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Psychological Interventions with Culturally Diverse Youth

Jewelle Taylor Gibbs

Larke Nahme Huang

and Associates

Forewords by

Stanley Sue, Ph.D.

Congressman George Miller

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Chapter Nine

Puerto Rican Children and Adolescents

Jaime E. Inclán
Mabel E. Quiñones

Puerto Rican adolescents living in the United States experience the developmental tasks of adolescence that have been described in the traditional theories of development (Erikson, 1963). However, Puerto Rican adolescents also struggle with the challenge of imagining a just future that is inclusive of them, and of carving a place in it—or developing an identity. The complexity of Puerto Ricans as a people is the result of that struggle.

Differences in critical contextual variables influence the unique interpretation of the developmental tasks of adolescence. For Puerto Ricans, adolescent questions like Who am I? and Where do I belong? and Where will I be? are intertwined with their unique history. Puerto Rican adolescents confront, directly or through the legacy of their families, dynamics related to their ethnic, cultural, and political identity. This makes being Puerto Rican and growing up in the United States a challenging multidimensional experience.

Colonialism is to Puerto Ricans as slavery is to African Americans; a critical understanding of the reality of the group begins with and is defined by it. Puerto Ricans have a history of over five hundred years of colonialism, from 1492 until 1898 by Spain and from 1898 to the present by the United States (Rodriguez, 1991). The contradiction of colonialism is at the core of common struggles with issues of identity, contradictions between ethnic assimilation or affir-

mation, adaptation needs versus preservation of the language and the culture, the search for ethnic identity in a country defined by the racial question, the internalized feelings of inferiority of colonialist mentality, and the drive for individual self-esteem, social participation, and reform versus abstention and rebellion. In short, contradictions between respect for one's identity and a society that demands conformity as a condition for dialogue are pervasive.

This chapter provides a picture of the unique sociocultural experience of Puerto Ricans living in the United States. It examines contextual and clinical issues bearing on Puerto Rican adolescent development such as the role of family, acculturation, intergenerational patterns, individuation, and identity development and presents examples of treatment interventions.

The chapter follows the following sequence. First, we present demographic data that describe and locate Puerto Ricans within the reality of the United States. Next, we discuss the different contexts that affect the adolescent's psychology, including social and gender beliefs and roles, socioeconomic and social supports, family issues, and individual and developmental dynamics. And third, assessment issues and clinical interventions are discussed as examples of systemic and contextual interventions in the work with Puerto Rican adolescents in the United States.

Demographic Data

As the Latino population grows in urban areas like New York City (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000a), characterizing and differentiating among ethnic groups of Latino heritage in the United States has become more complex. The year 2000 census divided Latino groups by ethnicity, social class, and gender. Although the census gives important information about major trends nationally, it is not as sensitive to mental health variables as we would prefer; it does not differentiate enough between groups and does not provide generational and longitudinal information.

In sharing a cultural heritage and other socioeconomic realities, a common tendency is to identify Latinos as a homogeneous group—as Hispanics or Latinos. What makes Puerto Rican adolescents in the United States different from other Latino groups? What is particular about their experience of growing up?

The 2000 census shows that after 1990 the Hispanic population grew 59 percent. The census estimates that in 2000, 35.3 million Latinos had rough parity with African Americans as the largest ethnic minority in the United States. In Florida and California, for example, Hispanics outnumber African Americans; in California, they account for one-third of the population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000b).

Race is an ongoing and difficult issue for Latinos, as it has been a criterion for discrimination among this ethnic group throughout their history (Hernández, 1999). The 2000 census for the first time provided the option of multiracial identification, which gave Latinos a chance to begin to identify themselves in ways that respond more directly to their racial reality. Provided this opportunity, Latinos identified themselves less as whites and more as racially mixed, shrinking the percentage of non-Hispanic whites from 76 percent to 69 percent.

Latino groups make up 11.5 percent of the total U.S. population. Puerto Ricans, the third-largest group, account for 9.6 percent of the Latino population in the United States, Mexicans for 65.2 percent, Central and South Americans for 14.3 percent, Cubans for 4.3 percent, and other Hispanics for 6.6 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000a). There are regional and local differences, for example in the Northeast, where 8.9 percent of the population is of Hispanic origin, of which 3.6 percent is Puerto Rican.

