The American Dream in Flux: Brazilian Immigrants’ Experiences of Living, Working and ‘Becoming’ American

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The American Dream in Flux:
Brazilian Immigrants’ Experiences of Living, Working and ‘Becoming’ American

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Preface

As I began to write this thesis I became incredibly uncomfortable with the truth I already knew, but had yet to accept: I would never be able to perfectly present the Brazilian immigrant experience to my readers. And yet, I set out on this journey seeking to provide slices of the immigrant experience to a broader audience in hopes that these insights might broaden the reader’s perspective – as it has certainly done to mine. Therefore as you set out to read my thesis, I ask that you keep this piece of knowledge in mind. The immigrant experience cannot be summarized, generalized or understood completely by those who have not lived it themselves. Perhaps even two immigrants from the same small town in Brazil could never fully understand the other’s motivations, experiences and dreams – as I foolishly set out to do in two semesters worth of literature and conversation.

What I hope to portray with some certainty is the power of a story, especially for those who are on the margins of American society. As a double major in Sociology and Psychology, I often find myself drawing parallels between the two courses of study, and this thesis is no exception. In Small, Loewenstein, and Slovic’s study on sympathy and callousness, participants donated more than twice the amount of money to a cause when the recipient was identified as Rokia, a 7-year-old girl from Mali, Africa, than when the money went support food shortages plaguing the continent of Africa (Small, Loewenstein, and Slovic, 2007). The researchers aptly call Rokia the “identifiable victim.” In some ways that is the point of this thesis, to make the 150,000 Brazilian immigrants in the state of Massachusetts “identifiable” to the reader. And just as Rokia becomes more worth of support through her identity, I hope that in the pages of this thesis I give Brazilian immigrants both identity and worth.
Introduction

There are an estimated 150,000 Brazilians currently in the state of Massachusetts living, working, and creating a life as immigrants in the “nation of immigrants” (McDonnell and de Lourenco, 2009; p. 241). The population often goes unnoticed, lost among a sea of immigrants in the landscape of Massachusetts. Occupying sub jobs, these Brazilian immigrants very often lose their status, and voices in the process of immigration to the United States. Over time, many Brazilians are able to achieve success in Massachusetts and decide to make the United States their home. Guided by the research questions: “How do Brazilian immigrants’ perceptions of the American Dream change with respect to reality and their lived experiences?” and “What are the lived experience of Brazilian immigrants?” I intend to understand this transition from temporary immigrant to permanent resident, and how the American Dream plays into these shifting expectation.

The study of Brazilian immigrants in the United States in a burgeoning field in sociology, with a small but strong field of literature paving the way for future research. Engaging with these texts, in addition to research broader immigrant experiences and the pursuit of the American Dream, this study is grounded in theory of segmented assimilation, which chronicles the immigrant experience of immigrating into the “white” Middle Class or the “minority” inner city underclass (Foner, 1997). Brazilian immigrants experience segmented assimilation both as a group, and on the interpersonal level by choosing to adapt to certain aspects of American culture, while maintaining, and even nurturing Brazilian culture in other parts of their lives. This thesis aims at exploring these aspects of immigration and assimilation, and seeks to understand more fully the segmented assimilation experienced by the individual Brazilian immigrant. I seek to
understand the immigrant experience and changing perceptions of the American Dream through in-depth interviews grounded in the narrative of Brazilians in the greater Boston area.

Beginning with Arizona Senate Bill 1070, the toughest law on undocumented immigrants in the United States, other states have emulated this measure in order to “other” the immigrant. In addition to answering my research questions, this thesis seeks to show that immigrants, and Brazilian immigrants specifically, cannot be “othered” because of the integral role they play in this country’s past, present and future. Even more than the role they play in the occupational or economic sphere, immigrants contribute to the social and cultural landscape of the United States. Their stories and experiences both uphold and challenge the American Dream; their perspectives give the United States praise, when due, but also challenge the United States to become a better place to live, work, and raise a family. Living on the margins, they are able to deconstruct American culture more clearly than those who have spent their whole lives living in it.

And so I offer you my humble analysis of these immigrants’ lives, begging you to remember they are far more nuanced than my words can portray. Their experiences are not to be understood as unwavering truths, but read as a reflection on parts of American culture and society from the Brazilian immigrant perspective. In some ways they are meant to lead to a better understanding and in others they are meant to lead only to more questions. No matter the outcome they are meant to broaden the view of those with whom these immigrants share their lives. It is my hope that this simple exchange will lead to many more of greater mutuality and understanding.
Literature Review

Defining the American Dream

Since the creation of the United States of America, immigrants have come to its shores in pursuit of a better life. Throughout time these immigrants have never been a homogenous people – their nationalities, ethnicities, races, beliefs, and histories created a mosaic of lives more diverse than nation the were about to enter. And yet they came and continue to come – compelled by one universal, unifying principle: the pursuit of the American Dream. Remarkable about the journey is that despite the diversity of the migrating people expectations of life in the United States persist. The expectations are two-fold, and rely on the central tenant that hard work begets success. Dreamers believe first that in the United States “they have a reasonable chance to achieve success through their own efforts” and second that this success can be attained “regardless of their background or origin” (Cohen-Marks and Stout, 2011; p. 824).

Understanding hard work and the democratic model as the vehicle to success in the United States, the pertinent question then becomes ‘what is success?’ It would be unwise to suggest that there is one definition of success – there are, perhaps, as many definitions of success as there are people in this country – however, in the case of the American Dream success is most broadly defined by assimilation into the Middle Class (Clark, 2003; p. 4). The next question, naturally, is ‘what is the Middle Class?’ or rather ‘who is the Middle Class?’ Responses vary tremendously in how to measure class and what parameters mark the upper and lower edges of the “middle.” Clark (2003) defines the Middle Class as roughly 1 to 5 times the poverty line (for a family of 4), which in 2000 designated 31 million households as Middle Class. Of these 31 million households, 2.7 million had foreign born heads of houses, accounting for 20% of all foreign born and 8.6% of middle-class households in total. Clark (2003) additionally draws
attention to the importance of homeownership in the designation of Middle Class. The opportunity allotted by homeownership allows families to participated in fully in “Middle Class” social endeavors, and the security ensures families can do so comfortably.

While the American Dream is understood here as the pursuit of material success, it is important to understand that it is not limited to these narrow parameters – particularly for those escaping lives of limited personal freedom. Hanson and Zogby’s (2010) U.S. public opinion polls reveal that from 1998 to 2001 respondents were more likely to consider the American dream mainly about “spiritual fulfillment” rather than “achieving material goods.” This number, however, showed a 5-point decrease from 1998 to 2001 as the number of respondents selecting “material goods” showed an 11-point increase.

As the Pew Research Center (2011) reports in their studies on the “American-Western European Values Gap,” the American Dream manifests in attitudes rather than realities. Of the 5 nations polled (US, Germany, Spain, Britain, France) United States Americans are the least likely to attribute success to forces outside of their control with only 36% of respondents answering this question in the affirmative. A college degree further diminishes this belief, as only 22% of college graduates feel that success is outside of their control. The same study reports United States Americans value the “freedom to pursue life’s goals” without state interference over ensuring that “nobody is in need.” Of the five other countries polled, all European and first world, not one shared this sentiment. So what makes the American Dream uniquely American is the opportunity and fairness of success, and the autonomy to claim ownership of what one has achieved. The American Dream is not just living well and freely, but knowing that the cause of success is your actions alone. This is the Dream – not success but ownership of success.
In recent years the United States has seen a shift in sentiment as more Americans become disenfranchised with unquestioning adherence to the American Dream and the message that hard work leads to success. Hanson and Zogby’s (2010) public opinion poll revealed that from 2001 to 2008 Americans felt more dissatisfied with the opportunity to get ahead by working hard. The number of respondents who felt “very dissatisfied” with this opportunity sharply increased from 8 to 14 percent. For those Americans who were “not too satisfied” or “not at all satisfied” the number increased from 33 to 59% in the years of 2000 to 2007. On the other end of the spectrum, respondents who were “very satisfied” with the ability to get ahead by working hard decreased from 25 to 12 percent in the same years, securing a marked shift in attitudes of those working to get ahead in the United States’ workforce.

These sentiments are not limited to the polls. The “Occupy Wall Street” movement, beginning in New York City to combat economic inequality, unemployment and greed on September 17, 2011 has spread across the country to over 100 US cities (occupywallstreet.org/about). The venue may be different but the message is the same: level the playing field, create more opportunity and revive the middle class. And the public has noticed – from kitchen tables to college classrooms to the oval office, the ideals behind “Occupy Wall Street” have become a major center of conversation. In a December 6, 2011 speech in Osawatomie, Kansas, President Obama referred to the protestors and their mission, claiming that they are not, in fact, 1% or 99% values, but rather American values “when everyone gets a fair shot, when everyone does their fair share, when everyone plays by the same rules.” No longer fighting to live, Americans are fighting to revive the American Dream.
Achieving the American Dream through Assimilation

As a “quintessentially immigrant nation,” immigrants to America hold a unique position in relationship to the American Dream. They come to America’s shores not to maintain, but to change their lives: to improve their future through hard work and individual effort. Immigrants to the United States largely believe in the individual model of success not just for themselves but also for others. They adhere to the belief that hard work begets success and hold both themselves and others to that standard. Their adherence to and belief in the Dream suggests that they do not just participate in the American Dream, but are greatly responsible for its maintenance and significance in American society (Mahler, 1995). In face, Cohen-Marks and Stout (2011) report that native-born citizens are the least likely to believe that they will achieve the American Dream in their lifetime, affirming the integral role played by immigrants in the development and maintenance of the American Dream. Noncitizens are 14% more likely and naturalized citizens are 11% more optimistic about achieving the American Dream. Hanson and Zogby’s (2010) US public opinion poll reports similar findings, and found that native-born respondents see the American Dream to be most alive in the immigrant population.

For the European immigrants of the past, the “original” immigrants to this nation, achieving the American Dream – or becoming ‘American’ – included linguistic, cultural, economic and social assimilation – to do so meant securing “economic security for oneself and social mobility for one’s children.” Times, laws and public sentiment have changed, however, and the largely minority immigrants now moving to the United States face different challenges and requirements in order to earn their “Americanness,” if it is even sought after. Having strayed from its original context, to “become American” for modern immigrants can take on several different meanings. Described as “finding a meaningful place in the society of which they are
the newest members” and “skillfulness in American culture,” Rumbaut and Beserra capture the vague social assimilation bound to Americanization (Portes, 1996; Beserra, 2003). Waters, who conducted in-depth research on West Indian immigrants, defines this experience of Americanization as “access to consumer goods and full participation in materialistic culture” (Waters, 2001).

Waters notes in a similar fashion as Rumbaut and Beserra that becoming American relates to opportunity, freedom for self-determination and a higher standard of living. With these gains, however, certain losses are sustained. The West Indian immigrants interviewed in Water’s “Black Identities” addressed the lack of community in the United States correlated with a personal and societal emphasis on individual success. This is emphasized in contrast to their home lives where familial and social support are central to daily life and provide both emotional and practical support, generally in the form of family values and childcare. These immigrants specifically point to loss of family values as most damaged by the material and monetary pursuits of the American Dream, which requires increased time spent at work, and therefore decreased time spent with one’s family (Waters, 2001).

