experienced by Mexican Americans is different compared to Black Americans due to the differences in historical and societal contexts that these racial groups experience/d in the United States (Sundstrom, 2008). Racial discourses relying on the Black and white binary discursively positions any race outside of it with enduring foreignness, and alienation (Flores, 2021; Sundstrom 2008). Furthermore, Flores (2021) argues there are mechanisms that position racialized bodies outside of nation-state belongingness. Liu and Kramer (2018) state, "The exclusion of out-groups becomes more evident when nationalism is interwoven with intergroup relations" (p. 457). In other words, the perception of all immigrants from Mexico being a foreign, national threat and excluded from U.S racial discourses operating within the Black and white binary, inherently excludes meaningful citizenship. My analysis therefore rejects the Black and white binary and instead focuses on its specific manifestations of racism toward the immigrant, Mexican community in relation to racial belonginess, citizenship, and hierarchy in the U.S (Sundstrom 2008; Kim, 1999).

Understanding the Racialization of Immigrants from Mexico

The fear of immigrants perpetuated by mainstream media in the early 2000's resulted in racially motivated legislation that directly impacted the lives of immigrant, Mexican community members, including those living in small rural towns. The racialization of immigrant bodies as representing both an individual threat and a collective threat to society leads to their strict enforcement and containment. Pearson-Dick (2011) points out, "Ever since the earliest U.S. immigration policies were formulated, the construction of the category 'illegal alien' has relied on the racialization of certain groups excluded from 'the real America' by virtue of their

deviance from a putative white normativity" (p. E35). Undocumented immigrants were not only alien in the legal context but also alien to America and privileged white culture (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010; Pearson-Dick, 2011). For example, in response to a sudden increase of immigration to Hazelton, PA, the town passed the Illegal Immigration Relief Act in 2006, which would enforce laws that punished local employers and landlords for hiring and renting property to undocumented immigrants (Pearson-Dick, 2011, p. E35). The passing of the Act brought attention from the mainstream media, which eventually inspired other cities and municipalities across the country to pass similar immigration ordinances (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010; Pearson-Dick, 2011). Cisneros (2012) argues that "citizenship and civic belonging are continually (re)enacted, (re)iterated, and read (lacking) on certain bodies through their individual and social performances" (p. 8). In this case, bodies that reject "putative white normativity" communicate a foreign threat that is not welcomed (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010; Pearson-Dick, 2011; Flores, 2021; Taiwo, 2020). Flores (2021) argues that race, specifically the Latino/a/x migrant race is managed by the U.S. immigrant system and then justified through the rhetoric of "illegality." She writes, "'Illegality' is created—cultivated, built, maintained—at the intersections of national desires for racialized immigration control" (Flores, 2021, p. 24). Non-citizenship racialization targeting all Mexican Americans, makes their lives, regardless of their legal status, difficult to navigate throughout U.S. society.

Browning Effect Towards Mixed-Race Bodies

Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2010) discuss "browning of immigrants" to distinguish the specific racialized construction of immigrants in the U.S. amongst the post-9/11 mainstream public discourses about terrorism, immigration, citizenship, threat, and illegality. Mudambi (2015) defined the threat of browning as "not inherent or fixed in the brown body but

imbued with flexibility because it gets constructed in the context of specific issues such as war, terrorism, Islamophobia, and, notably, immigration" (p. 47). Browning marks those outside of citizenship normativity and belonging as threats. It is not inherently tied to or constituted within the brown body; it is a discursive process which conveys a sense of national insecurity when norms of citizenships are challenged (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010; Mudambi, 2015). In other words, browning happens in spaces where white citizenship is dominant and centered. Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo (2010) write, "We do not consider such 'browning' to be given or granted; rather, 'browning' marks a purposeful pattern of articulating perceived threats to the security of the national imaginary as originating from racialized (that is, 'othered') bodies and spaces" (p. 240). Therefore, the collective browning of populations from Mexico, Central/South America, South Asia, and the Middle east while in white spaces can be subjected to language of non-citizenship, and threat regardless of their citizenship status history due the dominant racial discourses pertaining to their identities (Cisneros, 2012; Mudambi, 2015; Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth, 2010). For example, Mudambi (2015) connects the "threat narrative" of browning to state legislation known as "SB 1070" that was passed in Arizona in 2010. This piece of legislation allowed local law enforcement to question someone's citizenship based on visible indicators (brown skin) and their association with threat and otherness, therefore codifying the process of browning. She also argues that SB 1070 browned both Latino/a/x and South Asians in similar ways, demonstrating that browning is connected to dominant discourses that translates certain bodies as threatening and un-American (Mudambi, 2015).

The illegality and potential threat of immigrants from Mexico is still a common topic within the media, which draws from Americans' fear of immigrants to promote anti-immigration agendas or "solutions." Political candidates continue to use immigrants as a political ploy to

make themselves electable amongst conservative voters (Flores, 2021). During his presidential campaign, Donald J. Trump associated Mexican migrants with rapists and drug dealers on a live broadcast, which perpetuated the perceived criminality of migrants (MSNBC.com, 2015). Here, Trump contributed to the collective, macro-level browning of Mexican/Latino/a/x identities in the United States that Mudambi (2015) and Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo (2010) discuss as occurring through legislation and political discourse.

Recent scholarship about browning has touched on how browning manifests in fragmented multi-racial identities for whom developing a coherent racialized and cultural identity is complex (Canclini 1995; Daniel et al, 2014; Calafell, 2013). While concepts of hybridization and fragmentation allow for mixed-race individuals to negotiate between both racial identity contexts (Canclini, 1995), they also place mixed-race individuals in the space of both the colonized and the colonizer—privileged yet disadvantaged—which is an uncomfortable, sometimes profound place to be. Politics of visibility, however, challenge the complexities of the lived experiences of mixed-race identities (Calvente, 2011). As someone who identifies as being Mexican with light skin, sometimes I am able to pass as white, which erases a significant part of who I am. Conversely, being solely perceived as Mexican also takes away certain inherent privileges from my white identity. This either/or perception of mixed-race identities has been linked to dominant racial norms (Canclini, 1995). In the sections that follow, after a brief discussion of my methodology, I explore how browning operates at both macro and micro levels of communication to both externally and internally constrain and construct the identities of mixed-race Latinos/as/x living in the United States through a critical autoethnographic inquiry that interrogates the browning of my identity.

