
**“I’m Brazilian, Not Brazilian American”:
The Experiences of Second-Generation Brazilian Adolescents
Preserving Their Heritage Language and Resisting
Assimilation**

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ABSTRACT: Culture and heritage language (HL) preservation are crucial to developing children of immigrants’ ethnic and social identity, creating a sense of belonging, and fostering family and ethnic community support. However, numerous challenges permeate the experiences of underrepresented ethnolinguistic groups like Brazilian immigrants who are largely invisible in the United States. Therefore, this study investigated the lived experiences of second-generation Brazilian adolescents with culture and HL preservation. In-depth interviews and a focus group were conducted with 13 participants. The findings highlighted the participants’ embrace of their Brazilian ethnic identity and rejection of their American citizenship, and emphasized HL in affirming their identities and confronting discrimination.

KEYWORDS: Brazilians, second-generation immigrants, ethnic identity, heritage language, phenomenology

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Brazilian immigrants remain an understudied and largely invisible minority immigrant group in the United States (Lima & Siqueira, 2007; Margolis, 1993; Marrow, 2003). They are miscategorized as Hispanic/Latino but often reject this label because their heritage language (HL) is Portuguese, not Spanish (Carvalho, 2010). To “differentiate themselves from the broader stigmatized Latino immigrant group to which white Americans assign them” (Cebulko, 2013, p. 3), they “almost unanimously do not report Hispanic/Latino ethnicity while overwhelmingly report ‘Brazilian’ ancestry” (Schut, 2021, p. 1062) and commonly self-classify as “white” or “other.” However, they may “learn” to report being Hispanic/Latino due to the

lack of a more representative racial/ethnic designation in the U.S. official census (Joseph, 2015; Marrow, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Nevertheless, the Hispanic/Latino pan-ethnic classification represents an intrinsically American racial/ethnic construction that ignores Latin American migrants' cultural diversity or spoken languages in the United States (Cebulko, 2014; Marrow, 2007; Schut, 2021).

Moreover, other factors such as undocumented status contribute to Brazilian immigrants' misrepresentation and invisibility in the United States (Beserra, 2005; Joseph, 2011; Margolis, 1993; Marrow, 2003). Although the official data shows approximately 450,000 Brazilians in the United States, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' data reports nearly 1.8 million Brazilians living there (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2021). Brazilian immigrants' cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities are misrepresented/underrepresented in American society (Tosta, 2004; Zubaran, 2008). Consequently, this population poses significant challenges to researchers seeking to represent it through quantitative, statistical methods (Joseph, 2011; Marcus, 2009).

Previous studies have explored Brazilian immigrants' racial and religious identities, encounters with discrimination, cultural representations and behaviors, motivation for immigrating, and experiences of undocumented status in the United States (see Brinkerhoff et al., 2019; Cebulko, 2014, 2018, 2021; Cebulko & Silver, 2016; Fazito & Soares, 2013; Jesus, 2020; Joseph, 2011, 2015; Marcus, 2009; Marrow, 2003; Merçon-Vargas & Tudge, 2019). Most studied immigrant or 1.5-generation adults in California, New York, or Massachusetts (which has the largest Portuguese-speaking population in the country) (see Cebulko, 2018, 2021; Ferreira, 2005; Margolis, 1993; Martes, 2007; Oliveira et al., 2020a; Oliveira et al., 2021a). However, this immigrant population remains understudied in Florida, the state with the largest concentration of Brazilian immigrants. Thus, this study aimed to investigate second-generation¹ Brazilian adolescents' experiences with their culture and HL preservation in Southwest Florida.

Brazilians Immigrants in the United States

Since the 1980s, Brazilians have come to the United States due to economic hardships and political instability (Cebulko, 2013, 2021; Goza, 1994; Margolis, 1993; Tosta, 2004). Complex factors motivate Brazilians' migration, such as curiosity, desire to learn English, better opportunities, escape from frustrated relationships, reunification with loved ones abroad, and fascination with American pop culture (Marcus, 2009). Brazilians' migration represents "a project of upward social mobility... [in which] their ultimate goal is to accomplish the American dream, not in the United States, but in Brazil after the U.S. migration" (Joseph, 2011, p. 172). Many Brazilians become undocumented in the United States after

¹ Second-generation or children of immigrants are used interchangeably to designate the U.S.-born descendants of Brazilian immigrants in the United States.

overstaying tourist visas; they are then forced to take on physically demanding jobs with improper work visa authorization (Gonçalves, 2012; Siqueira, 2008).