“Becoming American” can provide a source of conflict between parents and children, who encounter different experiences, pressures and therefore requirements in the process of acculturation. Portes and Rumbaut explore three processes of acculturation among first generation immigrants and their children (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). In the first case, a great deal of support is gained through the acculturation of both parents and children, whose experiences mimic each other’s. When parents are unable to keep up with their children’s acculturation, conflict may result as children experience upward assimilation, social, and economic gain; while their parents experience the reverse. Teen participation in the underground
economy is often to account for parental-child dissonance of social and economic needs (Waters, 2001). In higher density areas, immigrants tend to experience a selective acculturation where ethnic values and American values are balanced to create a state of partial assimilation that results in less conflict between parents and children in addition to greater parental control (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

Stroll (2009) writes of the “long conversation” in which each immigrant participates that questions the meaning of belonging in a nation that is, at its very roots, a multi-ethnic immigrant nation. This conversation asks what it is to be American. Is what Americans share implicit in the unique designation of being American or is it simply a shared pursuit of freedom and consumption? Clark (2003) finds the latter to be truer, emphasizing the “overproduction” and “orgy of consumption” promoted by so-called American values such as the American Dream (p. 4). In a society based fundamentally on capital, no entity is free from the draw of commodification. Even the human entity is subject to commodification – meaning that, at times, capitalism’s material needs become more important than the individual’s socio-emotional needs. In these experiences individualism prevails over the greater good.

Immigrants, too, find themselves subject to this difficult decision-making. Mahler (1995) writes of immigrants working against rather than with each other, drawn away from their community and towards the dollar instead. While their communities at home fostered reciprocal and cooperative relationships, in the United States these immigrants find these same relationships commodified. This is not a selfish decision, but rather a method of self-preservation. While immigrants struggle to create a life for themselves stateside they must also find the material to support the transnational needs of their families and networks at home, drawing their self and their finances in two, conflicting directions (Mahler, 1995; 219).
Foner (1997) writes of the immigrant family in the context of cultural changes and legacies – the transition undergone by those immigrant families in their pursuit of the American Dream. Neither here nor there, the immigrant family creates a cultural context different from that in their home country and different from that in the United States. Traditions are born anew, blending with American culture to produce edited versions of those celebrated at home. Even the immigrant family structure and dynamic is not free from Americanization, as their own values and beliefs run up against mainstream American culture “concerning marriage, family and kinship.” The overabundance of social pressure through multiple media outlets makes this reality particularly difficult to ignore (Foner, 1997; p. 970). The result of responses to new challenges faced by the immigrant families, these cultural changes give meaning to their new life in the United States.

Foner (1997) does not write just of change, but of legacy – both the legacies created in the United States and those left back home through families, communities, and cultures. Transnational social networks alleviate social isolation that is experienced as a result of immigration, helping immigrants to preserve their cultural identity. The discrimination all too often imposed on immigrants negatively impacts this cultural identity, as immigrants feel the pressure to assimilate and lose their cultural roots. The maintenance of transnational ties assists in nourishing these cultural roots and communities of support. Yet, it is important to understand that these networks can also be draining, physically and emotionally. Negative consequences associated with the maintenance of transnational relationships include the high financial burden associated with maintaining a modest life on a modest income life in the United States, and still finding money to send back home. Furthermore, travel and communication expenses place
additional financial burdens on working parents as they struggle to maintain their ethnic identity despite living away from their homeland (Domínguez and Lubitow, 2008).

*Factors Affecting Achievement of the American Dream*

Perceived or real barriers can effect an immigrant’s assimilation into mainstream, Middle Class culture, and therefore influence how immigrants think and experience the American Dream. In particular, linguistic, social and educational assimilation have already been identified as significant factors in immigrant experiences of the American Dream. Not all immigrants experience living the Dream, but rather experience “segmented assimilation” whereby immigrants become integrated into every sector of society. Some immigrants assimilate into the stable Middle Class and live their American Dream. Still others spend years struggling in minimum wage jobs, buying time in the lower class as they struggle to make ends meet (Foner, 1997; 966).

A number of factors, both within and beyond an individual’s control, affect one’s ability to achieve the type of material success associated with the American Dream. Some are very obvious: a family’s likelihood of entering the Middle Class increases when both parents have incomes (Clark, 2003; p. 78). Others are more abstract: the existence of social networks and family ties can offer jobs, and strategies of survival for immigrants seeking entry into the Middle Class (Foner, 1997; 961). Still others depend on the definition of Middle Class in question, as Cohen-Marks and Stout (2011) show that homeowners are 13% more likely to believe they have achieved the American Dream – this does not, however, indicate necessity. All of these factors and more combine not to determine, but to predict the possibility of achieving the American Dream.
Naturalization: For foreign-born residents, naturalization correlates with an increased perception of achieving the American Dream, and yet immigrants are often less willing to obtain American citizenship if it requires legally renounce their nationality of birth (Cohen-Marks and Stout, 2011; 833; Woodrow-Lafield, et al., 2004; 205). A failure to naturalize does not only affect the resident in question, but his or her children who may not be eligible for certain benefits or aid without this action (Hernandez, 2004; 30). And while self evident, it is important to note that length of time an immigrant resides in the United States corresponds to a higher probability of naturalization, and likelihood of entering the Middle Class (Clark, 2003; p. 78).

Language: Related to naturalization, language assimilation or English proficiency serves as a predictor for Middle Class achievement (Clark, 2003; p. 78). Isolation from the English language can create isolation from an English society. Immigrants generally must be able to communicate in English in order to receive education, health care, or other services that contribute to overall development and the ability to participate fully and competitively in society (Hernandez, 2004; 30). Language assimilation also relates to length of time in the United States – a factor that has been shown to correlate with success. Linguistics studies note a three-generation pattern of assimilation: the first generation speaks little to no English, the second generation is bilingual (with about half English dominant), and the third generation speaking primarily, if not only English (Alba, 2006; 291; Waters and Jiménez, 2005; 105).

Education: Education has a two-fold effect on achievement of the American Dream in the context of immigration, beginning in the immigrant’s achievement of the Dream and fully manifesting in the children of immigrants’ continued attainment of success. Higher education in immigrants correlates with a more optimistic attitude about achieving the American Dream (Cohen-Marks and Stout, 2011; 836). This optimism is likely very accurate, as lower education
in the American labor market is correlated with higher poverty. This problem is increasingly exacerbated as educational costs rise, income inequality reaches historically unheard of levels, and life on minimum wage becomes increasingly hard to sustain (Waters and Jiménez, 2005; 108). Clark (2003) similarly notes that education and skills training increase the probability of entering the Middle Class. The Pew Research Center’s 2011 report finds that educational achievement is particularly important in the United States due to its cross-generational effect. In the same study of 5 countries (4 Western European and the USA), economic mobility is more directly correlated with parent’s education in the United States than elsewhere. In childhood this translates to a child having higher “economic, educational, and socio-emotional outcomes” as a result of their parent’s educational attainment (Pew, 2011).

Race: Despite the relative ease of assimilation into the middle class for the European immigrants of the past, for non-white immigrants to the United States “becoming American” is a complex and often unattainable designation that can tip the balance for their inclusion or exclusion from American mainstream society and economic success. Since Polish, Italian and other Europeans have been moving to the United States from the late nineteenth century, the question of race and immigration has existed. Constantly “under question,” the immigrants’ “whiteness” has found itself inexorably bound to the their social status and Americanness (Kasinitz, 2008). This question becomes important both for the immigrant and American society to discern as it determines, in many ways, how he or she will be treated. Immigrants very quickly observe the black-white polarization that permeates many sectors of American society. This self-segregation is observed as particularly evident in housing, schools and interpersonal relationships – areas that can define a person’s social network and shape their opinions, values and future in its entirety (Merenstein, 2008). Having perceived the racialized components of
American society, immigrant parents actually strive to minimalize their children’s perception of race and racism in the United States. As addressed in the previous section, in order to subscribe the American Dream and simultaneously encourage their children to buy into the ideology of hard work and upward mobility, immigrant parents must downplay inequality and specifically racism such that it does not affect their children’s belief in success (Waters, 2001).

West Indian immigrants offer an interesting perspective on the topic of immigrants and racism, as their own race is misinterpreted in American culture as black, a label which West Indian immigrants largely reject as it ignores their Caribbean heritage. Thus “becoming American” for West Indian immigrants would suggest a downward social mobility, and as a result many immigrants choose to assimilate economically, but maintain many social cues of their origins, including accent and dress (Waters, 2001). West Indian immigrants who self-identify West Indian perform significantly better economically, often entering the Middle class, than those who identify as “American” or “immigrant.” To identify as West Indian allows these immigrants to maintain their social norms and practices and to be perceived as of a foreign ethnicity by American society. On the contrary, those who identify as “American” or “immigrant” lose their distinct social qualities and are subject instead to serious stereotypes and discrimination, particularly those who identify as “American,” and therefore are perceived as “black American” (Portes, 1996).

The racism to which West Indian immigrants are subject can manifest itself in a converse racism that immigrants have for Americans of color. The strict belief in America as a place of opportunity and equality in combination with persistent negative media portrayals of black Americans and the reality of black American’s lower status often drives West Indian immigrants to form persistent attitudes regarding race. They are more likely to regard race as an attitude
(how one dresses, talks, walks) and reduce racial inequality to personal failures – seeing racial minorities as “victims of their own individual and collective liabilities” (Portes, 1996). Desegregation is often cited for support, and these perceptions are confirmed by the invisibility of hard-working black Americans in most mainstream media (Waters, 2001).

Merenstein argues that imbedded in the American Dream is a “modern racism” that claims all individuals are treated equally, despite race. Within this ideology of equality and meritocracy fails to address America’s racialized society, attributing any failure to succeed to “natural or cultural deficiencies” rather than structural inequality (Merenstein, 2008; p. 2). This modern racism is doubly harmful for racial minorities because it calls any policy combating structural inequality as unnecessary – ensuring that these very policies and realities are maintained rather than improved. The supposed meritocracy of American society proves integral to the American Dream, as addressing the unequal treatment of individuals disproves the simple “hard work-equals-success” ethic promoted by the Dream (Merenstein, 2008).

This reality can be particularly difficult for immigrants to grasp, as more often than not the American Dream of similar ideologies have motivated their immigration. Quite simply put, immigrants to the United States do not want to believe that their race will limit success, for doing so will shake the very foundations of their American Dream (Waters, 2001). The services and libraries patronized by immigrants uphold these ideologies, strongly promoting rigid and bound definitions for being American and achieving the American Dream. Not surprisingly, both are grounded in the notion of hard work and success. When contrasted with their own lives, often defined by lower socioeconomic status, immigrants reconcile this case of cognitive dissonance by minimizing race, racism, and the lack of social mobility present in the United States. Instead
they attribute a lack of hard work – either their own or minorities’ – for any failures to succeed (Merenstein, 2008; Waters, 2001).