Chapter Three: Methods

Discovering Autoethnography

In my first semester, I enrolled in a critical intercultural communication seminar, which introduced me to critical autoethnography. As someone who struggles with reading comprehension, I felt far more immersed in the content versus traditional research articles. My first impression of this type of work was how readable it was compared to traditional research articles. As a reader, I felt more connected to the author and their message. The narrative aspect allowed me to step into the author's point of view and gain unique insight while also understanding the theoretical application of critical intercultural theories. Not only does autoethnography reveal knowledge of people's lived experiences, but it also allows for a variety of representations of identity and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Calvente's (2011) profound chapter where she uses a autoethnographic method to share her experience being a brown U.S citizen crossing the U.S/Mexico border, helped me feel seen as a mixed-raced Latina and a second-generation immigrant. Being able to draw parallels to my own life made the arguments much more approachable… "I've felt this before too!" Seeing this kind of representation in this seminar's content was totally unexpected but necessary because for the first time, my complex cultural experience was seen and mattered. Additionally, mixed-race people can get by without our multiracial identities being noticed, leading to our experiences being overlooked in racial discourse. I did not have the words to communicate how I felt being mixed-raced until I read an autoethnography on Latina hybridity (Calvente, 2011). Reading autoethnographic research in my first semester of graduate school allowed me to acknowledge my mixed-race identity more than ever before. It was the first time I saw a representation of myself in research and in academia. Prior to graduate school, my research experience was centered around public relations and social media marketing using both quantitative and qualitative research

approaches that included surveys, analytics, and interviews. I understood research as science, math, and coding—definitely not personal. Up to this point in my education, my culture and my identity were barely acknowledged in the course curriculum. Now I see how critical autoethnography allows our complex experiences to exist and our identities to emerge.

In the current project, I utilize a critical autoethnographic approach to explore three different experiences of browning around my white-passing, mixed-race Latina/o/x identity. Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as an "autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). By revealing the discursive dimension of my lived experiences, autoethnographic research surfaced new forms of knowledge and ways of being. The way researchers' perspectives, social experience, beliefs, and viewpoints, also known as subjectivity, are critiqued, or viewed as a bias influencing research, therefore my decision to adopt this critical autoethnographic approach is due to the critique of traditional practice in cultural research prioritizing an objective point of view when interacting with and collecting data from participants of nondominant backgrounds. Intercultural researchers serve as vessels, transporting knowledge and experiences about peoples' lives outside of the dominant norm, but they also carry inherited biases about these groups which may be reflected in research findings and academic discourse (Bochner, 2012; Collier & Muneri, 2016; Conquergood, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This practice often led to Orientalist descriptions and the perpetuation of Othering (Liu & Kramer, 2019; Said, 1994). Such traditional approaches are grounded in coloniality and can reproduce whiteness by invoking inherent dominant western biases that constrain researchers from receiving new cultural understandings and perspectives (Bochner, 2012; Calafell, 2020; Collier & Muneri, 2016). To shift conversations from an objective voice,

recent critical intercultural communication research has taken a shift inward towards critically reflexive methodology (Calafell, 2020; Eguchi, 2015). Spivak (1988) said there is power in the subject's voice, and we must make room for the subject to speak. Therefore, in this project I move away from weariness of subjectivity and support the possibilities of felt knowledge.

Moreover, marginalized stories are exploited, underrepresented, and misrepresented through these Orientalist representations when produced in unreflexively examined research that limit subjects' voices (Collier & Muneri, 2016; Said, 1978). When taking on the role of speaking for someone else, limitations are placed on agency, which is "a term that can refer to invention, strategies, authorship, institutional power, identity, subjectivity, practices, and subject positions, among others" (Campbell, 2005, p. 1). In other words, agency allows for ownership of one's life, one's life story, and how that story is communicated and shared. Culture/identity research must represent people in a way that is meaningful to them and the individuals who relate to them because it ultimately indicates how they will be treated in society (Hall, 1997, as cited in Collier & Muneri, 2016). To avert types of problematic Othering in cultural research, scholars such as Calafell (2013; 2007) and Collier and Muneri (2016) call for critical reflexivity, which is centered on the intersectional, embodied perspectives of Others. Critical autoethnography returns agency to marginalized communities that have been poorly represented, underrepresented, or silenced.

Utilizing a critical approach therefore allowed me to respond to imperialist framings of my identity, inviting readers to view a cultural phenomenon of browning through my perspective. Turning the researcher perspective inward allowed for my experience to be a form of knowledge and for meaningful representation of my marginalized, diasporic, liminal and hybrid identity to be seen in a culture dominated by whiteness (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). I

argue the shift inward is crucial since canonical traditions of research have habitually centered whiteness by submitting research participant voices primarily as objects and solely analyzing them with dominant westernized lenses (Chakravartty et al., 2018; Moon, 2010; Said, 1978). Moon (2010) argues the centering of whiteness in intercultural research has been accomplished by referencing Americans solely as "white," dismissing transnational relationships established through migration, displacement, colonialization, and imperialism, and deserting voices and experiences of marginalized people (p. 42). Critical autoethnography disrupts whiteness by passing the microphone from dominating white voices and narratives to the voices and experiences of the marginalized.

I used critical autoethnography to create an accessible text to larger audiences, including those outside of academic settings (Adams & Ellis, 2017). Critical autoethnography allowed me to interrupt patterns of whiteness and the colonial gatekeeping within academia (Eguchi, 2014). Eguchi (2014) argues, "Autoethnography is a powerful and radical method to disrupt normative systems of knowledge productions to investigate historically marginalized experiences" (p. 29). Therefore, I use critical autoethnography and critical reflexivity to reveal and resist whiteness and reveal the instances of browning that constrain and construct my identity.