Although undocumented Brazilians share challenges with other immigrant groups, like discrimination and fear of deportation (Joseph, 2011), their illegality is less explicit. They differ because they are racially white or white-passing and are fluent in English (Cebulko, 2021). Notably, the notions of race/ethnicity in Brazil and the United States are essentially different. While the latter is more polarized between the white-Black binary, the former defines race/ethnicity on a continuum through self-identification (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2016; Joseph, 2015; Petruccelli & Saboia, 2013). Besides, in Brazil, “anyone with any European ancestry at all is defined as ‘potentially white,’ or at least ‘not black.’ This has made whiteness a much more inclusive category in Brazil than in the USA” (Marrow, 2003, p. 428). While many Brazilian immigrants self-classify as racially White in the United States, distancing themselves from the Hispanic/Latino label and experience of otherness, they are perceived as nonwhite and Hispanic/Latino by Americans (Margolis, 1993; Martes, 2007; Schut, 2021). Therefore, the unique racialization process of Brazilian immigrants in the United States is “one of the dilemmas of Brazilian identity construction” (McDonnell & Lourenço, 2009, p. 242).

Another Brazilian demographic distinction is their socioeconomic status and education. Generally, Brazilian immigrants have middle to upper socioeconomic status origins in Brazil and more education than the general Brazilian population (Joseph, 2011; Schut, 2021). Brazilian immigrants can somewhat blend into mainstream American neighborhoods. Consequently, attaining American citizenship allows them to fully enjoy “the benefits and privileges of white, middle-class Americans” (Cebulko, 2013, p. 3).

The increase in Brazilian immigrants and their descendants in the United States raises questions concerning second-generation children and adolescents’ challenges maintaining Portuguese as their heritage language (HL) and preserving their culture (Green, 2011; Mota, 2008; Sales & Loureiro, 2008). While Sales and Loureiro (2008) analyzed the insertion of first-generation adolescents in Massachusetts into American society through school and work, Mota (2008) examined immigrant families’ perspectives on their past and present language behavior in Brazil and the United States, respectively. Although Oliveira recently conducted studies on Brazilian immigrant children in an elementary public dual-language school program in the northeastern United States (Oliveira et al., 2020a; Oliveira et al., 2020b; Oliveira et al., 2021a; Oliveira et al., 2021b), few studies have addressed second-generation adolescents’ experiences with HL and culture preservation, particularly outside educational settings. As Sales and Loureiro (2008) indicated, it is significant to study children of Brazilian immigrants who are U.S.-born to understand their experiences acculturating or assimilating into American culture. In particular, it is crucial to consider the effects of immigrant families’ long-term undocumented status on their descendants’ sense of belonging, HL and culture preservation, and ethnic identity development (Desai et al., 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the lived

experiences of second-generation Brazilian adolescents with culture and HL preservation in Southwest Florida.

Heritage Language Maintenance

Central to the changing demographics in the United States is how immigrants transmit their culture and HL to their descendants (Potowski, 2004; Wong-Fillmore, 2000). Retaining culture and HL gives immigrant families a sense of belonging and develops their descendants' ethnic and social identity (Cho, 2000; Gaudet & Clément, 2005; Li, 1999; Nesteruk et al., 2015; Ricento, 2015). However, children of immigrants face pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture (and therefore often lose their HL). Policies and attitudes can revile bilingualism and pressure language-minority students to transition to all-English classrooms (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009). As a result, children of immigrants often experience negative ethnic identity development, cultural and linguistic assimilation, and complete HL loss within three generations (Nesteruk, 2010; Wiley, 2015). These challenges are exacerbated by discrimination (Montrul, 2013).

In the United States, HL is defined as a language other than English spoken by immigrants and their children and closely associated with their cultural background (Cho et al., 2004; Krashen, 1998). Heritage speakers who were "raised in a home where a non-English-language is spoken... may speak or merely understand the heritage language and [are], to some degree, bilingual in English and the heritage language" (Valdés, 2005, p. 412).