Second Generation (Dis)Advantage: Kasinitz writes of the “second generation advantage” garnered by the children of immigrants to the United States. By this he refers to the unique ability that second generation Americas have to combine their parent’s beliefs and practices with those they encounter in American society to create their own “norms and beliefs” (p. 87; Kasinitz, 2008). This description captures the unique cultural experience of the second generation, however, fails to encompass the daily realities of creating a life that is incongruous with that of their parents. The second generation’s race, language and culture is questioned and shaped during their youths such that their parents cannot fully understand their lived experiences. Americanization and the process of assimilation, however difficult, provide the quickest entry into the American economic mainstream for the second generation and thus prove integral in achievement of the Dream (Kasinitz, 2008).

By second-generation “Americanization,” Kasinitz speaks of linguistic, educational and occupational assimilation. These factors, he determines, create the difference that allows the second generation to perform more successfully than both their parents and racially equivalent Americans in the pursuit of economic integration (Kasinitz, 2008; Portes, 1996). This situation can create a great deal of tension within the immigrant family. Children of immigrants who thrive in the mainstream are also more likely to lose their parent’s native language and more likely to become invested in American materialist culture (Kasinitz, 2008; Waters, 2001). Unlike their parents, “becoming American” for the second generation requires valuing and consuming material goods – a need that when unfulfilled can drive these children to the
underground economy. They do not only desire, but also come to expect consumer goods at a rate that distances children from their parents’ values (Waters, 2001).

Having studied an array of immigrant children from Dominican, Colombian, West Indian, Chinese, and Russian origin in writing “The Second Generation,” Kasinitz makes broad claims that exposure to American culture and society has a positive effect on the second generation – an effect that supposedly improves performance in educational and occupational pursuits (Waters, 2001; Portes, 1996). He acknowledges an exception, confirmed in “Black Identities,” that lies within the West Indian immigrant population. Within this group exposure to American culture predicts downward mobility in educational, economic, and social achievement (Waters, 2001; Portes, 1996).

Dominant theories expose two main factors contributing to this reality. The first emphasizes West Indian immigrants’ identification with black American and the second American society’s perception of West Indian immigrants as black Americans. Without their parent’s West Indian accents, children are deemed as black and thus experience racism, an experience that drives them from this very image. For children of immigrants this reality is particularly difficult to grasp as it directly contradicts the ideology of inclusion, opportunity and equality because of which many of their parents chose to immigrate (Waters, 2001). In inner city communities, where West Indian immigrants most often find themselves, the second generation is more likely to choose racially defined identities instead of ethnic or American identities. A second, related, factor that contributes to this attitude is prejudice encountered by these individuals – who believe that they will face this no matter what level of education or success they achieve. Conversely, children of higher status who attend private schools identify more readily with non-racialized American or ethnic West Indian identities (Portes, 1996).
Other second-generation minority immigrants find themselves in a similar position of interpersonal and structural discrimination. Children of African, Puerto Rican and Dominican immigrants do less well on economic and social measures than Chinese or Russian immigrants. Dominicans attribute this to their “lower level of resources upon arrival, structural disadvantage in segregated neighborhoods, high levels of remittances sent to the Dominican Republic” (p. 300, Kasinitz, 2008). Children of African immigrants report incredible discrimination in education, an experience that gets worse with elevated education levels, a result of having to work and interact with higher-class communities. This discrimination is most often observed in lower expectations places on the African second generation in combination with stereotypes that teachers and administrators hold about their parents. While parents acknowledge the stigmatization, they strive to minimize and hide it, attributing African-Americans’ lower status to their awareness of race. For these parents and children, “being American means accepting white mentality and white culture” (p. 300, Kasinitz, 2008).

In the second generation, gender plays a significant role in determining identity, assimilation, and overall experience. Young women, on the whole, assimilate less actively into American culture. These girls are more likely to identity with hyphenated identities, and uphold their parent’s language. Young men, on the other hand, more often choose identities at the “extremes” of the spectrum and self-label as American or ethnic-national, and tend to lose their language of origin more quickly (Portes, 1996). For children of immigrants, linguistic assimilation negatively correlates with educational and occupational aspirations and success, as opposed to their parent’s generation – offering an advantage of girls in this demographic. However, second generation girls face more difficulties in emotional aspects of assimilation.
Self-esteem, depression and conflict are obstacles faced female second generation immigrants that young men don’t struggle with as often.

_Brazilians in the US and the American Dream_

Actual estimates on the number of Brazilian immigrants residing the in United States are unknown – the misinterpretation of Brazilians as Latino or Hispanic, in addition to the number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States makes the exact number difficult to determine with any accuracy. Inclusive estimates have found up to 750,000 Brazilians residing in the United States, with as many as 150,000 currently in the state of Massachusetts (McDonnell and de Lourenco, 2009; p. 241). Brazilian immigrants play such an important role in Massachusetts’ landscape that Governor Deval Patrick directed a delegation to foster economic partnership with Brazilian businesses, universities and political leadership in December 2011 (www.mass.gov).

Despite this special relationship, New England communities that host Brazilian immigrants lack an understanding of immigrants and immigration, particularly those form Portuguese-speaking nations (Jouet-Pastre and Braga, 2005; 864). Confused for Hispanics or Latinos, Brazilians are often falsely identified and their language and culture misunderstood as synonymous with the Spanish language and Latin American culture (Jouet-Pastre and Braga, 2005; Luciano and Tosta, 2004; McDonnell and de Lourenco, 2009). In an attempting to combat the inevitable label of Latino or Hispanic, Brazilian immigrants in the United States call themselves “Brazucas” to celebrate their unique ethnic and cultural identity. This pride places Brazucas in conflicting exclusive and inclusive roles. The former relates to the belief in the
dominance of their culture, the latter to their position as minorities occupying marginal roles in mainstream American society (Luciano and Tosta, 2004).

To Brazilians this dominance is not simply a point of pride but a point of survival. It does not take immigrants long to distinguish the black/white divide in the United States, nor does it take long to understand “black” as really meaning “non-white”. Brazilian immigrants therefore seek to remove from themselves the Hispanic label, understanding the implications of an inferior, non-white label in the racialized United States. However, the contradictory image of the United States as a racial democracy creates an environment where Brazilian immigrants fail to attribute mistreatment to race and understand “social friction” as a result of economic inequality rather than race inequality. The Brazuca identity, therefore, has evolved as a protective factor against racism (McDonnell and de Lourenco, 2009).

The large increase in Brazilian immigration to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s places the Brazilian immigrant in a unique population in American culture – while contributing significantly to the diversity of American society their position has not yet been solidified, in regards to race and the racial hierarchy experienced in the United States. This change has been attributed to the end of the Brazilian military government in 1985 and an inundation of American ideologies of consumption and modernity in Brazilian society, among other factors (Beserra, 2003). No matter the cause, the effect of Brazilian immigration is a dialogue on racial categorization previously unanswered. Brazilian immigrants have systematically rejected “Hispanic” and “Latino/a” as categories of racialization without seeing a more suitable alternative (Jouët-Pastré and Braga, 2008; Beserra, 2003). Complicating this rejection of a racialized identity is the acknowledgment that mainstream America perceives Brazilian
immigrant in the spectrum of “Hispanic” to “Black,” but never “White” – the race which many immigrants would have considered themselves in Brazil (Jouët-Pastré and Braga, 2008).

Brazilian immigrants actively work to distinguish themselves from the “Hispanic” and “Latino/a” identity, seeing the negative stereotypes associated with these labels in the United States. Beserra, in her studies on Brazilian immigration to the United States, revealed at the core of Brazilian rejection of “Latino/a” a fear of discrimination and stigmatization faced by Mexicans in the United States (Beserra, 2003). Similarly, in “Becoming Brazuca,” research from both Freston and Ramos-Zayas indicate Brazilian rejection of “Hispanic” identities as linked to the illegality associated with such a status. Instead, Brazilians may choose to refuse racialized labels and seek invisibility – citing their believed moral superiority to the stereotypes bestowed on Latino/a and Hispanic immigrants in the United States (Jouët-Pastré and Braga, 2008).

As a result of the conflict between their perceived and believed racial identities, Brazilian immigrants find themselves in a racial limbo prompted by their need to redefine racially in America’s eyes. This perception of being “neither here, nor there” is both a result and cause of racialization and transnationalism. To begin, many immigrants face difficulty choosing between their ethnic and American culture – and while many reject completes social “Americanization,” their decision to immigrate reflects an investment in American culture and modernity. McDonnell and de Lourenço in their study of Brazilian women discovered that these women often felt as though they did not belong anywhere, and as a result, at times, lost themselves in the process of transnationalism and racialization (Jouët-Pastré and Braga, 2008).

As the Brazilian community continues to become more prevalent in mainstream American culture, the need for a lasting and representative racial designation becomes more
evident. Thus the label “Brazuca” was termed in the 1980s in order to express the Brazilian’s unique culture and experience (Margolis, 1998). Maintaining a strong relationship and connection with their homeland is of great importance for Brazilian immigrants to the United States, who maintain emotional and economic ties with their culture and families back home. In one study, 78% of interviewees sent regular remittances back to Brazil, which proved integral to their families’ survival as a tradeoff for the immigrant’s absence. Many Brazilian immigrants hope to return home, strengthening the need for a comprehensive identity that captures their culture and unique commitment to their homeland. As a result of their unique “in between” identity, Brazilian immigrants have adopted the term “Brazuca” to represent their experiences as a minority, but to express their superiority to denigrated Latino/a and Hispanic immigrant (Jouët-Pastré and Braga, 2008). One way in which Brazilians maintain their cultural superiority is through the use and maintenance of the Portuguese language. While speaking English is for both immigrant and child a necessity of social, occupational and educational success, speaking Portuguese is a necessity of ethnic and cultural preservation. Language, for the Brazilian immigrant, is not just nominal, but represents self-perception, identity, and cultural values (Jouët-Pastré and Braga, 2008).
Expectations

Attempting to answer the research questions: “How do Brazilian immigrants’ perceptions of the American Dream change with respect to reality and their lived experiences?” and “What are the lived experience of Brazilian immigrants?” I believe that my research findings will be generally consistent with the findings discussed in the literature review of this work. As the population I seek to interview has broad demographic requirements (male or female Brazilian immigrant, between the ages of 20 and 55, living and working in the United States for greater than 5 years) I hope to recruit a generally representative group of Brazilian immigrants. The purpose of this scope is to ensure that age, gender, or length of time in the United States do not become homogenous among the individuals interviewed and therefore significantly effect the generalizability of this study to the Brazilian immigrant population in the greater Boston area. If the research subjects become misrepresentative of the greater population, this will be accounted for in the “Analysis” section, however, these expectations are made with the assumption of accurate representation.

Based on Clark’s 2003 study of Immigrants and the American Dream, which revealed that both length of time in the United States corresponds with an immigrant’s probability of entering the Middle Class, I expect first that interviewees will have experienced general upward mobility throughout the course of their time in the United States. Experiences of upward mobility and assimilation into the Middle Class, I believe, will indicate a stronger belief in the American Dream and related concepts. In American Dreaming Mahler explores the strong adherence of immigrants to the belief in and preservation of the American Dream, and if their experience prove their theory, this belief will only strengthen. This includes greater material success, as well as more prestigious jobs, higher education, improved living situation and general
assimilation into the Middle Class. A concurrent improvement in English language assimilation will provide the participants with the skills needed for more job and cultural assimilation. For these reasons language will likely be emphasized as something that has contributed to the participant’s success and something that was more difficult than anticipated, both of which are directly addressed by questions in the interview guide.