To conduct this autoethnographic inquiry, I collected and critically analyzed three stories from my childhood that illuminate my experiences of browning and illustrate how my dad's deportation story is central to my overall racial experience. Furthermore, I reflexively critique outward, social, and cultural aspects of my identity and personal experiences using the concept of browning. I look inwards to see how my vulnerable self-navigates the cultural interpretations of my identity and personal experiences with my dad. I blended the distinction between the personal and the cultural by drawing from the theoretical concepts in my literature review (Ellis

& Bochner, 1999). Furthermore, by employing my body as a cultural site of knowledge, I engaged in a reflexive and personal narrative inquiry about my identity and my experiences. Ellis and Bochner (1999) define narrative inquiry as "stories that create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence" (p. 744). In other words, these first-person narrative inquiries result in evocative storytelling that transport the readers from passive engagement to a witness to someone else's life (Ellis & Bochner, 1999). I question how my racial identity has been communicated through browning and how that process led to my understanding of my own identity. I gathered creative but critical expressions through journaling and analyzed these textual performances where dominant understandings of immigration, U.S. citizenship, and mixed-race identity are browned. My goal through sharing my experiences is to offer profound understandings of the lived-in experiences of immigration, family separation and Latina mixed-race.

Throughout my storytelling, I grappled with research ethics and how much of my story I wanted to share. I considered the guidance from Ellis (2007) on relational ethics to address this matter of involving intimate others such as family members in my research. She states that stories of "self-revelations always involve revelations about others" (p. 25), meaning that although this is my story to tell, it also reflects the people I am writing about. Considering this, I had a conversation with my family, including my dad, which has made me feel better about sharing my story. They understand the personal impact that this experience has had on me and encourage me to take this opportunity to make something positive out of something negative. I write my difficult stories as a gift to myself and my family, as a reflexive attempt to reconstruct the meaning of this experience to further heal and grow from our pain. Out of respect for the

privacy of my family and especially my dad, I left out names and other signifiers. I also omitted details about my dad's case or my family that do not relate to the main focus of this project, which is to analyze communication processes of browning around my identity.

Chapter Four: Autoethnography

Browned as a Family

I grew up in a rural, farming area in a part of a town nestled in Wisconsin's Kettle Moraine. The property we lived on was once a farm, then a junkyard, and finally a residential country dirt road cul-de-sac. I miss driving or walking up the quarter-mile long dirt gravel hilly driveway in the summer. The gravel would crunch underneath you as you dodged the potholes filled with rainwater while corn peaked to its full height all around you. With the hills, it felt like you were in a sea of cornfields, which smelled like a combination of cow manure and fresh-cut grass. On one end of the sea of cornfields was home, and the other was the rest of the world. Once through the sea of cornfields, my house was the first one on the right. Further down, at the end of the cul-de-sac was what we called the farmhouse. All the houses on this hill (including my own) were situated between old, abandoned farm equipment, barns, and sheds. This may all sound aesthetically pleasing, but this was a time before farm/country chic was cool. I often felt ashamed of where I lived, but being poor and my dad residing unlawfully, we did not have a lot of options. At the bottom of the hill where our driveway and the main road met, there were several houses scattered along the road. We called these stretches of houses "our neighbors."

One summer day, while I was playing outside with my niece, my older brother, who is also mixed-race like me, was driving our family's ATV along the main road. At the time, my niece and I were young, probably around six and seven years old, and my brother was around sixteen. All of a sudden, we heard shouting and loud engine sounds coming from the end of the driveway. The next thing we knew, a group of drunk rowdy white men jumped in the back of a loud silver pick-up truck with bats and shovels in hand and chased my brother up our driveway. I remember the dust flowing behind the truck as it floored up the hill and onto our front yard with men pouring out the bed of the truck and the front passenger side door. Most of the men were

shirtless, some of them men were bald with beards, and all of them had white skin tones that were sun kissed pink. When my niece and I saw the truck barreling up the hill of our driveway, we instinctively knew these men were coming to hurt us and immediately ran inside to the front porch of my house. Although I was terrified, I couldn't look away. Peeking through the green blinds of my front porch window, I saw my brother and my dad defend themselves by shouting at the group of angry white men to leave us alone (along with some obscenities of course). Why were the white men were acting like this? What had my brother done that called for this? The men shouted racial slurs and derogatory terms back at my dad and brother like "illegals," "spic," and "dirty Mexican" and threatened to hurt our entire family. These offensive words only deepened my dad and my brother's rage toward them. In those moments I felt powerless against their aggressive display of white power. How dare they think that they were better than us!? I was also terrified for my dad and brother. I thought they were going to get beaten with bats and shovels and I just wanted them to come inside, but there was no way my dad would let these men see him hide. That was not the type of person he was. Like most fathers, my dad was/is very protective of his kids.

Thankfully, none of these men used the bats and shovels, and no one got physically hurt. The altercation only lasted 20 minutes, but it felt like an entire day. It ended when my mom and her visiting friend, who recognized their privilege as being white women, intervened and threatened to call the police. The men drove off and never bothered us again. The night of the incident, my mom took my sisters and me to a hotel for the night. The distraction of the hotel swimming pool helped soften the sting of the day's trauma, but I was still angry, embarrassed, and so confused. Why did this happen to us? Why were they so mad? Why shovels and bats? My sense of security of the "neighbors" who lived on the other side of the sea of cornfields-driveway

was ruined. I didn't want this to happen again, that was for sure. I never again rode my bike or ATV in that direction in fear of offending someone, somehow.

When the attack occurred, it was hard for me to classify it as racism, as I only understood racism in terms of the Black and white binary (Flores, 2021; Sundstrom, 2008). Dominant narratives of black and white racial conflict made it a lot harder for me to process this experience as racism. I felt like my family and I were at fault in some way no matter what we did. I did not realize that we were victims of a hate crime. But reflecting back as a critical intercultural/race scholar, I realize this was the first time I witnessed an explicit form of violent racism, and it happened in my front yard targeting my own family. My teenage brother flipping the bird was uncalled for, but the actions followed by our adult neighbors were extreme. To trespass with the intent to harm, then to threaten a family with adolescent children in their front yard was really messed up. Why did these neighbors feel the need to react in such a way? What perceptions did they have that made them justify threatening us? Why did they never return? This story provides a specific example of the racialization process towards immigrants from Mexico and their families that helps answer these questions.

