

Navigating one's cultural identity is a complicated process. It is especially difficult for second generation immigrants, who often find themselves balancing the culture of their parents, and that of the country where they live. Language inevitably plays a large role in this connection, whether through its presence or absence. Those who may not be fluent in their heritage language sometimes choose to learn or relearn it later on in life. Second-generation migrants vary greatly in their fluency and comfortability in their heritage language. It is believed that, at times, linguistic fluency may impact their interactions with members of their heritage community and, by extension, their sensed connection to, or marginalization from, their parents' culture. With this in mind, this essay's aim is to support or refute such assumptions. With a focus on second generation migrants, it explores the factors that may influence the formation of cultural identity for second-generation migrants, as well as their sense of belonging or unbelonging to their specific heritage linguistic community. This research project draws critical insights from the analysis of existing literature and an interview with a York University student from the Latin community, Ricardo 'Ricky' Samayoa. Such data demonstrates that for many second-generation migrants, their sense of cultural belonging does not rely on language alone. Rather, it is a fluid, complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In exploring the influences on the formation of cultural identity, this paper will first explore the role of a desire/willingness to connect to one's culture, followed by the impact of community. Equally important, this publication outlines the dynamic ways in which cultural connections are formed and maintained, such as parents' views, interactions with the heritage community, connection with food, music, and cultural behaviors like games.

One of the largest factors contributing to one's cultural identity is not our ability to speak its language, but rather, the desire to connect to one's heritage culture. This assumption was clearly stated by Ricky Samayoa, during his interview. When asked whether an individual needs to know Spanish to be Latin, his response was that it was not necessarily the case. He highlighted that an individual's background is something they cannot control, but they can control whether or not they choose to

connect with their culture. Rather, Ricky emphasized that “there is no certain criteria for belonging to a culture.” Cultural belonging is not a checklist with an accomplishment awarded once the correct number of traits or skills have been acquired. Instead, cultural belonging depends on the person.

The refutation of language’s strict connection with cultural identity is also read in literature. Untangling cultural connection from linguistic identity is a view that, according to Gonzalez (2020), is common among second-generation migrants (p. 154). In Gonzalez’s study, one participant went on to state that “nowadays, like, you can be Hispanic, and not know Spanish, or you can be Asian and not know Chinese, you know what I mean?” (p. 154). Language is only one of many components that influence second generation migrants’ connection or disconnection with their parents’ culture. Other factors may relate to their parents’ attitudes towards their country of birth, its community, and culture. Ricky’s emphasis on one’s effort and willingness to connect to one’s culture is especially important when considering that not all individuals *want* to connect with certain aspects of their culture. Along such lines, a study by Martinez et al. (2012) outlines that experiences and perceptions of culture instilled in childhood have a major effect on cultural identity later in life. Individuals with positive images of Latino culture, as opposed to negative images of Latino culture alone were more likely to strongly identify as Latin. One participant was taught the importance of bilingualism growing up, and as an adult, made a strong effort to maintain the Spanish language (p. 194-195). In contrast, Monterroza (2017) highlights how his parents had fled El Salvador during the country’s civil war, escaping insurgencies and death squads. He emphasizes how, to them, “El Salvador meant being reminded of the hardest, most traumatic years of their life” (para. 8). For Monterroza, this resulted in a disconnect with his culture and a feeling that “since I grew up in Canada, I’m anything but Salvadoran” (para. 3). These claims lead us to assume that one’s cultural belonging is not solely dependent on their ability to speak the language, but rather heavily dependent on the individuals’ inherited views of their parents’ culture and place of birth and, by extension, on the person’s willingness to connect.