The benefits of maintaining an HL transcend cognitive or academic achievement; an HL represents sociocultural identity, self-respect, and a sense of belonging to an ethnic community (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009; Lee, 2013; Nesteruk et al., 2015; Ricento, 2015). Also, HL proficiency fosters positive relationships with other HL speakers (Cho, 2000; Cho et al., 2004) and an HL connects "individuals, societies, and countries beyond the boundaries of nation-states" (Kwon, 2017, p. 497).

However, many pressures push immigrants to shift to English, including their children's desire for social inclusion and sociopolitical and ideological forces (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009; Wiley, 2015). Language can set Americans apart from outsiders and is proof of "acceptance of and loyalty to the American ideal" (Wong-Fillmore, 2000, p. 207). Thus, children of immigrants often forgo their HL by the time they reach adulthood, even if this distances them from their families (Montrul, 2013; Nesteruk, 2010).

The study of Hispanic/Latino cultural preservation has included the intersection of second language acquisition and schooling experiences (Halpern et al., 2019; Henderson et al., 2020; Potowski, 2004; Reznicek-Parrado et al., 2018; Wilson, 2012). However, previous studies have not specified which ethnic groups they investigated, obscuring Latin American migrants' diversity of cultures and spoken languages (Cebulko, 2014; Schut, 2021).

Ethnic Identity Development

The ethnic identity development framework used in this study investigated participants' identity, self-concept, and ethnic community membership in relation to their culture and language preservation efforts (Phinney, 1989, 1992; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). Ethnic identity involves combined factors that connect an individual to an ethnic group and can impact acculturation processes (González et al., 2017). An individual's self-concept and ethnic identity are directly associated with their attitudes towards their ethnic group, and their cultural pride, knowledge, and positive perceptions of belonging to that group (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009).

Ethnic identity development is particularly relevant to minority group adolescents (Gay, 1978; González et al., 2017). Adolescents' "increased cognitive abilities, more interactions outside their community, and greater concern with appearance and social life" (Phinney, 1989, p. 35) make them more aware of their ethnic label and its meanings (Gay, 1978). In fact, ethnic identity and socialization in minority group adolescents are strengthened by exploration, positive perceptions of in-group norms, and quality contact with peers, family, and minority group community members (González et al., 2017; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017). Furthermore, positive family ethnic socialization increases adolescents' ethnic exploration, resolution, and identity development over time (Constante et al. 2020; Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Huguley et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, because adolescence is a critical period of ego identity formation, Erikson (1968) called for attention to identity development in adolescent minority groups, as they are likely to internalize the dominant society's negative views. In sum, ethnic identity development among youth is a combination of their positive attitudes, beliefs, exploration, sense of affirmation, pride, and belonging related to their ethnic group (Constante et al. 2020; Huguley et al., 2019; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009, 2014). Moreover, it is crucial to understand how minority groups negotiate their ethnic identity development alongside their national (American) identities (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Therefore, ethnic identity development and HL maintenance are critical ways for minority groups to resist assimilation and political hegemony in the United States (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Phinney, 1989; Suarez, 2002). Therefore, we aimed to answer the following research question: What is the essence of second-generation Brazilian adolescents' lived experiences with HL and culture maintenance?

Researchers' Positionalities

Researchers must examine their positionality in relation with the phenomenon to bracket experiences, reflect upon the data, and uncover assumptions to reduce bias (Van Manen, 1990). The first author is a Brazilian doctoral student in the United States with a research agenda in multicultural/multilingual education. As a Brazilian immigrant, she considered the influence of her proximity to the study phenomenon. On the one hand, she took advantage of her cultural and linguistic background to bridge gaps and translate—literally and metaphorically—the participants' words and expressions for the other researchers. On the other hand, she knew she might overlook certain information, as findings are permeated with a researchers' epistemological stances (Velho, 1978). Thus, a socio-anthropological stance allowed her to transform the familiar into the exotic (DaMatta, 1978). She questioned her assumptions about second-generation immigrants and her experiences as a Brazilian immigrant herself, exploring and clarifying the narrated experiences to make them visible and meaningful.