Intertwining the idea of being browned (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010) with the impact of US national affect (Cisneros, 2012) toward immigrants explains how certain bodies in the U.S. context are translated as national threats. According to Cisneros (2012), the US national affect encompasses the rhetorical affective attachments about what it means to look, talk, and act like a US American (p. 138). Cisneros explains,

> …the idea that citizenship/belonging are continually performed for an audience of other citizens, it follows that those performances of citizenship entail the articulation of certain

> affects that are experienced and judged in the bodies/minds of the citizen-audience who is judging the performance. (pp. 138-139)

The reaction of my neighbors was an example of the citizen audience judging other citizens' performance, ignoring any indication of him possibly belonging. Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2010) argue that a consequence of browning is that it turns racial groups into "problem populations" (p. 249). This way of racializing cultivates assumptions that motivate forceful and aggressive actions towards immigrants from Mexico.

This aspect of browning provides insight into our neighbors' aggressive response. By constructing us as a threat, they felt the need to take extreme measures in numbers to intimidate my brother and whoever was with him by screaming slurs and waving shovels and bats in the air instead of having a simple conversation with our father about my brother's behavior. Their need to deliberately display their power as grown, white men overlooked the fact my brother was a minor and lived in a house with younger, not-so-threatening kids. My neighbors ignored my brothers' innocence and directly translated his actions into threats, which led them to their chase and the assumptions about the rest of my family. Additionally, they assumed there were more threats where my brother was going, which explains the army of men and their choice of weaponry. "US national affect" rhetoric toward immigrants explains why even though most of my family were there legally, including my brother, our neighbors suspected all of us as of not belonging. Based on their assumption that my brother was a part of a "problem population" outside the performance borders of US citizenship, these men expected much more than a house full of young kids and proceeded to act accordingly. As Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo (2010) and Cisneros (2012) explain, these judgmental practices are carried down by US political and mainstream anti-immigration discourse to everyday citizens. This story highlights how the

impacts of mainstream immigrant discourse and "US national affect" toward immigrants fueled our neighbors' assumptions of who my brother was going and who was living on the other side of those corn fields.

After these men saw more white people than brown people, the perceived "threats" were not so threatening. Browning therefore also explains why the neighbors left and never returned. Upon realizing our household included several mostly white children, a white mother, and a brown father, these men seemed to back off as if this was not what they were expecting. What were they expecting on the other side of the sea of cornfields? Observing this as a child, I internalized a comparison between the treatments of my white relatives vs. my brown relatives, I began to see whiteness as a way to protect ourselves from those who did not understand us, which led to a constant negotiation between both of my racial identities and began to deidentify with the Mexican side of me (Chávez, 2009). Since living in rural Wisconsin and witnessing an attack as such, I felt much safer presenting white and distancing myself from the Mexican part of me in public performances of my identity. Confusion about who I was often led me to isolate myself from people because, even though I do enjoy being social, having to constantly think about your identity and performing that identity, makes social interaction exhausting. Engaging with outside narratives about other people felt much easier than actually socializing with the real world. Therefore, I would dissociate from myself and other people by retreating into various entertainment media, such as television, movies, and books. Although this was a good outlet for me and kept me out of trouble, I am also aware of the overwhelming effects these forms of media had on my complex racial identity.

News Media Producing Fear

As a child, I felt safe in my parents' room and spent more time in their room than my own. It was a small bedroom on the first floor with pink floral wallpaper and thick white baseboards. The queen size bed took up most of the room and sat on a tan and light green bedframe that matched the rest of the bedroom furniture. My dad turned on the TV in the bedroom in time for the nightly ABC World News one evening when I was about eight or nine years old. I was working on a homework assignment sitting on the floor, adjacent to my dad sitting on the bed, facing the TV. As the news reporters started to give a preview of the night's stories, I noticed one of the segments they were going to talk about pertained to the U.S.-Mexico Border and "illegal" immigration. In this preview, the news displayed a bird's-eye view of people running and crossing the border in a desert. Connecting this to my dad being an immigrant from Mexico, my mind flooded with questions. Did my dad cross the border like that? Is he not supposed to be in the United States? Am I not supposed to be here because I'm his daughter? Are all immigrants "illegal?" Is my dad?

After the preview, I asked my dad, "Are you an immigrant like the people we saw on the news?" He responded that he was a Green Card holder and that I shouldn't worry. This didn't mean anything to me since I really did not know what that meant. Despite his reassurance, I worried that we could be in trouble and resolved to hide from the world the fact that my dad was an immigrant upon concluding that immigrants from Mexico were not allowed in the United States. I also equated my own Mexicanness with being bad, unlike my whiteness which I associated with being good. I became perturbed about my identity and ultimately confused as to what being Mexican in the United States meant after watching the news that night. I was scared

to be Mexican and overwrought that my dad was an immigrant from Mexico who could get in trouble.

Reflecting on this moment in my childhood, two critical questions arise. How did the nature of the news broadcast impact my brown/white mixed-race identity? How did I internalize browning to view myself as Mexican? My parents would always watch the morning and nightly news together while I was growing up. Even today, as separated partners, they continue this practice and have discussions about what they saw in the news that day. I think they felt that watching the news daily was a way for us to stay connected and informed with the outside world while living in rural Wisconsin. The effects that this early and constant exposure to news media become more prominent when the subject being reported on resembled identities like my family and me (Lopez, 2016). Unfortunately, media literacy was not a skill my parents knew, nor was it explained to my siblings and me in school. What the news media said was true, real, and undebatable in our minds. Its believable imagery and commentary guided our perceptions of the world and even our perceptions of ourselves.

It is important to note the hostile mainstream news media climate around Mexican and Latina/o immigration in the post-9/11 society I was growing up in (Cisneros, 2012). I was seeing images of Mexican men and women dressed in dirty, raggedy clothes crossing the border while news reporters identifying them as "problems" or "possibly threatening" positioned immigrants from Mexico as undesirable (Cisneros, 2012). Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2010) describe the heightened anti-immigration sentiment in 2006 when U.S. Congress proposed several pieces of legislation that "browned" immigrants by depicting them as criminals or dangerous others. For example, Republican Representative Steve King (IA) made the following statement after witnessing pro-immigration rights' rallies across the country:

> ‘It is one thing to see an abstract number of 12 million unlawful immigrants. It is another thing to see more than a million marching through the streets demanding benefits as if it were a birthright. I think people resent that.’ (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010, p. 240)

According to Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth (2010), this statement epitomized the act of browning by assuming all the people involved with the protest to be “illegal” and merging them into one “problem” group. Similarly, my exposure to the anti-immigrant discourse and imagery displayed in the news media forged an understanding that all immigrants were “illegal” and therefore undesirable. Given my limited exposure to the history of Mexican immigration and ignorance of the Chicano Movement that might have given me pride, I only knew it to be something unlawful. Chávez (2009) mentioned that Latinas/os living in rural spaces often have a limited Latina/o community resulting in a lack of resources to develop a Brown-white relationships. In my case, the Brown-white relationship I was developing was within myself, like an internal negotiation to either accept certain parts of myself or to disassociate and de-identify. With mostly white people and very few Latina/o people around me, the media had a disproportionate influence on me, leading me to reject aspects of my cultural identity to fit in and to be comfortable.