The 2002 census shows that 35.7 percent of the Hispanic population in the United States is eighteen years or younger, in contrast with 23.5 percent of the non-Hispanic white population. Among the Hispanic groups, Puerto Ricans appear to be a younger group. Puerto Ricans below the age of eighteen account for 37.11 percent of the Puerto Rican population in the United States; of those, 18.10 percent are adolescents between the ages of ten and nineteen, from which half (9.4 percent) are between the ages of fifteen and nineteen (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000c). According to the March 1999 *Current Population Report* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000a), 56.1 percent of the Hispanic population have a high school diploma or more and 10.9 percent have a bachelor's degree or more. In terms of educational attainment, 63.9 percent of Puerto Ricans obtained a high school diploma or more, and 11.1 percent had a bachelor's degree or more, which qualifies

them as more highly educated than other Hispanics. In terms of income, 20.8 percent of Hispanics between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four live below poverty level. In contrast, 43.5 percent of Puerto Rican children (age eighteen and under) and 26.7 percent of Puerto Rican families are below poverty level, which makes them one of poorest groups among Hispanics.

The census does not address why Puerto Ricans as a group, despite their numbers, their educational attainment, their American citizenship, and its related entitlements remain at the bottom of the social ladder. It is proposed that as a group, Puerto Ricans have remained loyal to their ethnic identity and have resisted acculturation, as evidenced by the lower rate of interethnic marriages (Hernández, 1999). In order to better understand the significance of the census data, we cannot limit ourselves to statistical analysis. An appreciation of the effect of lack of access to social and political power and marginalization through generations has to be complemented with an analysis of current social, familial, and individual dynamics and contradictions.

Political participation is a form of community empowerment, and lack of participation contributes to a social context of marginality and disenfranchisement. In spite of the growing numbers, the Latino population remains almost invisible in local and county government (Cooper, 2001). Some of the factors that account for the underrepresentation of Latinos in the government are their young age, limited educational attainment, and lower yearly income—all of which contribute to less political visibility and access to power structures.

In this chapter, we address some issues related to the psychology of Puerto Ricans and, in particular, the psychology of its young people in terms of multiple contexts of assessment.

Contexts of Assessment

A valid psychological assessment of Puerto Rican adolescents requires an understanding of relevant sociopolitical, cultural, family, and individual issues pertinent to the Puerto Rican reality in the United States. The experience of the Puerto Rican adolescent differs from that of Puerto Rican islanders (Garcia-Preto, 1996), mainstream white Americans, African Americans, and other ethnic groups. There is also

significant within-ethnic group variation due to race, class, and gender differences.

We posed ourselves the following questions: What makes growing up Puerto Rican different from other adolescent processes? What is unique about it? How can adolescent development be facilitated within the context of culture and identity? To address these questions, we view the Puerto Rican adolescent within several contexts that affect psychosocial and physical development.

Colonization and Immigration

The principal difference between Puerto Rican adolescents in the United States and other adolescents has its root in the sociopolitical history of the United States and Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican adolescents in the United States and in the mainland have not experienced being part of an all-powerful group that can conquer any difficulty. Contrary to their mainstream American peers, Puerto Rican youth's ethnic identity is colored by a sense of powerlessness and resignation resulting from the experience of sociopolitical subjugation and oppression experienced as a group. Puerto Rico was a colony of Spain until 1898, when the United States invaded the Island after taking it as war booty in the Spanish-American War. Until 1917, Puerto Rico had an ambiguous political status, and its inhabitants were considered racially inferior (Skidmore and Smith, 1992). With the 1917 Jones Act, American citizenship was granted and Puerto Ricans gained ease of travel between the United States and the Island, became eligible for some entitlement programs, and were eligible to be drafted into the U.S. military but were not allowed to elect their governor. As an American colony, Puerto Rico continued the struggle it had waged against Spain in order to preserve a national identity.

The decline of the agrarian economy after the American invasion in the 1920s preceded the first wave of migration in the 1930s, mostly of agrarian workers (Rodriguez, 1991). After World War II, Puerto Rico initiated its modernization programs, influenced by the New Deal philosophy. In 1948, Puerto Rico was allowed to elect its first governor, and in 1952 it became a commonwealth. At this time, Operation Bootstrap was launched. It gave tax exemptions and cheap labor incentives to American industrialists wanting to

invest capital in the development of the economy (Hernández, 1999). As ways to control an excessive population that would prevent economic growth, massive emigration of Puerto Ricans to the United States and massive sterilization of low-income women were promoted (Facundo, 1991).