Both the second and third authors were outsiders to the Brazilian culture and language. The second author is an American high-school social studies teacher and graduate student with research interests in multicultural and multilingual education. The third author is a Turkish-Kurdish multicultural education professor and human rights activist with a research agenda in multicultural and bilingual education.

Finally, following Berreman's (1962/1980) assertions, the authors were aware that the participants and themselves, either consciously or not, could select what to reveal or conceal during the study. This is particularly relevant when individuals know that they are being observed and may protect aspects of their subjectivities despite the researchers' efforts to create comfortable settings for data collection.

Method

A phenomenological approach was used in this study to gain a deep understanding of the participants' lived experiences with HL and culture preservation (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990, 2014). We considered the participants' lived experiences in retrospect (Moustakas, 1994), regardless of whether the phenomenon was "real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 94). Finally, the ontological and philosophical standpoints of multiple realities and social constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2018) reminded us that the participants' perspectives were socially

constructed and products of social interactions (Berger & Luckmann 1985; Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1982).

Participants and Sampling

After receiving institutional review board approval (Protocol #S2021-16), the first author published a recruitment message in Portuguese on social media groups for Brazilians in Southwest Florida. Members of these social media groups included religious leaders, small business owners, and parents. As key informants were identified, the first author contacted the potential participants' parents via e-mail and messaging applications to invite them to an interview. Snowball sampling resulted in 13 second-generation Brazilians (Patton, 2015).

The volunteer participants had similar immigrant status, family background, and socioeconomic status. All were born in the United States to Brazilian immigrant parents who had lived in the country for nearly two decades and belonged to lower- to middle-class families. Most of the participants' parents were undocumented immigrants, while others had recently attained citizenship after years of undocumented status. The participants were 12- to 18-year-old middle and high school students who spoke Portuguese and English. One participant spoke Spanish as a third language. Despite being born in the United States, all the participants stated that they were Brazilians.

The participants and their parents signed assent and consent forms before the interviews that explained their rights of non-participation and non-response and that they would be assigned pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of their identities. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic profiles.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Grade	Race/Ethnicity
Sarah	F	12	6 th	Brazilian
Bianca	F	16	11 th	Brazilian
Antônio	M	15	9 th	Brazilian
Vinicius	M	17	11 th	Brazilian
José	M	16	10 th	Brazilian
Gabriela	F	17	11 th	Brazilian
Isadora	F	13	7 th	Brazilian
Bernardo	M	18	12 th	Brazilian
Joaquim	M	14	7 th	Brazilian
João	M	17	11 th	Brazilian
Daniel	M	14	8 th	Brazilian
Carlos	M	17	12 th	Brazilian
Débora	F	18	12 th	Brazilian

Note. Race/ethnicity was based on the participants' self-identification. F= Female, M= Male.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with five participants (Van Manen, 2014). Despite being offered online interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants preferred to be interviewed in person at convenient locations. Two participants (Bianca and Sarah) were sisters and were interviewed together. The interviews were 60 to 75 minutes each.

Initially, we planned to focus on second-generation Brazilian adolescents' experiences maintaining their HL and Brazilian culture while learning English as a second language in American schools. However, during the interviews, we realized that the participants, who were born in the United States, did not remember learning English. Hence, we followed the process of phenomenological reduction (Van Manen, 2014) and adapted the interview protocol to be more guided by the participants' lived experiences (Grbich, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants directed us to the experience of their *Brazilian identity* and its meanings beyond linguistic matters.

As the snowball participant sampling process continued, a key informant invited her friends' children to participate in the study as a group. We adapted the interview protocol to a focus group format with eight individuals of similar backgrounds (Patton, 2015). Six were brothers and sisters (Daniel and Bernardo, Gabriela and Isadora, and João and Joaquim), and two were friends (Débora and Carlos). We focused on significant issues that affected them, mainly about their Brazilian identity, and listened to what each had to say spontaneously (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The focus group questions and setting (a small Brazilian restaurant owned by one of the key informants, commonly frequented by the participants and their families) were carefully planned to "create a permissive and nonthreatening environment" (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 20).