> *When I was little, my parents bought me a traditional huipil, a garment worn by indigenous women from Mexico and Central America. It was white with colorful embroidery, and I loved how pretty it was. I liked how it sat on my shoulders and how it looked against my tanned skin. I felt beautiful wearing it, but I knew I would stand out like a sore thumb if I wore this dress anywhere in my community, so I would only wear it in my house.*

Wearing my huipil solely in my home illustrates how I negotiated browning by presenting myself as more white and less Mexican in public spaces, despite my desire and curiosity for Mexican culture. Chávez (2009) would define this strategy as assimilation to whiteness, a survival strategy among minorities that blends them in with a public majority that tends to scrutinize groups of people who do not adhere to citizenship normativity. Now, this does not mean I do not appreciate my uniqueness being Mexican. This is a part of me that I always loved, but I could not let my identity as Mexican flourish publicly due to the fear of browning.

My exposure to news media discussing immigration from Mexico led me to feel that all immigrants from Mexico, including my dad and parts of myself were undesirable in this society. In a sense, presenting and favoring whiteness protected me from ostracization and allowed my family, including my dad, to blend in with the society around me. Not only did this make me feel more comfortable while navigating a social life, but it also protected my dad from suspicion. Whiteness is and was a means of protection for me and indirectly for my dad because it enabled the assumption that my dad was also white, thereby deterring the perception my parents could be "illegal." In white spaces, my whiteness benefited me and got me through doors, so I favored this presentation of self and grew this part of me. In a sense my whiteness is like a security blanket but also a tool for survival. Deidentifying with my Mexican side was also implicitly encouraged by the majority rural white community I was living in.

"Wait…Where's Your Dad?"

"Marissa, where's your dad?" For a while, I would just say something along the lines of "He moved to Mexico" or "He is traveling for work" to avoid confusion and interrogation. My dad had been active in our after-school activities, such as youth soccer and Girls Scouts, and after he left, his absence in our community became apparent, and people started to wonder and

ask questions. There was a time while at the grocery store with my mom where I learned how to manage these questions in a way that protected my identity from misconceptions of immigration and Mexicanness. A soccer teammate's parents approached us in the bakery section one day while we were looking for marked-down baked goods and asked, "Hey, you guys, where is dad? Is he okay? He promised me some tamales!" I froze, and my stomach tensed upon hearing that question. I thought to myself, "What do we even say?" as this was the first time addressing this question since he was removed, but my mom quickly responded and said he had moved to Mexico. I thought to myself, "This is almost true, and it sounds a lot better than 'he was deported.'" This response had successfully ended the conversation about my dad, and they proceeded to ask us about coaching the following year, changing the subject to something else. As my mom proceeded to talk to them, I felt a sense of relief knowing that we did not need to give out the humiliating details so soon after the incident. I learned in this moment how to illuminate my whiteness to deflect from the browning that is intrinsically discursive when I honestly answer the question, "Where's your dad?"

In middle school, I became really close to a group of girls (all white), and one of the girls from the group would often host slumber parties. We were hanging out in their finished basement watching "Hannah Montana: The Movie," and at one point I had walked upstairs to get a drink from the kitchen. As my friend's mom pressed the glass up against the fridge's water dispenser, she looked over at me with a sweet, almost laughing smile and asked, "Are you having fun?" I answered, "Of course! I love coming over here!" "Well, we love having you!" she said as she handed me the glass of water. She proceeded with another question: "What do your parents do?" I froze as my mind panickily searched for a cover story, but I made a split-second decision to trust her since she was my friend's mom. After all, we had spent a lot of time together, and she

had always been kind and friendly. It would surely be safe to tell her the whole truth. I started to explain, "Well, it's a little confusing, my mom is permanently disabled, which prevents her from maintaining a full-time job, so we live off the government, and my dad was deported to Mexico last year." The look on her face was stunned, like I had just told her someone died. I felt as though I had sucked all the air out of the room with this overwhelming reality, but maybe it's because I was also holding my breath in fear as to what might come out of her mouth. I thought, "How does she think of me now?" She responded apologetically, with her usual kindness, but then followed-up with curiosity: "So, you're half Mexican?" "How did your dad get deported?" "Were you born here then?" I responded politely as possible as she interrogated my background and identity. I did not know all the direct answers and I felt my anxiety taking over. "Crap, I should've just said he moved to Mexico." Having to think about "how" even when I was still confused myself, I felt embarrassed and overwhelmed trying to give her the best possible answers. I wanted to leave the conversation but did not want to be rude. I felt as though I owed her an explanation, and I did not want to confuse her even more. There was no choice any more for me not to talk about it even when deep down I just wanted to blend in and be like the rest of my friends. Why did I have to explain more? Couldn't the first response be enough? I felt so different in this moment but not in a unique way. I felt disruptive and fraudulent. My trust dwindled as I felt she was more concerned about my identity and citizenship status than the fact that Immigrant Customs Enforcement (ICE) tore my family apart. The lack of advocacy from her was discouraging and I didn't understand why she was not as irate as I was about my dad's situation. She ended the conversation stating, "I never met anyone in your situation before." This type of response only reinforced the isolation of my identity living in rural Wisconsin.

How I talk about these experiences is congruent to how I perform and negotiate my white, mixed-race identity. As seen in the story at the grocery store with my mom, I learned how to perform whiteness to save face in instances where illegality could have been perceived. My mom indirectly showed me how to do this by choosing a "white" version of the story that left out the deportation aspect of my dad's departure. My mother answered the question in a way that deterred the conversation from deportation and "illegal" immigration and protected me from the browning process. Avoiding words like deportation and immigration when explaining to people why my dad left help deter the browning of my identity in that conversation. There are family members and friends who are very close to me, who still don't know what happened to me... I shared the "white" version of my story to stay in a white space. It is easier to bend the truth to blend in with whiteness than to live openly about being Mexican and having a dad who has been deported. This membership to whiteness allows this experience to be hidden and keeps me protected from browning. Especially when these disclosures are happening in predominantly white spaces, the internal dialogue went from questioning who would be accepting of my dad's experience to then how will people respond when I expose my Mexican side too?