The migration from Puerto Rico to the United States became one of the very few choices for economic survival during the period of the Great Migration (1946–1964). In Puerto Rico, migration served to alleviate the structural problem of massive unemployment. In the United States, the immigration of Puerto Rican workers helped to keep the wages low as they assumed low-level jobs with correspondingly meager salaries. In 1967, there was a net migration of 26,000 people (Inclán and Herron, 1998; Facundo, 1991).

During 1972 and 1977, a new sociopolitical climate was prevalent and encouraging of political commitment, in particular the Puerto Rican struggle for independence. Simultaneously, the United States was struggling with an economic recession. Although wanting to commit politically to the movement, many Puerto Ricans were forced to leave the country due to the critical condition of the national economy. This forced a second mass migration to the United States, known as the Revolving Door Migration, which was characterized by a circular pattern of migrating; for the first time, the Island culture was introduced to New York Puerto Rican culture (Hernández, 1999). The immigrants were younger, of diverse class origins, and from different educational and economic backgrounds.

In the 1980s, the migration characteristics changed. The Reagan administration policies in the eighties, the fear of a nuclear war, the growing technology, and the interest in economic power and globalization influenced Puerto Rican thinking (Hernández, 1999). During these years, the migrant population included highly skilled professionals, advanced graduate students, or other professionals who relocated in the United States to improve their financial and social status.

An understanding of the identity conflict experienced by Puerto Ricans in the United States is facilitated by a developmental view of their migration and transculturation within their family experience. Bowen (1976) states that substantial changes in a family system take place over at least three generations. Thus the effects of

family migration on the Puerto Rican adolescent can be conceptualized as a multigenerational experience of loss of social status, self-esteem, and mastery, while coping with the ambivalence and contradictions of acculturation (Hernández, 1999). Within this conceptualization, the second, third, and fourth generations, currently the majority of Puerto Ricans we see in our clinics, experience profound difficulties in which stress, failure, and defeat are common (Inclán, 1985).

Puerto Rican adolescents are still outsiders. As Puerto Ricans, they have never been able to control their own destiny. In addition, as immigrants, they carry the burden of being an ethnic minority in North American society. The sense of powerlessness and hopelessness that is often encountered in Puerto Rican adolescents meshes with historical and current social reality.

Culture

For Puerto Ricans, many traditional values are carried through generations, even though they may have little relevance in their everyday lives. Among the ideal traditional values is the value of *familism,* which encourages strong ties among blood relatives and the notion that, no matter what, family comes first (*Mi familia con razón o sin ella* [Family, right or wrong]; Inclán, 1985). The culture and the nuclear family are hierarchically structured and patriarchal. In addition, there is a *compadrazgo* system of godparents and coparents. This system is closely related to the concept of *familismo,* as is a system that involves either members of the immediate or extended family, friends, or significant others that by selection or by petition become the godparents of a child in baptism. This act constitutes a formal agreement among families that, in the absence of the parents, the godparents will be in charge (Inclán, 1985). Through this process, the bond between families and friends is solidified and immortalized, making everyone involved part of the family.

Gender roles, in the ideal sense, are clearly defined in the culture. *Machismo* is a cultural ideology that values male supremacy and encourages men's bravery, unemotionality, hypersexuality, and the role of provider and protector of women and family (Ramos-McKay, Comas-Díaz, and Rivera, 1988; Garcia-Preto, 1996; Stevens, 1973). *Marianismo* is another pivotal cultural ideology that calls for virgin-

ity, purity, goodness, sacrifice, resignation, and motherly abnegation (Ramos-McKay, Comas-Díaz, and Rivera, 1988; Garcia-Preto, 1996; Stevens, 1973). Based on the *marianista* value, the woman's primary role is to hold the family together, prioritize the husband, and secure family well-being, even when this involves self-sacrifice.

Personalismo upholds the dignity of the individual. It calls for the development of inner qualities to attain self-respect and offers a guide for the proper way to respect and gain the respect of others. Personalismo involves treating age peers with informal familiarity while treating seniors with deference (Inclán, 1985). Children are taught the importance of respect and the proper way to relate to others on the basis of age, sex, and social class (Ramos-McKay, Comas-Díaz, and Rivera, 1988; Garcia-Preto, 1996).