Based on my personal belief that immigration requires an extraordinarily strong adherence to dreams of success, the understanding that belief in the American Dream correlates with other predictive factors such as citizen status and higher education (Cohen-Marks and Stout, 2011), and the strong sense of ownership of success promoted for immigrants by concepts like the American Dream (Mahler, 1995), questions aimed at addressing causes for immigration are likely to include themes of the value of work and equality. For this reason, I believe that race will be addressed minimally by the participants, as well as other areas of discrimination that might possibly negatively affect the participant’s ability to succeed. Instead, I suspect that the Brazilian immigrants interviewed will adhere to a strong individualistic model of success, which promotes negative stereotypes and attitudes towards those who are unable to achieve material success through work in the United States, indicating a stronger belief in American opportunity. This theory, explored in Mahler’s studies of immigrant experiences, shows what immigrants not only believe in the “individual effort formula for success, but also project that perspective onto other” (Mahler, 1995). This emphasis on and reproduction of the individual model of the American Dream can manifest in a heightened emphasis on individual ability, as represented by the Cohen-Marks and Stout’s findings that Latino immigrants are more likely to believe that can achieve the American Dream, more so than black or white Americans (Cohen-Marks and Stout, 2011).
Theories of segmented assimilation offer an alternative narrative that race is significantly important in determining an immigrant’s assimilation into the “white” Middle Class or the “minority” inner city underclass (Foner, 1997). In McDonnell and de Lourenço’s study of Brazilian immigrants in Massachusetts, female participants recognized the dialectic of white and black in the United States, but choose to subscribe to the belief of “racial democracy” and are therefore reluctant to attribute any inequality or mistreatment to race. However, within the same group of individuals, the Hispanic identity is reject for fear it places Brazilian immigrants too close on the spectrum of race to black, which these women note as inferior (McDonnell and de Lourenço, 2009). Contradictory attitudes regarding immigrants’ race and ability to success have appeared in other studies, and I believe that they, too, will arise in my own. Although race will matter in an immigrant’s ability to succeed, it will not be perceived as an important factor because it directly violates the theory of “racial democracy.”

While race will likely be understood as playing a minimal factor limiting upward mobility, I believe that conversations on the Brazilian immigrants’ lived experiences will highlight issues associated with a transnational identity, because it is both a noticeable benefit and burden to those who engage in it’s practice (Dominguez and Lubitow, 2008). While I don’t see the Brazuca identity as a topic of conversation, mostly because it is not addressed in the interview questions, the root underlying the creation of the Brazuca identity is likely to arise, that is, the lack of appropriate identity for Brazilian immigrants in American culture as suggested by Luciano and Tosta’s exploration of the Brazuca identity as compromise for contradictory roles of a both dominant and exploited immigrant population. In order to address the cause of the Brazilian identity crisis, I believe that Brazilian immigrants will maintain a conflicted identity both towards Brazilian and American culture; however, time will move the immigrants further
from their Brazilian identity and closer towards an American identity. While no comparative cultures will be studied, I anticipate that Brazilians will maintain their unique cultural norms, such as the Portuguese language, as a method of identifying their differences from other immigrant populations.

Initial expectations of life in the United States will likely align with more traditional understandings of the American Dream, including an emphasis on hard work, material success and participation in the consumer culture. Cohen-Marks and Stout’s work on the Dream revealed that immigrants, and most often non-naturalized immigrants, are consistently the most optimistic about their ability to achieve the American Dream when defined as “All Americans, regardless of their background or origins, have a reasonable chance to achieve success through their own efforts” (Cohen-Marks and Stout, 2011, p. 824). However, with time and greater investment in American society (particularly if the participant has children) I expect that less tangible, or “spiritual” aspects of the Dream significant in Hanson and Zogby’s theory of the Dream. This “spiritual” aspect pertains primarily to feeling valued at work, acceptance in American culture, and meaningful vocation, will become more pertinent in the participant’s understanding of the Dream (Hanson and Zogby). With this shift in understanding from material to spiritual participation in material culture will be a product, rather than goal, of achieving the Dream. I foresee this shift in expectation and goals of one’s immigration to influence how the participant’s perceive what it means to “be American” as well, a concept that I believe will become increasingly accepted, as participation in American culture requires a more emotional, and holistic commitment.

For those immigrants with children I expect their definition of the American Dream to be centered around their children’s success and wellbeing rather than their own. Immigrants’
success largely depends on their children and grandchildren’s assimilation into the mainstream economy, yet while children of immigrants face a unique challenge because they tend to do better than their peers, but are also twice as likely as their native born peers to experience barriers to wellbeing and development (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Hernandez, 2004). Therefore, careful focus and attention must be paid to the wellbeing of the children of immigrants, a reality that I believe the participants will perceive themselves.

Given the size of the Brazilian population in Boston, social networks both in the United States and transnationally will be of great importance in the understanding of these immigrants’ experiences. While traditionally transnational ties have been central to maintaining immigrants’ cultural identities and alleviating social isolation, the Brazilian population in Massachusetts represents a dense ethnic network with access to immigrant communities and institutions, therefore cultural practices can be maintained via the community in the United States (Dominguez and Lubitow, 2008; Foner, 1997). I expect that this strong community will be central to the Brazilian immigrants’ experience not only socially, but economically, as family ties and networks are of central importance in the initial adjustment process. I expect, as in Foner’s findings, to uncover familial and other social ties as central to finding jobs, assimilating to life in the United States, and quite generally surviving (Foner, 1997).

The centrality of educational achievement to occupational success indicates that among those immigrants interviewed educational success will correlate directly with occupational and educational success. Individuals with lower education garner fewer earnings on average in the American labor market and are therefore subject to higher risk of poverty, and less access to resources that may contribute to positive experiences and perceptions of the American Dream (Clark, 2003; Hernandez, 2004; Waters and Jiménez, 2005). Cohen-Marks and Stout (2011)
support this theory, drawing direct connection between higher education and optimism about the American Dream. While I expect to see this same positive trend in success and education, understanding the current economic crisis in the United States and general lack of job security, educational success may play less of a role now than in economically plentiful times. Whether or not this plays out in the lived experiences, it will likely be apparent to them and may arise with the context of the interview.

To answer these research questions and determine the validity of these expectations requires a representative population of immigrants for study, and detailed qualitative data on immigrant experiences in the United States. I must know how immigrants experience and view community, work, education, wealth, and American culture, and explore how these understandings relate to his or her changing perceptions of the American Dream.
Methodology

**Study Location:** Living, working and studying in the greater Boston area it seems that Brazilian culture is simply a part of the city’s history – Brazilian food, culture and language is as woven into the fabric of the city as the Irish Pubs that so often define Boston. It comes as no surprise then that the 2000 Census estimated almost 77,000 Brazilian immigrants living in Boston, a number that has certainly increased over the past 12 years. A slight majority (53%) of the Brazilians living in Boston are male, single (45%) and half are between the ages of 20 and 34. This makes the number of young Brazilians much higher than that among the general population of Boston – young adults make up one third of the general population of Massachusetts. Of the Brazilian immigrants residing in Massachusetts 85% have yet to be naturalized, and the other 15% have gained their citizenship by naturalization.¹

Additionally, Massachusetts houses the largest percent of the Brazilian population in the United States by state with 22.5% of the total population residing in Massachusetts. Brazilian history in Boston, however, has not been completely free of tumult. *The Boston Globe* has been central in revealing the exploitation of Brazilians by local companies, specifically the hugely successful pizza chain *The Upper Crust*. On July 21, 2010 *The Globe* revealed to the Boston community the U.S. Labor Department investigation of the chain and their practices of wage violation. As of October 12, 2011 *The Globe* reports ongoing federal investigations by the Department of Labor and Immigration and Customs Enforcement into the restaurant’s practices of harboring and exploitation of illegal Brazilian immigrants.

The number of Brazilian immigrants in the greater Boston area, in addition to their integrated history with the city, provides an opportunity for rich research and data collection on

the experience of immigration to the United States. I have selected Brazilian immigrants as the population of study for their history and prevalence in the city of Boston, as well as their high immigration rates into the United States over the past 30 years since the fall of the military dictatorship in the 1980s. Brazilians are a good case with which to explore the concept of the American Dream because of the scope of immigrant experiences offered by the greater Brazilian population. Immigrants who came to the United States in the 1980s are likely to have had children, or even grandchildren born in this country, an experience that is likely to change one’s perceptions of many concepts, including the American Dream. Additionally, they may offer a helpful perspective on the changing social and political landscape in the United States, particularly for immigrants. On the other end of the spectrum, younger Brazilian immigrants will help to color the study, offering a youthful energy and experiences that may become less apparent or important with age. The also offer the unique perspective of seeing friends, relatives and loved ones immigrate to the United States for their entire lives, and are able to reference and comment on these other Brazilian immigrant’s experiences as well.

Research Subjects: My research included 8 self-identified Brazilian immigrants living and working in the greater Boston area. This included participants living in the city of Boston and as far out as Newton, MA a suburb approximately 10 miles outside of downtown Boston. Several levels of legal status were represented, including immigrants who were both legally living and working, immigrants who were legally living and illegally working, and immigrants who were both illegally living and working in the United States. Ages ranged from 19 to 55 and included immigrants who had both lived and worked within the United States for more than a year and at the time of the interview lived and worked in the greater Boston community specifically.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<td>43</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
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<td>Paolo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Small Business Owner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jordana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Banker</td>
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The sample included 6 men and 2 women, who occupied both blue and white-collar jobs. Women were much less accessible and willing to sit down for interviews, leading to a disproportionate male sample, although the study was not designed to study gender difference so the effects were not detrimental to the completion of this study. Of the participants, 4 are single, 3 married, and 1 divorced. This reflects the overall proportion of single men and women, who make up 45% of Brazilians living in the Boston area. This study disproportionately favors older immigrants, and those who have lived in the United States for longer time, as 5 out of 8 participants have lived in the United States, and Boston specifically for greater than 20 years. The remaining 3 have lived in the United States between 1 and 7 years. Brazilians between the age of 20 and 34 represent half the Brazilian population in Boston, an age range that is represented only once in this sample. This naturally influences the data, as they type of immigrant permanently rooted in the United States represents a different sub-population within the Brazilian immigrant community. The effects of this influence are considered beneficial,
however, as these immigrants represent the first major wave of Brazilian immigration to the United States and therefore have more than 20 years of insight and perspective on the American Dream.

**Recruitment:** Participants were initially recruited through advertisements posted in commercial areas surrounding Boston and Cambridge however; a number of participants were also recruited through snowball sampling and word of mouth. The advertisements asked “Are you a Brazilian immigrant between the ages of 23 and 60 who would be interested in talking about your experiences in the United States?” All participants had lived in the United States for at least 1 year, were conversational in English, and had 1 to 2 hours to offer for the length of the interview. As all interviewees were both blue collar and the primary wage earners for themselves or their family unit, participants were paid $15 as compensation for lost work or time with their families. Payment did not seem to affect the class or economic status of the participant, as half of the participants refused the payment.