When I got older and more comfortable with talking about my experience, I began disclosing the deportation of my dad. The story of disclosure with my friend's mom at the sleepover demonstrates the browning that would occur in seemingly innocuous conversations at two different levels. At the first level, disclosing my dad's deportation browned me by revealing a hidden aspect of my identity, i.e., that I am Mexican. People would respond, "I had no idea you were Mexican!?" Reflecting back to moments where I talk about my dad's deportation, which also inherently speaks to how I negotiate my racial identity, coincides with how I would publicly perform my mixed-race identity. This is particularly important since most people who interact

with me do not always realize I am Mexican. My dark, thick curly brown hair (now with blonde highlights), low hanging dark thick eyebrows, and my green eyes are overshadowed by my mother's prominent European white features and light skin. Although certain performances of my identity, such as wearing my gold hoop earrings, can lead people to tell me, "You look Mexican today," generally, people perceive me as just white. The frustrating part is that I am not. And now with my dad no longer in the picture, it makes my Mexican side even more invisible. When people think of me as just white, they tend to be more comfortable with their expressions of racism and ignore the pain they are causing to my identity. Also, perceiving me as solely white makes people's reactions towards my families' situation less empathetic. Because I appear white, my struggles are overlooked or easily forgotten, and I don't always feel entitled to those struggles. Limited perceptions of "being a Mexican" amongst my community and family influenced conflicting identity politics. I am not just white, and I am not just Mexican but there was never really a clear meaning to what it meant to be both. Furthermore, Johnson (1997) argues that the Mexican American community is far from homogenous and needs more heterogeneous perceptions. Being aware of the diverse mixtures of race, national origin, immigration status, class, culture, education, political outlook, and many other characteristics of the Latino/a/x community will allow experiences like mine to come out from the shadows become more salient.

At the second level, when I said my dad was deported, I was browned because I was automatically associated with illegality. The other question that would arise was "Does this mean you're "illegal" too?" I had endured a traumatic experience that had led to several stressors in my life, but I could not always freely talk about it due to the racial assumptions one might have when I would tell them what happened to me. My innocence and my welfare were overlooked, as

I could not escape all the other rhetorical meanings tied to when someone says their parent has been deported. Reflecting on this interaction between my young self and my childhood friend's mom, I wonder how my friend's mom justified her invasive questioning. Why did she think my dad's deportation meant that I was also "illegal"? How did the lack of consideration affect how I view my mixed-race identity? Her assumptions can be linked to the historical discourses about immigrants from Mexico being perpetuated by mainstream media and politics in a post-9/11 world (Flores, 2021; Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010). My friend mom's response reflected these same sentiments found in mainstream media. Even though I was born in a country that claimed to have neoliberal "race-neutral" policies (Chávez, 2009), I was still Othered due to my identity being tied to illegality and "illegal" immigration. It was easier for me to blend in as white instead of being a racialized Other. Blending in was a means of protection from ostracization and it was not until I would reveal to someone that my dad was deported that this layer of white protection would weaken. I still feel guilty claiming that I am a minority through this experience. If my racial identity was more transparent and did not pass for white, it probably would not be an issue. My lack of racial transparency leads most people to be surprised upon hearing that my dad was deported and to question if I am really Mexican. This lack of visibility for identities like mine is particular to the reflections made by Calvente (2012) who shared her experiences with the politics of visibility as a Latina and a U.S citizen crossing the U.S/Mexico border. Depending on which side she came from, determined how her race was being perceived. My experience telling my story as a mixed-race person showcases my inability to fully assimilate with dominant white culture and/or Latino/a/x culture, which signifies race relations in the United States (Johnson, 1998).

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this project, I explored the browning of my white, mixed-race identity through a critical autoethnography in which I reflected on three different experiences in my life where browning was manifested. I discuss browning as not inherently tied or constituted within the brown body, but instead as a discursive process surrounding racialized Othered bodies to convey a sense of national insecurity through the merging of subjects such as "illegal" immigration, terrorism, and Islamophobia across multiple ethnocultural groups. Therefore, any immigrant population can be "browned" and subjected to language of non-citizenship, regardless of their citizenship status history. The browning of my identity in relation to my family was exemplified through social interactions living in rural Wisconsin as well as through witnessing discourses about "illegal" immigration on news media. The browning of my identity was also reflected through my processes of determining how to disclose my dad's deportation to my white peers. Through these stories, browning helped explain the discursive process of my detachment from my Mexican identity.

I see my story of witnessing my dad's detention as a narrative central to how I perform my mixed-race identity. In the same way my dad was "illegalized" and removed from the United States, the Mexican part of me was also "illegalized" and removed. Limited exposure to responsible representations of Latino/a/x and Mexicans migrating to the United States had a disproportionate influence on the Brown-white relationship I was developing within myself (Chávez, 2009). As I understand the strategic center of whiteness (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), I argue this de-identification with Mexicanness is a forceful and purposeful act inflicted by a rural, conservative environment that continues to center whiteness in the United States (Flores, 2021). As a consequence of whiteness, browning further explains the internal and external discursive process of this detachment with the Mexican part of my identity.

From this autoethnographic research, I build upon Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo's (2010) conceptualization of browning by locating the external browning of my identity at both micro- and macro-levels of communication. I define external browning as direct racialization inflicted by any outside source that constructs anyone who performs outside of white, citizenship normativity to be "illegal" and/or a "threat." For example, I discussed news media as a form of external browning that guided perceptions about myself, my dad, and the Mexican immigrant community as a whole. However, unlike the browning examples given throughout existing literature, which occur at macro-levels of communication, such as legislation and political discourses, I also demonstrate how external browning can occur at micro levels of interpersonal communication. For example, the neighbors verbally attacking our family by calling us "illegals" was an instance of externalized browning at a micro-level of interpersonal communication. My interpersonal disclosure of my dad's deportation to my childhood friend's mom also exposed my Mexican identity in a way that triggered an external browning because the subject of "illegality" did not escape the conversation.