Follow-up comments and clarifications were collected from the participants and their parents via mobile messaging applications (e.g., Messenger and WhatsApp) using text and voice notes (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Field notes, including our interpretations of and reactions to the participants' experiences, added richness to the data collection process (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

The interviews and focus group were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were sent to the participants for member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Notably, the participants and first researcher translanguaged from Portuguese to English when speaking of critical aspects of the Brazilian and American languages and cultures. The excerpts in Portuguese were translated to English for analysis by the research team.

In order to increase the study's accuracy and credibility, we triangulated the data; we analyzed the transcripts separately and then compared our interpretations to check for potential bias and inconsistencies (Patton, 2015). The data were analyzed thematically to "extract essences and essentials of participant meanings" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 4). As the initial codes emerged, we refined them into relevant themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) through an iterative, interpretative, reflective, and non-linear procedure in which we considered our subjectivities and insights for theme development (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

Findings

The thematic data analysis resulted in three themes: (1) "I'm Brazilian, not Brazilian American," (2) "Brazilian runs in our blood," and (3) "my language is my power." The participants' lived experiences centered on their Brazilian identity and refusal to identify as American citizens, which were rooted in family traditions and community-based interactions. Moreover, the participants regarded their ability to speak Brazilian Portuguese as a sign of power and affirmation of their ethnic identities rather than a source of discrimination or a minority language.

Theme One: "I'm Brazilian, Not Brazilian American"

The first theme centered on the participants' Brazilian ethnic identity. Despite being American citizens from birth, the participants declared, unanimously, that they were *Brazilians*. Different layers of their Brazilian identity were unveiled, from their attempt to set themselves apart from their American peers to their refusal to take ownership of their American citizenship. More than defining their identities as Brazilian, the participants felt uncomfortable identifying as Americans. Joaquim said, "It's boring to say we're American; it's fun being different." Carlos explained,

If I go up to someone at school and say, 'Oh, I'm American' [saying it with disdain] they're also American, and there's nothing special about that. But if you go up to someone and say you're Brazilian, they'll be more curious. So, I guess it's fun to have that attention.

Other participants echoed the sentiment of standing out, particularly at school. Daniel talked about his pride in saying he was Brazilian; "It's better saying that you're Brazilian because you want to be different. And I don't know a single Brazilian who doesn't want to be Brazilian. We're always like, 'Look at me, I'm Brazilian!'"

The participants described moments when their schoolmates asked them to speak or teach them some Portuguese or asked questions about the Brazilian culture and lifestyle. They were proud of "talking about music, Brazilian TV shows, soccer, and food" (Antônio) and "showing off clothes and accessories bought in

Brazil” to friends at school (Bianca and Sarah). In other words, they narrated moments when they felt special. Words such as “yummy and delicious food” (Sarah), “party” (Débora), “fun and mysterious” (Isadora), “colorful” (Bianca), “legit” (Daniel), “community-oriented” (Gabriela), “creative and innovative” (Joaquim), “hype” (Bernardo), “attractive” (Carlos), and “sexy” (João) permeated the participants’ narratives. Their words conveyed feelings that equated being different to feeling attractive and desired, sentiments particularly emphasized when they talked about friendships, romantic relationships, and flirting with schoolmates.

In contrast, when asked to talk about their perceptions of the American culture and identity, the participants used descriptors that emphasized indifference, such as “unoriginal” (Sarah), “basic” (Daniel), “plain and without spice” (Débora), “smart but boring” (João). Most importantly, they set Americans apart from Brazilians, claiming that “Americans don’t have a culture” (José), they “need to do something about their boring food” (Joaquim) because they “only eat hot dogs, hamburgers, and pizza” (Isadora), and they are “independent people, who just live their lives the same and to themselves” (Gabriela).

Nonetheless, Isadora pondered that “although being Brazilian is different, different isn’t always celebrated in this country.” João commented, “If we said we were Americans, they [Americans] wouldn’t believe us. They’d still look at us the same way as they see us for being Brazilian because the truth is we don’t look American.” Vinicius added that Americans have often mistaken him for Hispanic/Latino “because I look like I have Spanish heritage.” The participants told stories of discrimination rooted in their appearance that increased their desire to set themselves apart from Americans:

Once I told a kid I was Brazilian, and he literally looked me in the eye and said, ‘Go back to Brazil!’ It was pretty annoying because he’s always bragging about his Irish culture. But it’s all these right-sided people who do that. They don’t understand why they can say these things about us when nobody says anything about them. (Sarah).