Aggression is to be controlled, particularly in women. Socially, aggression is supposed to be inhibited. The repression of aggression in women has been associated with the cultural syndrome of *ataques de nervios,* which are characterized by seizurelike patterns, usually psychogenic in nature (Garcia-Preto, 1998). At other times, it is channeled in less dramatic and more "accepted" channels such as somatization, alcohol consumption, indirect verbal aggression, or sarcasm and loud arguments.

Catholicism is the dominant religion, although the individual may experience a personal relationship with God without the institutional rituals (Garcia-Preto, 1996). *Spiritism* is another widespread but not officially sanctioned spiritual belief. Many Puerto Ricans adhere to it and believe that good and evil forces can affect one's life (Garcia-Preto, 1996). "Being" is valued above "doing" and "having"; thus, what you cultivate in yourself is more important than your accomplishments or wealth (Inclán, 1985; Garcia-Preto, 1996). *Racism* is pervasive and greatly denied as an issue, even though race and shades of color have direct implications for social desirability. Puerto Ricans are a racially mixed group, but being black or dark is seen as a disadvantage; racism and race discrimination are prevalent but not spoken about. As a general cultural rule, being darker is associated with a lower status in society, whereas being lighter is associated with a higher status (Ramos-McKay, Comas-Díaz, and Rivera, 1988).

Language is an important cultural value among Puerto Ricans that is emotionally charged as an issue of pride and shame. Third- and fourth-generation Puerto Rican children sometimes refuse to

speak Spanish, as they associate it with their seniors and with their lower social status. However, the prevalence of Spanish-English bilingualism among Puerto Ricans in New York City is also seen as a symbol of cultural affirmation and cultural identity (Hernández, 1999).

The process of Puerto Ricans acculturating to their new environment in the United States has taken generations (Inclán, 1985; Hernández, 1999). Although Puerto Rican adolescents continue to struggle to succeed in a culture that is hostile to them, they also struggle to resist assimilation into that culture. The Puerto Rican adolescents seen in our clinics rarely come with an assimilation dream. Instead, they present as a differentiated group who no longer identify with the "classic" Puerto Rican culture of their grandparents; neither do they identify with the host American culture. After at least three generations in the United States, many Puerto Rican adolescents are beginning to identify with a syncretic culture—that of the urban youth of Puerto Rican descent. As is true with any overlapping ideologies, this culture incorporates elements of the traditional Puerto Rican culture (Spanish words, values such as familism) with elements of the mainstream culture (values such as independence, English language) and elements of the urban diverse cultures (rap music, other Latin American music).

Puerto Rican youth, as a disadvantaged group, identify with groups like the Dominican or African American youth (Hernández, 1999). Simultaneously, they differentiate from these adolescent peers by adhering to their symbols of ethnic pride. At the crossroads of developing new cultural representatives and relevant role models, they have identified with a cultural movement or peer idols that represent their "in-between" status: not American, not Puerto Rican, but New York–Puerto Ricans. Examples of the birth of their own "Nuyorican" culture are the Puerto Rican Pride Day Parade in New York City, the Latin groove and Latin hip-hop music movements, and idols such as salsa or pop singers who sing Puerto Rican music with English words (Marc Anthony, Dark Latin Groove, Jennifer Lopez).

Even though cultural ideals tend to persist through time, Puerto Rican traditional cultural values are more like a tradition or moral guide; the group is not necessarily expected to follow it. When dealing with conflicts between parents and children, we are no longer encountering the conflict between the traditional val-

ues of the Puerto Rican culture and the acculturated values their youngsters encountered two generations ago. Rather, we are recognizing that the generational conflict occurs in the context of more advanced stages of the U.S.-Puerto Rican process of acculturation; parents tend to be more conservative but somewhat more understanding of the mixture of cultures, and teenagers tend to be more liberal and aggressive in their pursuit of their mixed cultural identity.