Additionally, I build on previous literature that has focused primarily on external forms of browning by revealing a layer of browning that is internalized and negotiated within the identities of people who identify with brownness. I define internal browning as an iterative process based on various social observations that creates racialized meaning about one's own identity. The external browning labeled me as an outsider in relation to US citizenship, which then influenced my internalized browning of identity, meaning I was starting to associate my own Otherness as "illegal." For example, the news media fed the perceptions that all immigrants came here "illegally." Little did I know how complex and racialized the immigration system operates. Furthermore, when I noticed the distinguishable difference between how the white

people in my family were treated versus the brown people, it led to a constant negotiation between both my racial identities and began to influence my de-identification with being Mexican. I began to hide my Mexicanness and publicly perform whiteness as much as possible in order to adhere to citizenship normativity. Therefore, I would only wear my huipil in my home because I did not want to be associated with the immigrants I had seen and heard through anti-immigration discourse. I did not want to be browned. Internalized browning also led to insecurity in how to disclose my dad's removal from the United States, for example, by not saying the word "deported." I learned to see my mother's whiteness as a form of protection against the racial hate we were receiving.

I adhered to whiteness to avoid ostracization and being the Other in the room, and thankfully for me, I had the privilege to hide behind my whiteness. I used my white mask to evade the browning of my identity. The assimilation to whiteness, or "the acculturation to European American values, can be an invaluable resource for those capable of performing it" (Chávez, 2009, p. 175). Therefore, I exploited this option. The notion that identity is an iterative, ideological, and discursive process is reflected in my de-identification with Mexicanness via browning. Assimilation to whiteness was the easier choice for me given the negative experiences associated with being Mexican. This detachment from this part of my identity became apparent to me through my analysis, and it is not something I always acknowledged.

Importantly, despite the fact that as a mixed-race Latina I can be racialized as white, I was browned specifically through the context of discourses of immigration from Mexico. Furthermore, my analysis contributes to critical intercultural scholarship regarding the complex racialization of mixed-race Latina/o/x identities. I demonstrate how internalized browning influenced the development of my mixed-race identity; I did not want to present as Mexican

because there was always a part of me that knew it was not acceptable in my hometown. I became extremely insecure about my race, but why? My reflexive analysis of the concept of browning helped me realize that I have been excluding a big part of who I am. I am exhausted from my attempts to fit in with whiteness. I no longer feel the need to hide behind my white mask. I am learning to embrace my Mexicanness. I am learning how to be both/and.

Implications from Critical Autoethnography

Analyzing a series of traumatic stories that I thought I was mostly recovered from was a difficult process. Upon embarking on this project, I had thought that emotional maturity would help me through this project, but my analysis uprooted a lot of feelings I have not personally dealt with, especially when it came to the realization of my own racialization of my identity negotiation. It has been a vulnerable yet profound process. This pulling away of layers revealed the biases about how I define and talk about myself. Why did I feel so uncomfortable talking about my dad being deported? Where were the uncomfortable feelings coming from when I talked about my identity? Exploring my experiences through the lens of browning helped explain where these feelings about my identity were stemming from. Not only did I realize how I browned myself, but also how I did it to other people too. Despite this being an emotional roller coaster to revisit vulnerable and traumatic experiences, this process illustrates the importance of dcritical autoethnographic work. If my intention is to become a critical intercultural scholar, I need to be aware of the racial biases that reside within me and in how I construct my own identity. I cannot teach or discuss the importance of reflexive critical work if I am not doing the work on myself.

Trauma from this experience was definitely a barrier in this project. Being more aware of my pain, I plan to focus on healing from this moment and hopefully revisit this analysis in the

future. As discussed previously, marginalized Others can experience racism and not even realize it is racism in the moment. Jones and Ellis (2017) write, "The use of personal experience permits autoethnographers to describe and record the ways in which racism is experienced in the most mundane of settings" (p. 4). We dissociate from those experiences for a reason, but there is harm in not speaking about these racist experiences. Staying silent continues the perpetuation of racism in the United States. Additionally, the harm it does internally to identity needs to also be acknowledged. Thinking so much about what I was thinking during traumatic experiences like witnessing hateful, racist violence and my dad being detained and deported has been exhausting. I do not want to abandon my research but instead, take some time to heal and revisit again in the future.

As I end this juncture, I am ready to take the spotlight off myself. I plan to work towards amplifying others through ethnographic field work from the work I have done here with my project. I hope to draw in more parallels with Chávez 's (2009) concept of racial disidentification and Canclini's (1995) arguments on hybridity to further examine Latino/a/x identity in rural America. I wonder how do folks with non-racially transparent or white passing identities experience implicit forms of racism? How does this impact how they view themselves? These are questions I end with and hope to continue to explore. I plan to continue to be invested in research surrounding the Latino/a/x experiences and browning.

References

Adams, T. E., Ellis, C., & Jones, S. H. (2017). Autoethnography. In J. Matthes, C. S. Davis, & R. F. Potter (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (1st ed., pp. 1–11). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0011

Alcoff, L. (2003). Latino/as, Asian Americans, and the Black-White binary. *The Journal of Ethics*, *7*, 5–27. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25115747

Bloodsworth-Lugo, M. K., & Lugo-Lugo, C. R. (2010). Citizenship and the browning of terror. *Peace Review,* 20(3), 273–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650802330071

Bochner, A. P. (2012). On first-person narrative scholarship: Autoethnography as acts of meaning. *Narrative Inquiry*, 22(1), 155-164. https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.22.1.10boc

Canclini, N. G. (1995). *Hybrid cultures: Strategies for entering and leaving modernity*. U of Minnesota Press.

Calafell, B. M. (2007). Making a space for Latina/o performance. In T.K. Nakayama (Ed), *Latina/o Communication Studies, Theorizing Performance,* (Vol. 9, pp. 1–11). Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Calafell, B. M. (2020). (I)dentities: Considering accountability, reflexivity, and intersectionality in the I and the We. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 9(2), 6-13.

Calvente, L. B. Y. (2011). "This is one line you won't have to worry about crossing": Crossing borders and becoming. In M. A. Holling & B. M. Calafell (Eds.*), Latina/o discourses in vernacular spaces: Somos de una voz?* (pp. 185-202). Lexington Books.