Similarly, Débora talked about racist incidents against her mother that resulted in them moving to another community.

Bernardo and his brother, Daniel, said that being from a racially mixed (African American and White) family “makes it worse because you add that to speaking another language, and you get a group of Americans judging you even harder, giving us a dirty look, getting up and leaving [the restaurant] to stay away from us.” Carlos added, “Americans do the same to all my friends who are different because they just want to hate on.” Consequently, they revealed another reason for not wanting to take ownership of their American identity, summarized by Gabriela:

White Americans are being portrayed poorly on the news nowadays, with racism growing dramatically, not even against just Brazilians or Blacks, but also Chinese, killing innocent people, which is just not right. So, we take ownership of being Brazilian because we don’t want the American title; we

just live here. I don't want to sound American because I don't want to be associated with that group.

Therefore, to navigate America's perceived complicated and racially codified society, the participants held onto their Brazilian roots. They grounded themselves in their positive perceptions of the Brazilian culture (e.g., food, partying, clothing, and other elements), using their Brazilian identity to shield them from being associated with a racist America that they were not proud of, while also standing out among friends and schoolmates.

Theme Two: "Brazilian Runs in Our Blood"

The participants defined their Brazilian identity as rooted in cultural traditions, linguistic heritage, family ties, and connections with the Brazilian community in Southwest Florida, which contributed to their rejection of being called Americans or Brazilian Americans. Gabriela said, "Our parents are Brazilians; we grew up in that culture and lifestyle and, of course, speaking Portuguese at home. So, that's who we are." Bernardo echoed this perspective: "We can't say we're American because that doesn't run in our blood. Our blood is Brazilian. So, if we were to deny that, it'd be like saying we're ashamed of being who we really are." Débora added, "We grew up around Brazilian culture, food, and everything; so, I don't feel like I'm American, even though I am, because we have never been brought up that way." The participants' family-rooted identities became more explicit as they declared the importance of honoring their family, cultural, and linguistic heritage and experiences within the Southwest Florida Brazilian community. As Gabriela explained,

We say we're Brazilian to take ownership of who our parents are and the experiences they had coming here, to kind of keep bringing it down [to the next generations]. When we have kids, we'll honor our parents, saying that our heritage is Brazilian; that's where we all came from.

Other participants said it was their "dream to have our kids be raised as Brazilians like we did" (Carlos).

Notably, the male participants emphasized their desire to marry Brazilian women to preserve their family's cultural and linguistic heritage, despite living in the United States. They highlighted "Brazilian women being more affectionate than American girls" (Antônio), which made it "super important [for them] to marry a Brazilian woman" (João). Bernardo added, "It'd be special [to marry a Brazilian] because if the wife is American, the child will most likely never speak Portuguese. But, if the wife is Brazilian, the child will speak Portuguese and whatever other language they want."

Although the participants emphasized honoring their heritage and their hopes to pass it onto their children, paradoxically, when asked to provide concrete examples of their experiences with Brazilian culture and language, the participants

choked. They stated their love for Brazilian food, soccer, music, and behaviors; however, these elements might seem superficial to Brazilians in Brazil. In other words, the participants' Brazilian identities seemed to be rooted in family and emotional experiences rather than concrete ones. Notably, most of the participants had visited Brazil only a few times, staying with family members as tourists for no more than three weeks; none had had the experience of being a Brazilian "native" in Brazil.

Theme Three: "My Language is My Power"

The participants defined speaking Portuguese as a synonym for power rather than perceiving it as a minority language. In fact, the participants retained their HL and tended to actively resist assimilation into the dominant culture. They talked about Portuguese with pride, saying that it sparked curiosity among their schoolmates: "When I say I'm Brazilian, they [schoolmates] ask me to say something in Portuguese, because they think it's cool; it's a new language for them, so they want to hear what it sounds like" (Isadora). Despite feeling bothered that Americans often refer to their HL as *Brazilian* instead of Portuguese, the participants were proud to say they spoke Portuguese, as this set them apart from Hispanics, as exemplified by the following quotes:

There are so many Hispanics here [in the United States] that they [Americans] don't believe us when we say we're Brazilian. So, they ask us to say something in '*Brazilian*' to test us and prove to them we're not Hispanics. So, I do it with pride to show I'm Brazilian and I can speak Portuguese, not Spanish. (João)

At school, people say things like, 'Oh, you're Brazilian? Where's that again?' And they automatically assume Portuguese is like Spanish. Then, I get on my little speech, my teaching moment, I guess, where I explain it's not the same thing. Portuguese is not Spanish like Latino is not Brazilian, but they just don't understand that. (Sarah)

Participants were aware that Spanish speakers in the United States are often discriminated against by individuals who push English as the national language, which could discourage them from speaking Spanish in public.