**Interviews:** Interviews took place between January and April 2012 in coffee shops or in the participant’s home. Interviews lasted between one and two hours with the longest interview lasting 1 hour and 52 minutes and the shortest lasting 57 minutes. The primary instrument for this study was an in-depth interview guide crafted by the researcher in the context of a literature review as well as the intended research questions “how do Brazilian immigrants’ perceptions of the American Dream change with respect to reality and their lived experiences?” and “what are their lived experiences?” This interview guide is attached as an appendix at the end of this paper. Questions were open ended and the researcher generally read the questions from a script to the participant, asking additional questions for clarity or explanation when needed. The interview was divided into sections based on the theme presented by each question or series of
questions. These themes later became the basic sections of this thesis, although additional themes became relevant during the course of conversation, and became supplemental sections.

The interview guide proved to be congruent with the natural progression of conversation, beginning with more explicit questions about the participants work and neighborhood, and progressing toward more theoretical questions regarding perceptions on assimilation, the American Dream, and more broad reflections on immigration. Most often in answering one question, the participants expanded such that they answered several of the following questions without prompt. The most successful interviews were full of narrative, and so questions were tailed to ask about specific experiences or interactions when the participant felt or notices a specific theme, rather than simple reports on that theme.

The interview guide needed only be adjusted slightly in semantics to more explicitly address the sections on material wealth, becoming American, and defining the American Dream. Questions were modified in the section on material wealth to explicitly ask participants their perceptions on consumer culture and materialism. Additionally, in defining the American Dream, those participants who described the image rather than act of the American Dream (e.g. house in suburbs, white picket fence, car, 9 to 5 job) were immediately disengaged with the Dream, as this image did not represent their lived experience. To compensate, in later interviewed is the participants were confused or offered a different definition of the American Dream, Cohen-Marks and Stout’s definition was read as a model. The final clarification that was made to the interview guide was speaking of ‘being American’ in mentality and not citizenship. Many immigrants perceived being American simply as gaining American citizenship, and therefore needed to be explicitly asked about any changes in mentality.
As an outsider to this population, I am able to see listen to and analyze my participants’ responses without attaching and personal value or experiences, which would reflect more of my own bias than the actual experiences of the participant. I find this to be a huge benefit in the process of effective and valid research. I still, however, must be aware of any preexisting beliefs I have about immigrants as an outsider that may shape what I hope to hear and see in my results. Further, as an outsider I was aware of the role that my race, class and education may have on the interview process and responses. As a white, private college educated female, it was important for the validity and authenticity of my data that any power imbalance inherent in my own and the interviewee’s role in society not influence the immigrant’s ability to speak honestly and openly.

To combat this, each interviewee signed an informed consent form, which emphasized confidentiality and participant rights. In addition to reading over the consent form, I emphasized the participant’s right to stop the interview at anytime, or refuse to answer any questions, providing them with some authority in the interview process. Additionally, I stressed that any identifying factors would be eliminated in the study, disguising their personality for anyone who may read the findings. Finally, I presented myself as an immigrant advocate and explained that my thesis was intended to shed light on the immigrant experience, and would be grounded completely in their responses. Reviewing the transcripts, and acknowledging that immigrants both invited me into their homes and revealed information on their legal status, I am confident that my race, class, gender and education had minimal, if any influence on results.

Analysis: Each interview was transcribed in its entirety after completion and compiled into one document with all of the interviews. Using Strauss’s Grounded Theory (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004), interviews were assigned open coded, which were consolidated and compiled into a second document. Analysis was grounded in Brazilian immigrants stories, reflections, and
perceptions on their own and other Brazilians live as immigrants in the United States – all theory was grounded fully in their lived experiences. Codes were clustered into larger conceptual categories, and then sorted into theory that addressed either the first research question “How do Brazilian immigrants’ perceptions of the American Dream change with respect to reality and their lived experiences?” or the second “What are the lived experience of Brazilian immigrants?” The process of coding was very systematic, in order to maximize validity and impartiality in the analysis process. The themes and theories presented in this thesis are considered inductive in nature, and while an accurate representation of those interviewed, not meant to represent the complete immigrant experience. The researcher did not include themes and codes that were present in interviews but not considered pertinent or conclusive.
Analysis

“How do Brazilian immigrants’ conceptions of the American Dream change?”

Defining the American Dream: Some call it by name, others simply refer to it in definition, but sit down with an immigrant to the United States and themes associated with the American Dream will inevitably creep into conversation. Many immigrants will produce definitions that are congruent with Cohen-Marks and Stout’s understanding that “all Americans, regardless of their background or origins, have a reasonable chance to achieve success through their own efforts” and the “central tenant of the American dream holds that hard work leads to success” (Cohen-Marks and Stout, 2011; p. 824, 827).

Conceptions of the American Dream fall into one of three categories: there is equal opportunity to achieve success, hard work leads to this success, and that these successes are individually achieved. Despite acknowledging the existence of racial tension in the United States, many of those interviewed specifically mention that this tension does prevent access to opportunity, or unequal treatment in the workplace. Instead, personal traits of honesty, determination and virtue are thought to determine access to opportunity. Jordana, a 45-year-old Brazilian immigrant who has lived and worked in the United States for 20 years maintains, “there is equal opportunity. They don’t look at you for what you are or your race. You will have opportunity if you look for it.” Paolo, a 43-year-old small business owner who has lived in the Boston area for 22 years confirms, “people treat you the same, equal, as long as you do the right thing.”

The correlation between hard work and success, which Cohen-Marks and Stout consider central to the Dream, is particularly relevant to Brazilian immigrants, who often begin working in sub-jobs with long hours, low pay, and little autonomy. In these jobs there is no work but hard
work. This theme arose in every interview especially as the interview drew to a close, offered by the participant almost as the “take home” message when asked “what do you think is really important in understanding you experience?” Paolo focused on the importance of hard work, noting specifically, “if you’re honest and you work hard it’s going to work out…you can achieve your American Dreams.” Enrique, an Afro-Brazilian immigrant who has lived in the United States for 12 years affirmed the hard work model of success, after noting the minimal effects of race in the United States, and celebrated equality, saying, “when people are given a chance they will rise, and will succeed like everyone else.” In Enrique’s response the correlation between the first and second tenants, equality and hard work, are particularly strong. Without equal opportunity, the ability for hard work to beget success would be untrue, particularly for the immigrant population, whose minority race and ethnicity put them at risk of experiencing discrimination as a barrier to success.

The final tenant of the American Dream, which is addressed minimally in Cohen-Marks and Stout’s definition that success is achieved through “their own efforts,” is the belief that success is dependent on and achieved by the individual. This is encompassed in the reliance of success on hard work, but is understood as its own specific tenant, and what makes the Dream specifically American. Camilla, a 47-year-old nanny spoke often of the individual aspect of the American Dream, contrasting it to the dependent life she saw herself living in Brazil. Understanding that in the United States she accomplished her goals and achieved success on her own was both the most surprising and most rewarding aspect of living the American Dream, and what she believes makes the Dream uniquely American. Bruno, a young immigrant who came to the United States more recently echoed this emphasis on the individual, but as an immigrant who has yet to achieve his American Dreams, and constantly returned to his determinism and
perseverance as the traits that would make his dream a reality. Speaking of his minimum-wage cashier job, Bruno foresaw opportunity to “climb the ladder” by doing extra work and therefore setting himself above his coworkers, who he believed all had equal access to this opportunity. Brazilian immigrants speak of fighting for the Dream, and fighting the battle alone. One immigrant emphasized the necessity of achieving one’s dreams individually, and warned, “don’t wait for other people to help you” (Jordana, 45, banker).

**Temporary Expectations:** During the first few years of living and working in the United States, the typical Brazilian immigrant continues to “build his or her life” in Brazil by purchasing homes, land, and cars in their hometowns. Earning and saving money in the United States more easily than they would in Brazil, these immigrants send a portion of their earnings to a support life they plan on eventually living in Brazil. They come to the United States with expectations of staying no more than 5 years and returning to Brazil, satisfied with the amount they have saved. The end goals are varied, whether it includes a house, an apartment, a farm or a small business, their Dreams, which are earned in the United States, are bought in Brazil. Camilla spoke of her initial expectations as both temporary and specific “I thought I was going to make a lot of money and come back in 5 years. I’ll buy a house, save money and go back to Brazil” (Camilla, 47, nanny). Other immigrants echoed this sentiment, seeing work in the United States as the catalyst for a life in Brazil. With this understanding initial expectations of the American Dream could be understood as falling into two tenants: hard work leads to financial success, and that these finances fund purchases in Brazil.

For this reason when asked their primary motivation for immigration nearly every immigrant will cite work, and only work. Respondents do not only emphasize that their
immigration was primarily for work, but also emphasize that the Brazilian community in general moves with the intention of staying only temporarily as a catalyst for success in Brazil. Felipe, a 43-year-old teacher spoke of the “average Brazilian immigrant” who is never dedicated in the United States and continues to live culturally as a Brazilian because they never view the United States as a long-term home. These immigrants reduce their American Dream to earning, spending, and saving money – the means by which they accomplish this task: hard works in low wage jobs. This immigrant invests their hope in the American opportunity, and the ease with which jobs and money can be attained. These Dreams are finite, and therefore once they have been accomplished he or she is prepared to return to Brazil with ease. Because their ties to the United States are purely economic and occupational this task is not difficult; their Dreams lie in Brazil, and the American Dream is only a means to that end.

Transformation: For most Brazilians something changes. Reflecting on his own initial expectations of living for 4 years in the United States, making money, buying property in Brazil and returning, one interviewee nonchalantly added “but, of course, everything changes” (Paolo, 43, small business owner). The change is gradual, but obvious, as sentiments regarding dreams and the United States undergo revision. This shift becomes apparent first as the immigrant learns to like the United States, and eventually love the country he or she now calls home. Leandro, a 37-year-old carpenter, summed up this transformation, saying “but after a while I started to change my mind about this county. I started to like it, and now I love it.” What specifically Brazilians learn to appreciate and love differs based on his or her lived experiences in the United States and in Brazil, but this transformation is universally clear.
The transformation experienced by these immigrants is not just external – a reflection of their appreciation of the United States, but internal – a reflection of beliefs, habits, and understandings of themselves. For some this is habitual, like Bruno, whose friends have noticed and pointed out that he quickly absorbs American culture, including the food, comforts, technologies, and behaviors (Bruno, 20, cashier). Others are political, like Jordana who feels pride in her American citizenship, especially when traveling and showing her passport (Jordana, 45, banker). And still others are more personal, like Enrique who talks about becoming a new person in the United States (Enrique, 39, self-employed). However the change occurs, it is necessary if one continues to live in the United States. To resist transformation means to risk failure, as many immigrants warn of being trapped between two cultures by refusing to settle completely in either place.