Campbell, K. K. (2005). Agency: Promiscuous and Protean. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 2(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1479142042000332134

Campion, K. (2019). “You think you’re Black?” Exploring Black mixed-race experiences of Black rejection. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 42(16), 196–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1642503

Chakravartty, P., Kuo, R., Grubbs, V. & McIlwain, C. (2018). #CommunicationSoWhite. *Journal of Communication* 68, 254–266. doi: 10.1093/joc/jqy003

Chávez, K. R. (2009). Remapping Latinidad: A performance cartography of Latina/o identity in rural Nebraska. *Text and Performance Quarterly,* 29(2), 165–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930902774866

Collier, M. J. & Muneri, C. (2016). A call for critical reflexivity: Reflections on research with nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations in Zimbabwe and Kenya. *Western Journal of Communication,* 80(5), 638-658. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2016.1187762

Collier, M. J. (1997). Cultural identity and intercultural communication. In L. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (8th ed., pp. 36-44). Wadsworth.

Collier, M. J. (1998). Researching cultural identity: Reconciling interpretive and postcolonial perspectives. In D. V. Tanno & A. Gonzalez (Eds.), *Communication and identity across cultures* (pp. 122-147). Sage.

Conquergood, D. (1991). Rethinking ethnography: Towards a critical cultural politics. *Communication Monographs*, 58(2), 179–194. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759109376222

Cisneros, J. D. (2012). Affect, rhetoric, and performativity in Arizona’s senate bill 1070. In D. R DeChaine (Ed)*, Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier* (pp. 133–150). University of Alabama Press.

Daniel, G. R., Kina, L., Dariotis, W. M., & Fojas, C. (2014). Emerging paradigms in critical mixed race studies. *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies,* 1(1). https://doi.org/10.5070/C811013868

Dick, H. P. (2011). Making immigrants illegal in small-town USA. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *21*, E35–E55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1395.2011.01096.x

Eguchi, S. (2014). Queer intercultural relationality: An autoethnography of Asian–Black (dis)connections in white gay America. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *8*(1), 27–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2015.991077

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp.733-768). Sage.

Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *13*(1), 3–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947

Flores, L. A. (2021). *Deportable and disposable: Public rhetoric and the making of the "illegal" immigrant (rhetoric and democratic deliberation)* (1st ed.). Penn State University Press.

Garcia-Canclini, N. (1995). *Hybrid cultures: Strategies for entering and leaving modernity* (pp. xxiii-xlvi). University of Minnesota Press.

Gulbas, L. E., & Zayas, L. H. (2017). Exploring the effects of U.S. immigration enforcement on the well-being of citizen children in Mexican immigrant families. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, *3*(4), 53. https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2017.3.4.04

Johnson, H. (1997). Immigration reform and the browning of America: Tensions, conflicts and community instability in metropolitan Los Angeles'. *International Migration Review*, 42.

Jackson, R. L. & Moshin, J. (2010). Identity and difference: Race and the necessity of the discriminating subject. In T. K. Nakayama & R. T. Halualani (Eds.), *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication* (pp. 348-363). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Jung, E., & Hecht, M. L. (2004). Elaborating the communication theory of identity: Identity gaps and communication outcomes. *Communication Quarterly*, 52(3), 265–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370409370197

Hecht, M. L. (1993). 2002-a research odyssey: Toward the development of a communication theory of identity. *Communication Monographs*, *60*(1), 76. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759309376297

Hecht, M. L., Collier, M. J., & Ribeau, S. A. (1993). *African American communication: Ethnic identity and cultural interpretation*. Sage.

Kim, C. J. (1999). The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans. *Politics & Society,* 27(1), 105–138. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001005

Kim, Y. Y. (2007). Ideology, identity, and intercultural communication: An analysis of differing macademic conceptions of cultural identity. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 36(3), 237–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475750701737181

Liu, Y., & Kramer, E. (2018). Conceptualizing the other in intercultural encounters: Review, formulation, and typology of the other-Identity. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 30(5), 446–463. https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2018.1532850

Lopez, L. K. (2016). *Asian American media activism: Fighting for cultural citizenship*. NYU Press.

Moon, D. (2010). Critical reflections on culture and critical intercultural communication. In T. K. Nakayama & R. T. Halualani (Eds.), *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication,* (pp. 34-52). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Morning, A. (2018). Kaleidoscope: Contested identities and new forms of race membership. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 41(6), 1055–1073. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1415456

Mudambi, A. (2015). The construction of brownness: Latino/a and South Asian bloggers' responses to SB 1070. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication,* 8(1), 44–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2015.991079

Mendoza, S. L., Halualani, R. T., & Drzewiecka, J. A. (2002). Moving the discourse on identities in intercultural communication: Structure, culture, and resignifications. *Communication Quarterly*, *50*(3–4), 312–327. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370209385666

Nakayama, T. K., & Krizek, R. L. (1995). Whiteness: A strategic rhetoric. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *81*(3), 291–309. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335639509384117

Said, E. W. (1995). *Orientalism*. Penguin Books India.

Ojeda, V. D., Magana, C., Burgos, J. L., & Vargas-Ojeda, A. C. (2020). Deported men's and father's perspectives: The impacts of family separation on children and families. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11(148). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2020.00148

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2014). *Racial Formation in the United States* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. V. (2020, May 30). *U.S. unauthorized immigration total lowest in a decade*. Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project.

https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2018/11/27/u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-total-dips-to-lowest-level-in-a-decade/.

Pereat, J. F. (1998). The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The "Normal Science" of American Racial Thought. *California Law Review*, *10*, 47.

Sarup, M. (1996). *Identity, culture, and the postmodern world*. University of Georgia Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2011). *Latina Condition*. NYU Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1998). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 46-111). MacMillan Education.

Sundstrom, R. R. (2008). *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*. SUNY Press.

"Totally accurate": Trump defends calling Mexican immigrants "rapists." (2015, July 1). MSNBC.com. https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/totally-accurate-trump-defends-calling-mexican-immigrants-rapists-msna629836

Taiwo, W. T. (2020). What It means to be brown. In N. Khanna, *Whiter Asian American women on skin color and colorism* (pp. 137–142). New York University Press.