Conversely, the participants' experiences with their HL were defined by power, pride, and confrontation. Bernardo said, "Knowing that I can speak a language no one can, that I'm able to say things that no one will understand, that's my power." Débora added,

I use this power to confront them [Americans], to show them I can speak two languages while they can't. Sometimes I even respond back in Portuguese, so they *back off* of even trying to make me feel bad for saying I'm Brazilian. Because I can speak it [Portuguese], they can't.

Several similar accounts followed these comments. José pondered that speaking two languages “makes [him] feel cocky, more privileged than others because [he’s] had the opportunity to learn another language. But it also made [him] feel bad for the others who haven’t had that chance.”

Others like Antônio also shared stories of speaking Portuguese in public to challenge monolingual Americans:

To be able to speak Portuguese in this country is a matter of power. *It is power.* I love being Brazilian; so, if anyone tries to say anything hurtful about that, I ask them, ‘How many languages do you speak?’ Because I know they can only speak one. So, I say, ‘Well, I speak two’ [in a conceited tone], and I speak Portuguese to their faces because they don’t understand, and then they shut up. So, I use this against them, so they know that speaking two languages is my power.

Besides speaking Portuguese in public to defy Americans, they also spoke it in public as a secret, private language. The participants described social moments, even while shopping in a supermarket, where they chose to speak Portuguese with family members knowing that no one would understand them. José said, “When we’re in public and we need to say something in private, and we’re around other people, we’ll talk in Portuguese because people don’t know what we’re talking about. So, we don’t need to whisper.” Sisters Bianca and Sarah agreed, saying that “it’s our secret language; we use it to gossip or to say things about people because we know they won’t understand.” They narrated these incidents with humor, saying that they were fully aware that those around them might be wondering what they were saying. In each context, the participants said they continued to speak Portuguese confidently, knowing that it was part of their power not to be understood by Americans.

Nonetheless, their Portuguese use was mainly confined to moments with Brazilian friends in the Southwest Florida region, their own parents, and family members who still lived in Brazil. The participants admitted that they talked to their parents with a “mix of Portuguese and English” because they did not feel entirely comfortable speaking Portuguese, a sign of language assimilation. Moreover, the participants’ preference for being interviewed in English rather than in Portuguese could also point to language assimilation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate second-generation Brazilian adolescents’ experiences with culture and HL preservation in Southwest Florida, United States. The findings unveiled layers of the participants’ lived experiences, from the centrality of their Brazilian identity to the need to set themselves apart from the Hispanic/Latino racial/ethnic categorization and to reject an American identity. The findings also revealed their perception of Portuguese as a source of power and a form of resistance against social, cultural, and linguistic assimilation.