Social Class and Community

Clashes between social classes are the social, family, and emotional contradictions that result from being disadvantaged in an affluent society. The 2000 census indicates that 43.5 percent of the Puerto Ricans under the age of eighteen live below poverty level. This translates to a poor quality of life and limited community resources available for the Puerto Rican adolescent. The continuing growing disparity between the "haves" and "have-nots" has grown to major proportions, and the polarization between the two has had a destabilizing effect for the adolescent. The psychological consequences for Puerto Rican youth of this discrepancy include increased feelings of marginalization, a more intense struggle between issues of inferiority and self-esteem, a more complex adolescent crisis, alienation from the "blamed" parents, a dearth of role models, and an ambivalent, often rebellious attitude toward the mainstream society (Koss-Chionio and Vargas, 1999).

In the American society, wealth controls the definition of values in society. Puerto Rican adolescents, generally lacking a trajectory of wealth and entitlement, face the challenge of defining and redefining the social values that will influence their decisions and relationships.

To accept the mainstream path to achievement in this society is not an easy choice for Puerto Rican adolescents. Their parents may coach them but are not available role models. They followed the American Dream fantasy but, in the view of the adolescent, have very little to show for it, just fragmented families, transported and continuous poverty, and broken dreams. The high incidence of school underachievement and dropping out, early marriages and childbearing, and involvement in the criminal justice system

are all indicators that we have not yet found good models for guiding Puerto Rican youth into adulthood (Inclán and Herron, 1998). In addition, the current lack of a cohesive, well-organized, active, and critical political force within the Puerto Rican community has limited the possibilities of youth seeking alternative role models of successful Puerto Rican adults.

The problem has reinforcing feedback loops at all levels. For example, given the high prevalence of youth disillusioned with the possibility of success in the American mainstream, schools that serve Puerto Rican communities are disproportionately filled with youth who are looked up to for their tough disregard for cultural values. They constitute a significant peer group influence that competes, often successfully, against the parents' guidance. It is a credit to the resilience of the group that the majority of Puerto Rican youth from poor families stay in the course and break with the powerful forces of history and society that perpetuate the status quo of their ethnic group.

Family

Family dynamics characteristic of adolescence occur in the context of generational clashes experienced among family members. Due to the extended family structure of many Puerto Rican families and the value of familism, the Puerto Rican adolescent is not only confronting differences with their parents but also with their grandparents or other elders.

Within the socioeconomic context of the agrarian culture from which many of the grandparents came, an apprenticeship model of passage into adulthood was functional and adaptive (Inclán and Herron, 1998). The parents of the adolescents seen in our clinics have a different experience from those of the grandparents. Many are second- or third-generation Puerto Ricans who are operating in a more urban context but still preserving part of the ideal cultural values, in particular that of familism and male privilege. In many cases, there is a more latent conflict because as second- and third-generation Puerto Ricans, their experience of acculturation, biculturalism, and ethnic identity remains unprocessed cognitively.

In many Puerto Rican communities, the upbringing of the adolescent is shared by multiple generations and extended family.

These families are often in conflict and have to find a balance between being loyal to the values of the traditional hierarchical and highly structured family and the more individualistic, competitive, personal achievement values of the American urban culture. Being blind to the social and historical roots of this evolution of values often leads therapists to simplistically misinterpret the parents as either overly controlling or overly lenient, depending on the caretaker's generation. This "blame the parent" position can be exacerbated when the therapist fails to recognize the larger social dynamics of being Puerto Rican in the United States (Inclán and Herron, 1998).

One task adolescents have is to expand their social network beyond the family to external resources. This implies a process in which the whole family explores the culture outside the family, the development of new and different sets of values and orientations, and a reintegration of new and old cultural values (Inclán, 1985). For the adolescent, frequently this involves a stressful distancing from one's family, which, lacking the framework to understand the desirability of the individual's movement, is likely to devalue and censure this development. Many find it difficult to accept the adolescent's adoption of the new values and the behavior changes associated with resocialization.

Individual

As all adolescents do, Puerto Ricans undergo biological and psychological changes characteristic of their developmental stage. However, it is the social dynamics and the cultural and community experiences that encourage or hinder the potential that young people have. As stated before, many Puerto Rican youth lack appropriate educational resources and positive role models in their immediate environment. Thus intellectual development is a greater challenge. There is no preparation or training in analytical thinking or relevant strategizing. The school system does not respond to the developmental or social needs they have (Koss-Chioino and Vargas, 1999). This vacuum fosters a reactive approach to intellectual or interpersonal tasks. A vicious circle of isolation and victimization develops, as inner resources are not trained; therefore, the potential for escaping the vicious circle is unavailable (Quiñones, 2000, 2001).