The New Dream: As sentiments towards the United States change, so too do conceptions of the American Dream; where previously the United States was a means to an end, as immigrants spend more time in the United States it becomes both the means and the end. From those immigrants in the United States for less than 2 years, to those in the United States more than 20 years the message is clear: these immigrants no longer think about returning to Brazil, and begin to live a new Dream in the United States. What is particularly remarkable about this change is that it is not a simple question of geography – the same Dream is not pursued in a different location – it is a question of total transformation of goals, and understanding of the American Dream. The transformed immigrant does not seek to work hard and make money, at the risk of poor job or living condition required for attaining these goals, but pursues a new American Dream is personal, individual, even spiritual in concept. The new Dream focuses on three
tenants: rootedness in the United States, their children’s education, and attainment of meaningful success.

Previously transnational, these immigrants settle both their Dreams and their lives in the United States. Specifically for immigrants with families or looking to have families, a central tenant of their new Dreams is feeling and being settled in their jobs, homes, and futures. For many Brazilian immigrants this means feeling as though they have not yet achieved their Dreams, but will when their “life is more settled” and they “don’t have to worry as much anymore” about occupational, financial, social and educational burdens (Paolo, 43, small business owner). These immigrants do so by allowing themselves to find roots in their lives in the United States in ways that they were previously unable or unwilling. This rootedness allows the central tenant of the new Dream to become a reality, and these immigrants to see new factors as central to the realization of their American Dream.

One new factor is the realization of their children’s educational success. Their focus, no longer on a life in Brazil, instead is on seeing their children finish high school, and undergraduate degrees. This emphasis is particularly remarkable considering that of the immigrants with children interviewed, only one had completed high school. Jordana, who completed high school and some college in Brazil, explained that she, as well as the whole Brazilian community, have changed dramatically, and focuses now on “giving the education we were not able to have to our kids,” intentionally noting that this goal is more important that working hard and making money, although these goals had previously been the motivation for her immigration (Jordana, 45, banker). Her close friend, Camilla, who completed only 8th grade in Brazil, when asked about her dreams responded, “My dream is just to see my girls happy and finish college and do what they want to do” (Camilla, 47, nanny).
The third tenant of the new Dream is perhaps the most surprising, because it makes the American Dream personal, even spiritual, in a manner that it had not been previously for these immigrants. No longer looking to survive, the Brazilian men and women interviewed expressed that they are looking for something more. Some refer to this vaguely, in broad statements like “I want to do something bigger,” “I want to be somebody,” or “my American Dream is the pursuit of happiness.” Others are able to narrow down this desire to their occupational pursuits, searching for meaningful, engaging and enjoyable work as most important in the achievement of their Dreams. Still others are interested in improving others lives in addition to their own, hoping to support others financially, or be involved in social projects that benefit the greater community. Jordana speaks of this new tenant as being able to live her life with more meaning (Jordana, 45, banker). On this type of success, a young male Brazilian immigrant speaks with hopeful uncertainty, “I don’t think I will ever be done (achieving my goals) because I will always have something else to realize” (Bruno, 20, cashier). Unlike the initial, temporary and limited Dreams, these new dreams know no bounds.

“What are the lived experiences of Brazilian immigrants?”

Homeland Nostalgia: Making the decision to live in the United States does not indicate that a Brazilian immigrant is ready to lose his or her roots and ‘become American.’ In fact, Brazilians speak with great nostalgia and longing for the culture they have left behind. Interviewing was conducted during the time known in Brazil as Carnival, when summer is the season and Brazilian culture is in full force. Participants reflected on missing this time of year, comparing cold New England weather to the warm summer nights they spend partying in Brazil. Brazilians long for the year-round sun and parties that are spent sitting, talking, drinking, and dancing with friends.
and families. They describe their hometowns with desire, such as Enrique who reminisced, “I love the tropical fruits. I love swimming in the ocean. I love walking on the soft sand. I miss taking walks on the beach and making bonfires on summer nights” (Enrique, 39, self-employed).

To compensate, transporting the traditional summer barbecue is central component of the American Brazilian community – a time for the neighborhood to come together and celebrate Brazilian food, music and dance.

The transition to the United States is particularly difficult for the weather, which is consistently cited as the most difficult factor for Brazilians in immigration. A seemingly mundane element for someone accustomed to colder weather, the climate carries a more significant meaning for the Brazilian immigrant. Although the weather cannot be changed, Brazilian immigrants do everything they can to carry on their traditions and make them a priority in their children’s lives as well. The Brazilian barbecue is seasonally limited, but culture is maintained year round through consistent engagement with the Brazilian community. Brazilian nightclubs, restaurants, food and dance engage Brazilian-Americans with their culture, and the Brazilian community of the greater Boston area. Friendships and close relationships with other Brazilian immigrants assist in this process. For many, Brazilian-Portuguese Churches provide a more personal group of Brazilians dedicated to maintaining culture and community.

Children of immigrants may not be given the opportunity to grow up in Brazil, but their parents ensure that they feel connection to the homeland. Language is particularly important in this process, and even for bi-national families, the Brazilian parent ensures that his or her children learn and speak the language from a young age. Returning to Brazil for vacations makes speaking Portuguese not only easy, but necessary, and most parents are unwilling to compromise in this matter. For some, the longing for Brazilian culture is strong enough that they
question whether their immigration was the right decision to make for themselves and for their children. For those who do stay, this questioning is never resolved, but alleviated by the strong roots they keep in the Brazilian community and culture.

**Ease of Life:** Nothing is easy, at least initially, for the Brazilian immigrant to the United States, but there is consensus that life is easier in the United States than in Brazil. One of the factors affecting the ease of life in the United States is the time it takes to earn money. The very idea of immigrating for 4-5 years is rooted in the understanding that for these immigrants is takes just a few years to earn and purchase what might take a lifetime in Brazil. When asked why he decided to remain in the United States one man who was buying a farm in Brazil responded, “to live over here is so much easier than to live in Brazil. Everything is more convenient…something that takes a couple hours takes months in Brazil” (Leandro, 37, carpenter). Others expand that provides them accessibility they were not given in Brazil, such as to education, healthcare, home ownership, and travel. The ability to even plan and execute these newfound enterprises reflects a stability of life that was not inherent in Brazil.

To suggest that their life is in some way easy is to misrepresent the lives of these immigrants, and they acknowledge this as well. Within the same interview, these men and women struggle to comfortably label their experiences. The same respondent who previously spoke of the ease of life in the United States later returned to this topic, saying, “it’s not easy, nothing is easy. Everything you have to work hard to get. Nothing is easy. In this country you have to work hard if you want anything” (Leandro, 37, carpenter). Surviving hard work is part of the journey of the American Dream, and these immigrants agree that in survival they find new strength, for which they are proud, and that ties them even more to this land they now call home.
It is important to recall that these immigrants have chosen to remain in the United States, though, and therefore have chosen a life in the United States not simply for its ease, but for its ease in comparison to their life in Brazil. Participants often spoke pessimistically of the economy in Brazil, and the length of time it takes to accomplish ones goals, as previously reported. These men and women agree, “if you want to get things done, it’s so hard. You want to be fast but you can’t” (Enrique 39, self-employed). The final experience of inefficiency for many of these immigrants occurs in immigration to the United States. Many showed frustration at how long it took to obtain their Visas, often requiring them to apply 3 or 4 times and prove repeatedly that they have money to spend in the United States and a reason to return to Brazil. For those who were unable to wait, illegal immigration became the only option, as one respondent jokingly spoke of the experience of crossing via Tijuana, Mexico, only to be stopped and arrested a few miles into the United States. This same respondent spoke with little hope of the ability to “move up” in Brazil, and with finality in his tone, emphasized, “if you have money you have money. If you don’t it’s not going to get any better” (Enrique 39, self-employed).

**Freedom, Laws and Social Responsibility:** For Brazilian immigrants to the United States, a surprising and hugely important factor in the decision to remain is the efficacy and integrity of the government, police, and the US legal system. In order to understand the significance of these factors, one must first understand the state of government and politics in Brazil. Reflecting on their lives in Brazil, immigrants recall a generally inefficient, if not completely ineffective police force. Enrique recalled calling the police once to calm a neighborhood party that had gotten out of hand to be told that the only trooper authorized to respond to a noise complaint was gone and
the police station was unable to tell when he would return. Of course, the police never came (Enrique, 39, self-employed).

Understood in the context of the grander state of Brazil, inefficacy of the police is a minimal problem compared to the corruption that Brazilian immigrants see stunting the economic and international growth of Brazil. In addition to general political corruption, Brazilian immigrants express great discontent with the misappropriation of taxes in the Brazilian economy. Many feel cheated, as though the Brazilian government collects a great deal of money in taxes but there is not gain to be seen for the average citizen. They call for improved roads, education and health care, among other things, and are likewise particularly impressed with these industries in the United States. Seeing such corruption is particularly difficult because these immigrants love their country, and feel the corruption limiting Brazil’s success, as “Brazil is huge, it’s a beautiful country, and it deserves to be great; but the corruption is huge, the corruption is amazing” (Paolo, 43, small business owner).

To be expected, these immigrants celebrate the tough laws, strict enforcement, and political efficacy of the United States. Police are considered to be more serious, and when you need them, more timely than in Brazil. Some offhandedly expressed that they were also there when you didn’t necessarily need them: running a red light, or illegally u-turning seem to be two prime examples. Despite these inconveniences, the immigrants felt safer and more secure. The security is also ensued by the legal system, which provides an outlet through which to combat mistreatment effectively. This system promotes respect and responsibility, in the eyes of many Brazilian immigrants. As a result, they see themselves and Americans as more honest individuals, who act with greater respect towards others and their community – if only because the risk is being sued or arrested.
Brazilian immigrants highlight formal rights ensured by the police and legal system in the United States, but also recognize and experience informal rights that are a product of American society rather than any specific law. Stemming from the freedom of speech, American offers a freedom of expression that, while legally guaranteed, has more to do with the individuals who make up the society. Americans are described as “different,” “more out there,” and “more creative.” This attitude leads to a more accepting culture and one in which it is easier to be different, and to be who you chose to be. Referring to the progress of gay civil and gay rights, one immigrant celebrated, “I love that American fights for things, sometimes it takes them forever to figure it out, but when they do its done right…it’s great you are ahead of the game and it’s great to be part of it” (Paolo, 43, small business owner).

Of course, with their perspective from the margins immigrants are able to criticize the veil of American “freedom.” To some, the police force and legal code seemed excessive, such that rights were infringed upon, rather than promoted. In this way freedom was secured, but only intellectually or behind closed doors, for fear that some rule was being broken. To others the freedoms granted were wholly arbitrary and more often about consumerism than true intellectual and political freedoms. Often presented in a joking manner, these individuals laughed about the freedom between 12 beers on tap, the freedom for paper or plastic, or the freedom to own a home that the bank actually owns. Offered as a side comment, these comments are not meant to be taken seriously, but reveal an unconvinced perspective on American “freedom.”