Another major influence on one's sense of cultural belonging and identity is an individual's relation to members of their heritage community. Whether it is family or friends, engagement with individuals of a similar cultural background contributes significantly to a sense of belonging. Such individuals can provide an environment where heritage language use is encouraged and normalized. Moreover, they facilitate cultural connections through rituals, music, food, and celebrations. Ricky's own experiences have also been heavily influenced by family and friends. Beyond being able to joke in Spanish with his cousins, Ricky grew up eating Honduran foods with his family, and is able to connect with peers who have had similar experiences through the Organization of Latin American Students (OLAS) at York University. As such, community has played a large role in shaping Ricky's sense of belonging. Ricky's statement also leads us to the understanding that a lack of such a community can often negatively affect a second-generation migrants' sense of belonging, or even result in a sense of *un*belonging. A survey by the Pew Research Center (2017) explored the perception of cultural identity in adults with Hispanic ancestry who do not self-identify as Hispanic. It found that 81% of these individuals "never considered themselves Hispanic or Latino (Pew Research Center, 2017). In their rationalization, many cited "limited contact with Hispanic relatives" and "few Hispanic cultural links" as major factors contributing to their lack of cultural belonging. Another study by Martinez et al. (2012) further draws attention to the role of family in influencing cultural identity. One participant, when reflecting on her experience, notes that her parents valued Latino customs, which informed her own perception of identity. As stated by this participant: "My parents have always instilled a strong sense of our culture, and therefore, I have never had a time where I did not feel a strong self-identity" (p. 195). Overall, whether it be through family or friends, connections with individuals from the same background provide links to their sense of cultural belonging. They provide heritage language learners with formational experiences, whether it be through celebrations, ways of life, food, and music which may be linked or independent from individuals' fluency in their heritage language.

Our research and interview with Ricky uncovered how cultural connections can be forged and maintained through a variety of ways. Though language is one way in which individuals connect with their heritage culture, it is not the only factor that either strengthens or weakens such connection. Parents' and relatives' attitudes towards their country of birth, their shared and personal experiences, and connection with their community, all play a role in second generation migrants' cultural identity. Ricky emphasized the importance of "finding a way that resonates with you specifically" and that "there's something for everyone" (R. Samayoa, personal communication, February 21, 2023). When addressing his connection with his heritage culture, Ricky spoke of food, music, and even artifacts as ways individuals can strengthen their cultural connections. Ricky highlighted how he personally connected with Honduran culture through jewellery, specifically, through a Honduran bracelet he commonly wears. Such a link seems to fall in line with Satpathy's (2017) publication. According to this researcher, jewellery is characterized as a "manifestation of man's imagination and creativity which symbolizes the ethnic culture and heritage" (p. 1). Moreover, it enables for a connection with cultural identity and allows an individual to express themselves. Beyond cultural artifacts, our research on heritage culture and identity has also led to the importance of cultural behaviours, such as games and plays. Piech & Cieśliński (2007) uncovered in their study that "games and plays preserved from generation to generation allow young people to get to know their ancestors' traditions" (p. 149). Such insights are evidence that cultural connections extend well beyond language and include artifacts like jewelry and cultural behaviours such as games.

Music, as mentioned earlier, provides yet another link to culture. For Ricky, his cultural connection is also enhanced through music. This may explain why he often makes an effort to choose Latin clubs when going out. The use of music as a method of cultural connection is common. An article about students from the University of Texas explored how students connect to their culture, besides language. It featured a student who had struggled with speaking Spanish when growing up, but is able

to connect with her culture through music, and by listening to artists such as Enrique Iglesias, Pitbull and Selena (Treviño, 2021, para. 15). Another student in the article chose to connect and appreciate her culture through food and recipes. In his interview, Ricky also expressed an affinity for Honduran foods and an interest in trying more Honduran recipes. Studies have shown that food is a powerful way for individuals to connect with their culture. Weller & Turkon (2015) state that “food [can] become a powerful symbol for expressive, symbolic ethnicity” (p. 62) and “help individuals maintain their heritage identity while developing a Latino identity” (p.69).

Given our literary research and the information we gathered from Ricky’s interview, it seems evident that language is not the only component for cultural connection. Rather, individuals, especially those who may not be fluent in Spanish, can connect to their culture in a multitude of ways, depending on their upbringing and what appeals to them. Given a lack of fluency or limited exposure to the language, second-generation migrants likely use these various methods, in addition to language, to form and maintain cultural connections. Cultural identity and a sense of cultural belonging are complex concepts. There is no single process or factor that instantly results in a strong sense of identity or cultural belonging. Rather, they are formed by a variety of factors and experiences. Though language is an important factor, it is not the only factor that determines one’s cultural identity.

Interlinked with our upbringing, and ongoing experiences, a key factor that determines our identity is one’s own desire and willingness to connect to our heritage culture. As argued thus far, this process can often be facilitated and aided through a sense of community, through connections with individuals who have gone through similar experiences. Here it seems essential to also note that, just as the experiences of every individual and their own personalities vary, there are various ways individuals may choose to connect with their culture. As such, the interview with Ricky and the research in the field provide insight into the factors that influence cultural identity, it is important to acknowledge that

there is no one path. Understanding one's cultural identity, and forming a cultural connection is an experience that varies from individual to individual.

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