Physical development is also affected. The October 2000 issue of *Time* (Lemonick, 2000) reports that puberty is occurring at an earlier age, with a mean age of twelve for girls. This is particularly true for African Americans and Latinas, who may start to develop secondary sexual characteristics as early as age seven. The figures increase among some Puerto Rican Island groups. Unfortunately, there is limited information and evidence regarding premature male puberty. Some reports indicate the onset of markers of sexual maturity in boys by age ten (Lemonick, 2000), but this evidence is sketchy and controversial. This phenomenon has implications for the psychological and social functioning of the Puerto Rican adolescent.

Girls, expected to act and relate to others as adults based on their physical appearance, are unequipped cognitively and emotionally to respond to their bodies and to others in protective and caring ways. Boys, expected to react to girls in a "manly" way, are also unequipped to respond to this pressure; they do not have the physical and emotional maturity to make informed decisions. Teen pregnancy and failed early and intense romantic relationships are associated with this discrepancy (Koss-Chioino and Vargas, 1999; Lemonick, 2000).

In adolescence, issues of gender also take priority. The cultural ideology of *marianismo* and *machismo* is played out frequently and destructively. First, because the practice differs from the expected ideology, a deficit model is inadvertently set up. Also the expectations can allow for abusive patterns to become part of young people's relationships, as males assume their supremacy and females assume the passivity that may be culturally expected or feel anxiety for not doing so (Quiñones, 2001). Unfortunately, there are not many alternative role models available for these youngsters that could help in breaking the gender relational cycle.

Treatment Modalities with Puerto Rican Adolescents

In this section, we present individual, family, group, and community treatment considerations. The interventions we describe are based on existing theory and techniques but are expanded in order to be more relevant to Puerto Rican adolescents and their families. Specifically, value clashes, migration, and sociocultural factors are

introduced as significant intervening variables in treatment. This expanded point of view includes a contextual, historical, and social-systems perspective of problems. Furthermore, it uses and articulates these variables for therapeutic effect. Descriptions and case examples are used to illustrate our treatment approach.

Individual Psychotherapy

Traditionally, individual psychotherapy approaches tend to focus on the psychodynamics of the person, patterns of attachment, quality of relationships, and relationship with the parents, among others. These processes are essential for the understanding and healing of individual conflicts as they represent human aspects shared by everybody, regardless of their background. In working with Puerto Rican adolescents, it is useful to expand the scope of these processes to incorporate other significant contexts that influence their ways of behaving and relating (Malgady, Rogler, and Costantino, 1990). The following case illustrates how historical, cultural, and individual dynamics interact to create in a sixteen-year-old girl a sense of defectiveness that prevents her from feeling worthy and happy.

> Janet was born and raised in New York City, the youngest of three girls. She had been in Special Education for five years, due to a language-based learning disability. Now at age fourteen, Janet requested services because she felt "stuck." Her sisters had run away with their boyfriends, and since then her mother's irrational demands on her had increased. Although Janet complied with most of her mother's expectations, she felt incapable of ever satisfying her.
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> During Janet's treatment, the therapist focused on family, cultural, and social factors to provide a broader context for understanding the mother-daughter relationship and the symptomatology presented. Janet's mother was incorporated into the treatment, and we focused on her migration history. Asking Mrs. E about her experience growing up, in comparison with Janet's, provided us helpful information.
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> Janet's mother, whose family was working class, migrated to New York City in the 1960s from a small town on the Island. Mrs. E hoped to become more integrated with the American culture. However, she felt looked down on and segregated by it, so her relationships with Americans were conflicted. As the first person in her family to graduate from college, her college counselor

convinced her that she would have a better chance to succeed in New York City. Contrary to her expectations, Mrs. E did not find a job. She felt embarrassed by her accent and small-town manners and felt threatened by the "all-white, all-American" professional world. Without a job or social support, Mrs. E went to live with relatives in a poor Puerto Rican neighborhood where she met her first husband and had three daughters. But the marriage ended in divorce.

Mrs. E was trapped in self-blame and shameful feelings, so she cut off communication with her family. She did not relate to other women in her ethnic community because she felt they were not "classy enough," nor did she relate to other groups or to Americans because she felt ashamed of who she was.