When asked to define their race/ethnicity, the participants did not hesitate to respond “Brazilian” (Marrow, 2003; Schut, 2021). Notably, different aspects contributed to their Brazilian identity. They affirmed that their “blood” was Brazilian, emphasizing that their identity was rooted in family heritage rather than in official designations or citizenship, and their wish to perpetuate their culture and HL in the future (Nesteruk et al., 2015; Sales, 2007; Sales & Loureiro, 2008). Consistent with research on ethnic identity development, the participants’ connections to the Brazilian culture, the positive support of their family and Brazilian friends, and the sense of belonging to the Brazilian ethnic community contributed to their identity formation (Cho et al., 2004; Constante et al., 2020; DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009; González et al., 2017; Huguley et al., 2019; Lee, 2013; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Corroborating Hall’s (2000) conceptualization of identity, their Brazilian ethnic identity seemed to be constructed within and not outside of discourse as representations of their own selves. For example, they exhibited superficial knowledge of the Brazilian culture; perhaps because most had visited Brazil only once, they did not cite concrete cultural experiences beyond naming typical foods and behaviors seen as intrinsic to the Brazilian culture. Nonetheless, they felt connected to this culture, demonstrating that identity is developed as an inner experience, related to attitudinal and affectionate experiences (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Also, the participants’ Brazilian identity was built by rejecting their American identity and refusing to be labeled as Brazilian American or Hispanic/Latino. In this sense, their Brazilian identity was determined by recognizing “who I am” and “who I am not,” and was *produced* within specific historical, political, and sociocultural contexts (Hall, 2000), particularly in the face of heightened perceived racism and discrimination in the United States. In this sense, the findings indicated how the participants negotiated being American-born while identifying with their ethnic group, which led them to confront American misconceptions and biases related to their culture, language, and ethnic group membership (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Although language is a noticeable trait that sets Americans apart from outsiders and can lead to discrimination against minority language groups (Mota, 2008; Wong-Fillmore, 2000), the participants actively resisted assimilation into the dominant culture and language. This was evidenced in their descriptions of freely speaking Portuguese in public spaces and responding to English language questions in Portuguese to challenge American monolingualism and impose their language, culture, and personality upon peers. Thus, the findings show they did not always follow the common pattern for Hispanic/Latino immigrants of assimilation and loss of HL. In fact, the participants’ representations of their ethnic identity and HL became “relevant and visible symbol[s] of belonging” to their ethnic group (Mota, 2008, p. 331), as elements of their heritage language and culture were preserved as a sign of respect for their parents’ culture and strong co-ethnic community experiences (Portes et al., 2009).

The participants perceived Portuguese as a source of power and a “secret language.” Thus, they used Portuguese in public spaces to intentionally confront

and exclude others, affirming their ethnic identity and making themselves visible to Americans (Mota, 2008). The participants' Brazilian ethnic identity and "Portuguese as power" attitude took the form of resistance against social, cultural, and linguistic assimilation (Mota, 2008; Suarez, 2002). In addition, the participants' perceptions of Portuguese as a source of power before their monolingual American peers reinforced the value of bilingualism in American society (Bialystok, 2011; Cho, 2000; Gaudet & Clément, 2005; Li, 1999). Furthermore, even though studies indicate that second-generation immigrants tend to become Americanized, often experiencing negative ethnic identity development and cultural and linguistic assimilation (Mackey, 2013; Montrul, 2013; Nesteruk, 2010; Nesteruk et al., 2015; Wong-Fillmore, 2000), the participants in this study demonstrated a stronger connection with their Brazilian roots and identities.

Finally, the participants were fully aware of their ethnic label and its challenges and meanings in American society (Gay, 1978; Nesteruk et al., 2015). They emphasized the fun and value of being different from their American peers (Nesteruk et al., 2015). At the same time, they recognized the negative impacts of discrimination rooted in misconceptions of Brazilian versus Hispanic/Latino identities and the intersectionality of ethnicity, race, and language, particularly for those of mixed races who were often mistaken for African Americans. The participants' concerns with their appearance and social life, typical of adolescents (Phinney, 1989), were marked by their desire to feel special and attractive among friends and in romantic and flirting interactions with schoolmates

The main limitation of this study was its small number of participants. Future, larger studies could include the voices of parents and family members to triangulate different perspectives on Brazilian identity and HL preservation. These results could then be generalized to other second-generation Brazilians living in Florida or the United States.

In conclusion, the study's findings call for expanding the understanding of multiracial/ethnic identities in the United States (Halpern & Aydin, 2021) and challenge the tendency (even in scientific studies) to naturalize demographic labels without investigating their real pertinence. Our findings demonstrate that such labels may obscure individuals' identities, such as second-generation adolescents' Brazilian identity, which does not fit into the Hispanic/Latino pan-ethnic categorization. By avoiding such labels, the findings evidenced relevant aspects of HL preservation, ethnic identity development and affirmation, and a sense of belonging to the Brazilian ethnic community that could, otherwise, be underestimated. Finally, the study's findings revealed a sense of Brazilian identity and belonging rooted in family, cultural, and linguistic heritages rather than in theoretical definitions of citizenship among immigrants' descendants.

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