**Race Relations:** Despite adhering to the belief that opportunity is awarded equally based on merit, suggesting that racial discrimination is minimal, Brazilian immigrants recognize and experience what they call a “race problem” in the United States. Most speak of the problem in
the context of black and white Americans, reducing the issue to interpersonal conflict rather than systematic exclusion. This definition of race relations in the United States reflects the experiences of Brazilian immigrants, who do not tend to feel the effects of discrimination in work or educational success, but rather in social situations. Many report being insulted in public or ignored because of their accent. Others experience discrimination as jealousies from Americans who see and do not approve of the success Brazilian immigrants have had in the American economy. On the contrary, many immigrants will still argue that in professional sectors, discrimination is not apparent or not important. Specifically, the quality of treatment that immigrants, legal or illegal, receive from the healthcare industry was emphasized as an image of equality in the United States, reaffirming the belief that racial discrimination is personal, not political in the United States.

Race and racial equality were of particular importance to the Afro-Brazilians who participated in this study because race was a detriment to their success in Brazil and therefore a larger factor in their decision to immigrate to the United States. Afro-Brazilians describe the racial situation in Brazil as worse than in the United States, but marginally acknowledged. Reports of police violence during Carnival, discrimination in education and work, and income inequality are just a portion of offenses that Afro-Brazilians report experiencing in Brazil. One participant who described himself as “white-Brazilian” reported, “in Brazil you never have racism…racism is nothing in Brazil,” demonstrating the point to which race and racism are ignored within Brazilian culture (Paolo, 39, small business owner). For Afro-Brazilian these comments embody the heart of the issue of race in Brazil, and for this reason they appreciate the frankness with which racial issues are addressed in the United States, even if they are still present.
Education: Despite disagreement on whether education is necessary for success, immigrants agree that higher education provides access to achieving one’s American Dream. For this reason education is most often the first priority for children of immigrants, particularly for those Brazilians who were unable to attain higher education themselves. Higher education is more accessible in the United States, a reality made possible by a merit based system, and opportunity for scholarships and loans that do not exist in Brazil, where the reality of education is a system in which working and studying in Brazil is more difficult, such that money is not an option for the poor or underprivileged. The importance of education is such that some immigrants credit the strength of the United States to the strength of its educational system, calling it a “tool for social change,” and the primary opportunity to “change your class.”

The reality is, however, that first Brazilian immigrants do not tend to pursue education, because the rigor of work requires one’s complete attention. Perhaps without consciously realizing this contradiction, Brazilian immigrants compensate by pursuing self-education. Many talked of the key role books and readings have played in their lives. Brazilians express unique interest and involvement with self-education; Felipe spoke of the power of philosophy in improving his life, Enrique explored the history of African-Americans and the Feminist movement in order to understand his own experience as an Afro-Brazilian, and Jordana pursued her interests in the mortgage business and finance. Recognizing the importance of English proficiency, Brazilians pursue a combination of the occasional English course, and self-education through books, conversation, and media. The immediate discomfort of living in a country where you don’t speak the language compels most immigrants to master in small, but consistent actions like “reading on the bus, listening to CDs, and speaking English at work” (Leandro, 37, carpenter).
Language: Finding every way to improve his or her English becomes is central to the immigrant experience because it represents the most evident and largest source of powerlessness. Consistently cited, with poor weather, as the most difficult part of immigration, language is also cited as the one experience that was more difficult than anticipated. Losing their mastery of language for Brazilian immigrants means losing power, status, self-expression, communication and entertainment. Not speaking English translates to exploitation by lawyers, employers, and service providers. When arriving initially in the United States, lower English capabilities correlates with poorer jobs, and a more difficult job searching process. To this day many immigrants express feeling most marginalized by their accent and imperfect English abilities.

This experience is most difficult in the first few years of immigrant because it directly conflicts with an immigrant’s need for community and support during the beginning, and most difficult period of transition. To live, work, and socialize within the Brazilian community risks learning and practicing the English language; however, to leave the community risks emotional, financial and cultural support that eases the initial difficulties of immigration. While most immigrants through comfort, commonality and convenience find themselves completely immersed in the Brazilian community, they stress the importance of branching out, while maintaining roots in the community, if one wished access to the most and best opportunities.

Work: Brazilian immigrants leave behind a poor economy where jobs are scarce, and pay is low; one of the most significant factors contributing to their immigration. Particularly for immigrants with proper documentation, work is not difficult to find, and for those who seek underground work, with the proper connections work is possible. For most immigrants those connections are other Brazilian immigrants who have or are also currently working illegally and can provide
references for both employer and employee. Many immigrants express surprise at the availability of work, claiming, “I was always amazed to see so many job help wants signs. At first I didn’t know what they meant, and I couldn’t believe that a help-wanted sign could be there for so long. I mean you couldn’t believe it” (Enrique, 39, self-employed). In addition to an availability of jobs, there are an availability of better job opportunities, and more opportunities to advance one’s social position through work, a central component of the American Dream.

Through social gain, though, Brazilians note a loss of connection with the Brazilian community that occurs in more prestigious work.

Referred to as a “positive culture shock,” Brazilian immigrants appreciate and make note of the meritocracy and respect in the American workplace. Although the types of jobs Brazilians typically take initially (restaurant, childcare, and cleaning are the most prevalent) include long hours and hard work, these immigrants express great pride in their ability to do the work that they believe Americans can not or do not want to do. They add comments about Brazilians providing the entire service industry in order to make a specific point: Brazilians are not afraid of hard work, and they are proud to be known as the hardest working immigrants. However, this only represents the first stage of work for these immigrants. As concepts of the American Dream change, concepts of work change, too, from a means to earn income to a means to earn respect and fulfillment. As Brazilians invest more in their American Dream, realizations about work in the United States are less positive, and deal more with the overwork of Americans and prioritization of work over family.

Access to better work provides these immigrants with newfound access to consumer culture. Many immigrants, particularly younger immigrants, participate avidly in consumer culture when money allows. Goods purchased are both for personal consumption and for family
members who remain in Brazil. Items that were previously inaccessible in the Brazilian because of high prices and lower income become accessible in the United States; clothing, technology, and electronic items specifically are recognized as status items in Brazil, but merely a reflection of hard work in the United States. Older immigrants, especially those with families, tend to talk of the consumer culture in the United States as a habit or craze that takes away from overall life quality. For these immigrants, participating in the consumer culture correlates with more work and less time with family; in a way, they see material items used to replace genuine time spent together that is more typical of the Brazilian family.

**Neighborhood & the Community:** The American neighborhood is one area in which Brazilian immigrants find their previous lives and tendencies directly at odds with what is normal in the United States. The Brazilian neighborhood is one of rootedness, connection, and community. In many ways the Brazilian neighborhood is stagnant, residents do not move in and out as in American neighborhoods, but live in the same location, most often with or near their extended family. Many of the immigrants spoke with nostalgia of returning home for vacation and finding the neighborhood exactly as they left it; any movement in or out could be tied to a new marriage, the time that leaving one’s family becomes commonplace. For those neighbors who are not family, they are considered a big, extended family, about whom these immigrants know almost everything and with whom they share almost everything. Of course, having left their communities, these immigrants are able to look back and see the limits of these interactions and relationships. Knowing everything about ones neighbor meant often knowing too much, and becoming too involved with each other’s business. Jokes about knowing everything your
neighbor did from the time he woke up to the time her went to bed were commonplace, a jovial reflection of a sometimes harmful reality (Jordana, 45, banker).

To these immigrants, the American neighborhood represented the complete inversion of the Brazilian neighborhood. Any time spent at home was spent privately indoors, not in the street socializing with neighbors and friends. Some of the participants didn’t know their neighbors by name, or didn’t sustain any more interaction with their neighbors than a simple “hello.” This new reality shocked many of the immigrants, who came from a community where to not know and interact with their neighbors on a more intimate level could be considered an offense. Both female respondents spoke of their neighbors and neighborhoods being quiet, and focused on the lack of interaction with their neighbors. Speaking of the borrowing a cup of sugar or eggs from their neighbor, both said they would feel uncomfortable doing so, because it is simply not done.

While acknowledging the flaws of the Brazilian community, most of the men and women spoke with nostalgia and longing for the connection and support offered within such a community. The community was thought to both help with and be a reflection of a happiness that these men and women felt in Brazil. Living in a close community, neighbors are able to provide both emotional and material support for each other in times of need. Thinking about growing up in such a community in Brazil one male compared the two communities, realizing “you don’t need much money (in Brazil), that much stuff, it’s not like here” because these needs are met by the community rather than the individual (Paolo, 43, small business owner).

Independence and Isolation: The new sense of individualism, which is apparent to Brazilian immigrants in the neighborhood dynamic, is not a unique experience, but rather a manifestation
of the larger community in which they now live and work. This same effect can and is viewed by immigrants in contradictions, at times empowering and at other times isolating of the individual. Considering the centrality of individualism to these immigrants definition of the American Dream, the experience is celebrated as independence and viewed positively. For those immigrants who are critical of the over involvement of Brazilians in each other’s lives, the American neighborhood community is a welcomed change, where privacy and independence is respected. Camilla was particularly surprised both by this change and how much she came to appreciate it. When speaking of her life in the United States she noted, “I only depend on myself, and it’s a dream come true. I don’t have to ask anybody for anything. That is surprising.”

But, when no needing my neighbor translates into “I don’t need you,” these immigrants see and understand the negative aspects of such a culture. One man spoke of moving through his day feeling invisible; he couldn’t understand not saying hello to ones neighbor, or engaging a stranger on the bus, or even making eye contact with another individual (Enrique, 39, self-employed). He spoke of a fear Americans seemed to have for the other. Other participants echoed this feeling of isolation and even fear, comparing situations where individuals seemed to be afraid to situations of joyful interaction and community inherent in Brazilian culture. One participant spoke of saying hi to a woman and her child in the park and receiving, in return, hostile or no response (Felipe, 43, teacher). Many of the immigrants credit this behavior to reservation that is stereotypical of the North East, and find it particularly jarring in contrast with the Brazilian personality. The “Brazilian personality” can, perhaps, be best understood as jovial. Understanding the contrast the this personality represents in relationship to the “New England personality,” respondents took care to explain just how friendly, happy, and personable a
traditional Brazilian ought to be. Even in hardship, Brazilians are notably optimistic, and warm people, a trait that most hope to maintain and some even credit for their success in the United States.

The isolation that these immigrants perceive is no only physical, but emotional. Coming from a family-centered culture, they are very critical of the negative effects of moving out and losing one’s roots at age 18, and characterize the typical American family as both physically and emotionally distant. This break from one’s family at a young age in combination with the “New England personality” is credited for increased rates of suicide, depression and other mental health problems that these immigrants do not see in Brazil. Camilla, who works as a nanny for a wealthy American family, sees the effects of this relationship first-hand. She spoke with sadness that the family, and particularly the mother, never seems to be happy, or at least does not express her emotions very often. The Brazilian family in the United States is not free from this tendency either. Lives are described as “busy,” interactions as “rushed,” and work as “constant.” These realities mean that these immigrants may see family members who live 10 miles away once a month, if at all. Homes become “just a place to sleep” rather than places of hospitality, as they once were in Brazil. The entire Brazilian community suffers from isolation, and in addition to personal experiences of isolation, these men and women concede that the Brazilian community is disunited in a way it had not been previously “back in the day.”
Discussion

Eight Brazilians among some one hundred and fifty thousand represent a small slice of the Brazilian immigrant population, which is just one among the plethora of immigrants who have come to America’s shores in pursuit of the Dream. And yet, their experience are just as valuable and worthwhile as any other, offering true perspective on the nuanced experience of immigration to the United States. The strength of this particular group lies in their ability to both prove and challenge the expectations that were made going into the study. American Dreams do change, but not for good or for worse. Immigrants remain in the United States, but acknowledge the areas in which their new lives lack in comparison to their lives in Brazil. Perhaps most notable is the focus on the American neighborhood and community. Brazilians unanimously agree that the American neighborhood is one defined by isolationism, a reality particularly difficult at first to understand and accept. For some, this isolation is a looming reality, present not just in the home but at work, in the street, even on the bus as they attempt, but fail to engage with the community as they once did in Brazil.