Although Janet was very close to her mom and her principal goal was to please her, she also felt like a failure, unable to fulfill her expectations. In the family sessions, Janet was asked to discuss her mother's history and encouraged to identify common themes. Janet was surprised to know that her mother felt incompetent and unable to fulfill her goals in life, much like herself. She was also surprised that her mother felt so intimidated by Americans, when in her presence she had valued them incessantly. Perhaps the most difficult thing for Janet was hearing her mother devalue "New York Ricans." Because she identified with that culture, Janet questioned how her mother could appreciate her if she also despised who she was.

At this point in the treatment, we started to challenge the family's values and myths regarding their own ethnic group. Where did these beliefs come from? What made them feel inferior to Americans? What contributed to their limited vision of their past, present, and future? How is it that in this family, gender and ethnicity determine success? How is it that Puerto Rican islanders have a higher sense of self-worth than Puerto Rican immigrants and their descendants? What happens with other Puerto Rican immigrant families in comparison to them?

Mrs. E and Janet started to question their thinking, helping them both to see how the mother's rigidity was associated with her family dynamics. Mrs. E's shame and her need to show her family her success had superceded her relationship with Janet. Mrs. E had identified with the term *minority*. Her difficulty was related to her assumption that her difficulties were entirely her responsibility. She compensated for her inferiority by underestimating and rejecting other Puerto Rican immigrants and did not realize that she and her daughter were part of them. Janet, in an attempt to become visible and assert herself, secretly held on to her Nuyorican iden-

tity. However, she felt as if she were violating the family rules and her mother's trust by doing so. These insights and connections helped mother and daughter move from a position of shame and self-blame to a more accepting and empathic view of themselves and their pain.

The focus of the individual sessions with Janet was the analysis of her behavior and feelings. Janet felt defective because she was unable to fulfill her mother's expectations, because she had a learning disability, and also because she was carrying a legacy of shame and unresolved family conflict. Expanding her understanding of herself from a self-centered and defective perspective to a more interpersonal and social one, Janet started to view herself in a different light and to better appreciate herself and the influence of ethnic, cultural, and family background on the type of family she grew up in and the type of person she was becoming.

Family Therapy

The family therapy literature includes some references to treatment issues in working with Puerto Rican families (Garcia-Preto, 1996; Inclán, 1985). In this section, we discuss three issues of importance in treating Puerto Rican adolescents in the context of their families: value differences, the importance of siblings, and questions of role hierarchy.

Although all families experience value conflict between the caretaker and child generations, this clash of values is exacerbated and becomes most intense at adolescence due to the developmental and social changes involved in this stage. When working with Puerto Rican adolescents and their families, we have found the technique of "cultural reframing" useful (Falicov and Karrer, 1984; Falicov, 1998). In this technique, the experience or demand that a parent or adolescent makes is analyzed in relation to the cultural values that constitute the background for the demand or expectation. For example, a mother's request that her daughter interact less frequently with peers is viewed as expressing the traditional Puerto Rican value that the family takes priority over the individual. The adolescent's demand for greater peer contact is viewed as expressing the more acculturated American middle-class value of individuality over family (Inclán, 1985).

Cultural reframing (Falicov, 1998) allows one to shift the focus of blame from the person to the social and cultural processes, which places different demands on the parent and adolescent generations. Contextualization of the problem is achieved when blame of the other has been dissipated or transferred to blame of the socialization and acculturation process as it relates to adolescent expectations. Once this is attained, the therapist may proceed to the next stage of therapy, which involves presenting an objective and impartial model for family progression through the stages of adolescence. This model is based on the process of exchange and negotiation between the parent and adolescent, for greater freedom, trust, and responsibility (Haley, 1980). For most families with adolescents, this is the normal developmental task, and it often needs clarification and therapeutic assistance.

The following case example illustrates the adolescent conflict experienced in the family. It also describes the ways in which the therapist can address the different levels of the conflict and contextualize the presenting problem within the social, cultural, and developmental dynamics.