Throughout the course of this study, the resilience of the Brazilian immigrant population was increasingly apparent in their willingness to work their way to success both within and outside of the formal workplace. Education, of course, is no exception and the Brazilian immigrant’s participation in both formal and informal education contributes to their economic assimilation into American culture and the Middle Class. This emphasis on education is particularly strong for the children of Brazilians, or second-generation immigrants, whose parents seek, like Jordana, to give “the education we were not able to have to our kids,” acknowledging the centrality of education to success in the United States.
Brazilians are also unique in their intense connections to their homeland and culture, which reflects in their decidedly transnational identity. In fact, while Brazilians see benefits to both cultures, and in many ways see themselves acting American, they do not suppose to consider themselves “American” for these actions. Without denigrating America, Brazilians are proud of their Brazilianness and seek to uphold their cultural practices and “identity” as friendly, happy, and hospitable people in a nation that does not always promote such ideals. For this reason, engagement with the Brazilian community, and extended trips back to Brazil are hugely significant in the lives of Brazilian immigrants.

Brazilians experience segmented assimilation not only as a community, but also as individuals finding their place in American culture and society. This often leads to conflicting understandings of the self and society in which these Brazilian live. Brazilian immigrants recognize the isolation that prevents community in the United States, but believe quite ferociously in the individual model of success central to the American Dream. Over time, they lose contact with their community, and through increased economic success assimilate into Middle Class American culture, but maintain firmly that they have not “become American.” They acknowledge interpersonal racism defining interactions between white and black Americans but do not see racism in their own lives, or acknowledge how they may experience discrimination interpersonally and structurally.

The immigrant experience is nuanced, and ought to be documented more clearly in the future. As a quintessentially immigrant nation, America must not turn its back on immigrants by imposing stricter policies to incriminate and deport illegal immigrants. Rather, immigrants ought to be welcomed as the living representations of the American Dream, and proof that it is still alive. As stated in the introduction to this work, the immigrant to the United States cannot be
othered” because of the integral role they play in this country’s past, present and future. They contribute economically, working the jobs they are so proud to say “Americans do not want to do.” They uphold the American Dream through their financial and social success, and yet challenge American normalcies and the manner in which Americans interact with each other and the community. Through their unique positions on the margins, they are able to view and critique American culture and those areas in which the United States is falling short.

For this reason Brazilians are critical of American hyper independence, and overemphasis on material success. This manifests in what many see as an over emphasis on work and material culture, which replaces genuine interaction. Brazilians see this shift as particularly harmful to the family, the central building block of society, and the most central aspect of their life in Brazil. Calling for a return to family, Brazilians also encourage a de-emphasis on the glorification of overworking, overproduction and overconsumption, which, for them, defines much of American culture. On the other hand, Brazilians celebrate the fairness of the American workplace and the ability for hard work and determination to create a life of success and stability that they never saw themselves achieving in Brazil. Brazilians further emphasize the tangible and intangible freedoms available in the United States including, among others: equality under law, fair educational and work access, ease and stability of life, and the ability to express oneself openly, and both physical, emotional, and legal security and equality.

These voices offer the clearest and most honest reflection on American culture and society and therefore ought to be taken as seriously, if not more so, than the voices of those embedded in and responsible for “mainstream” American culture. Just as an American citizen is able to reflect on their lives more clearly when traveling or working abroad, so too are Brazilians
able to see, reflect, and offer critique that, if heeded, can contribute to the positive progress of a society that has never settled for complacency.
Conclusion

“These things that I didn’t realize until I stepped out. Sometimes you have to step out to see something clearly.”

-Enrique, 39, self-employed

Even after 20 some years of living in the United States, Brazilian immigrants are still unable to call themselves Americans. For many, this means spending more of their lives in the Unites States than Brazil, and yet they fail to feel completely integrated into the American community. Most speak of this experience as being caught between two cultures; immigrants express not “feeling one way or another” or “feeling a little bit part of each community” (Enrique; Bruno). Others speak of “going back and forth” or feeling “half and half” (Paolo; Jordana). In a change of scope, still others feel as though they “belong to the world” (Felipe). Immigrants report being changed by the culture in the United States, yet maintain they cannot be changed from where they come (Enrique). They love everything about Brazilians, and everything about Americans (Camilla). So where do they really stand?

Immigrants stand precisely in the middle, right where they ought to. This is why immigrants are so central to a successful American, because they recognize the good and bad aspects of both cultures to which they belong, and have a strong desire to maintain the best components of each. Not meant to be a pure praise, or pure criticism of American culture and the American Dream, this paper, too, stands in the middle. It recognizes where the United States excels, and using the Brazilian community as a model, shows some ways in which this society can learn from another one quite different than itself. Is the success of individualism worth the cost of isolationism? Are we willing to sacrifice an intimate neighborhood community for privacy and autonomy? Do we really achieve it all on our own? These questions may have no answer just yet, but as Enrique suggests, “stepping out” is one way to answer these questions.
more clearly. Though we may not physically leave our community, engaging and learning from immigrants to the United States provides a brief instance of clarity, as we step out of our comfort zone, if only momentarily. It is my hope, therefore, that this thesis is not merely a narrative, or generalization of Brazilian immigrants, but a series of moments of clarity upon which to reflect, question, and conduct research to further an understanding of the Brazilian immigrant experience.
Appendix A – Interview Guide

Introduction
What is your name? How old are you?

Tell me about where you live – do you live with other people? Who are they? What is the neighborhood like? (wait for response, then ask “can you give me an example of [insert their comment here]?”)

How do you feel about the community or neighborhood? Do you have friends there? How much time do you spend there? Can you give me some examples of what you do at home and in your neighborhood? Are there things that you don’t like about it? (wait for response, then ask “can you give me an example of [insert their comment here]?”)

Safety
Social connection and relationships
Resources in area (access to education, childcare, food, healthcare, etc.)
Do you own your home?

Work
Tell me about the process of finding a job? Did you find anything surprising about finding a job? Why was that so? Can you think of a particular example that defines your experience when you think about finding a job?

Tell me about your work. What do you do?
Location
Job title, status
How they found the job
Length of time at job
Social Connections and relationship
Treatment by co-workers

How does your job make you feel? (wait for response, then ask “can you give me an example of [insert their comment here]?”) Do you feel supported at your job? Do you feel like there is opportunity to “climb the ladder” at your job? How will you do that?

What do you like about your job? Can you give me some examples or tell me a story of something good that happened at work?
Money
Friends
Other social connections
Identity formation

Education
What is your education? Where did you study? Did this fit into your decision to immigrate?
Have you pursued education in the USA? Do you go to school now? How does your community support your education? How does this education compare to

Is education a priority for you? Do you feel you need to pursue more education? Why? How does education fit into your long-term goals?

*Material Wealth*
Do you struggle to provide certain amenities for you family?
- Technology (computers, cell phone, iPods)
- Clothing (name brands)
- Food
- Transportation
- Home

Do you think it is important to own certain things? What do you think it is important to own? Do you think that owning certain items gives you status in the United States?

Do you feel like you are a part of the consumer culture in the United States? What does consumerism mean to you? How do you understand materialism in the United States?

*Immigration*
What was it like coming to the US?
- How long have you lived in the United States?
- Where are you from originally?
- When did you first leave Brazil?
- What process did you have to go through?
- What about the process was really easy?
- What about the process was really difficult?
- Can you tell me a story about why this was difficult/easy?

Why did you first leave Brazil? What factors influenced your decision? Can you tell me a story about an experience that encouraged you to leave Brazil?
- Money
- Family
- Work
- Education
- Healthcare

What was your life like in Brazil? Can you tell me a story about your experience in Brazil? How is your life here similar to your life in Brazil? How is your life different? Can you tell me more about why things are different? Can you give me a specific example of that?
- Job in Brazil
- Family in Brazil
- Community involvement in Brazil
- Neighborhood like in Brazil
- Family life like in Brazil
Assimilation
Did you know anyone in the US before you moved? Have you met people since you’ve been here? Who have you met? How did you meet them?

Tell me a story about your experiences as an immigrant, something that really sticks out in your mind. What about that experience was particularly challenging? What of those hardships didn’t you expect? What about that experience was particularly easy? What advantages have you been given that you didn’t expect?

What communities in the United States do you consider yourself a part of? Do you consider yourself a part of any community? How was this community helped your progress? How has this community hurt your progress?

Do you think you are part of the American culture? Can you tell me of an experience where you felt a part of American culture? An experience where you felt excluded from American culture?

Can you tell me a story about how your expectations compare to how your life really is? How does your job, family and community play into this story?

What in your culture is very important for you to maintain? What in your culture are you willing to lose? Are you able to maintain your cultural values despite immigration? Do you think your culture helps you succeed in the US? Does your culture hurt you in any way? Can you tell me a story about this?

Past Expectations
What were your expectations of your life in the USA? When you first left Brazil where did you see yourself working, living upon arrival? 5 years after arrival? 10 years after arrival?

What has been the most surprising aspect of living in the USA? What has been the most surprising aspect of working in the USA?

What has been easier than you expected? What has been harder than you expected?

American Dream
Have you heard the term the “American Dream?” If so, what does the term “American Dream” mean to you? If you had to define the term how would you define it? Tell me a story about what living the American Dream would look like for you?

*If they have not read definition of the American Dream to subject

Before you came to the USA had you heard of the concept of the American Dream? Is it something you hear a lot since you’ve been in the US?

How do you think the stories you’ve told me and the conversation we’ve had relate to the American Dream?
Do you think you have achieved the American Dream? Do you think you will achieve the American Dream, soon, in the near future or ever? Do you think your children will achieve the American Dream?

Do you think that the American Dream is easy to live? What do you see as the biggest barrier to achieving the American Dream? What has been the biggest help for you in achieving the American Dream?

**Future Expectations**
What is most important for you to achieve through your immigration? What are you looking for in terms of economic advancement? Education? Work? Prestige? What are you expecting or hoping for your children?

Can you tell me a story about your life 5 years from now? What would your employment situation look like? How would education play a role in your life? In what community would you live?

Where will your family be 5 years from now? What will their lives look like?

Do you want to be ‘American’? Why or why not? What does being ‘American’ mean to you? What does it look like to you?

**Closure**
What do you think is really important in understanding your experience? If you wanted to tell me one story about your experience what would that be? If you want me to take away one thing from our conversation to tell all my friends, family, and educators, what would that be?

Is there anything you think I missed? What questions would you ask yourself in order to understand your own experience?
Bibliography


Hesse-Biber, Sharlene and Patricia Leavy. *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press