> Four Puerto Rican siblings were in kinship foster care with their aunt. Their father had died of AIDS, and their mother had fallen prey to drug abuse when the children were placed. Jose was sixteen years old and Nicole fourteen; the other two children were seven and eight years old. Nicole had started to explore and act out sexually and was reported to be experimenting with marijuana. The foster mother, a very proud and traditional Puerto Rican woman, reported "having raised model children who never disrespected my household or used drugs, not even smoked cigarettes." She was overwhelmed by Nicole's failure to follow her guidance and threatened the children with return to the foster agency. The older brother, Jose, was angry with Nicole and embarrassed by her behavior because her sexual experimentation included involvement with some of his friends. When treatment was initiated, Jose had withdrawn from friends and family, as he felt impotent to address Nicole's activities.

Treatment options opened up when the foster mother's daughter Carla was included in the treatment. For a period, she attended the sessions instead of the foster mother. Carla's involvement and taking of responsibility de-escalated Nicole's conflict with her

mother, as Carla was able to serve as a bridge across the cultures and generations. She could offer useful guidance to Nicole in a way that Nicole was able to hear. Carla's involvement also relieved her mother of her anxiety about feeling ineffective. When Nicole felt listened to, she was more open and participatory in the treatment and sought the advice and support of her brother Jose.

About eighteen months into the treatment, when the initial crisis had subsided, individual sessions were scheduled with Jose. Jose and the therapist (male) explored differences in expectations and in gender role socialization in Puerto Rican young men and women. He was able to identify the cultural and family gender role models that he had internalized and to critically evaluate them. Although he continued to verbalize adherence to some male gender role constructs, specifically "being in charge," he was also able to express change regarding the constructs that men should not be sensitive, cry, or show feelings other than aggressive ones and felt that the hypersexualized, "macho," ready-to-have-sex-at-anytime idea of a Puerto Rican male was an unnecessary burden for men which, in fact, prevents young men from achieving positive self-concepts.

As a result of the redefinition of cultural values and incorporation of another generation as the bridge between the foster children and the foster mother, the communication between the children and the foster mother improved. In sessions and at home, Carla served as the cultural broker, often translating between the two generations. These skills were eventually developed in session by the children and the foster mother, liberating Carla from having to be in the center of each communication transaction and facilitating a more nurturing and oldest-sibling type of relationship between them.

Because more traditional parents have limited ability to serve as a bridge between the old and new cultures, sibling relationships are very important in Puerto Rican families. This is an underutilized resource in family therapy, in general, and in the treatment of ethnic adolescents in particular. Family dynamics and role distributions are usually such that some family member is able to differentiate from the family of origin earlier or more successfully than others. Often young women feel greater pressure to remain at home and help out than male Puerto Rican adolescents do. The

sibling who has been able to differentiate successfully from the family of origin can be enlisted in family therapy to serve as a bridge between the parents' and children's generations.

Therapists need to be aware of the importance of siblings in family therapy and move beyond their initial reluctance to include well-differentiated siblings in treatment. Although these siblings may live elsewhere, may be asymptomatic, hold jobs, and have families and other pressing commitments, they remain loyal to the family and tend to respond readily when an appeal is made for their assistance. The case of Marta illustrates this point.

> Marta, age seventeen, had become maladaptively entrenched in the role of executive of the family system—a role she had assumed as a result of the hospitalization of the male head of the household and her mother's very limited social competence. Exploration revealed that an older brother, Ernesto, had moved out of the home but maintained good family ties. Efforts to engage him in the therapy were successful, and Ernesto was instrumental in helping his younger sister reconnect with developmental tasks, issues, and priorities.

In order to accomplish this outcome, the therapist built on the belief systems and values the family adhered to. Upon exploration, it was discovered and articulated that this family placed significant importance on family hierarchy. After the parents, the oldest sibling, particularly if he was male, would make the decisions for the family. After reframing his participation within a cultural and family frame, Ernesto's involvement with the family crisis was seen as only natural. Marta's involvement was reframed as well intended but, due to her inexperience in life and lack of a role model from an elder sibling, she was becoming overwhelmed. A dialogue between the siblings discussing how they could better share responsibilities was encouraged in the sessions.

The family also placed enormous value in traditional roles, which prescribed that the daughter should be the family's caretaker. This time, the therapist decided to respectfully challenge this notion by incorporating developmental and social aspects to the therapeutic dialogue. At seventeen and in the current social organization where the family lived, it would be nearly impossible to be success-

ful as the only caretaker for the family. The role of the man was critically evaluated and expanded by incorporating and normalizing the presence of characteristics other than "being in charge." These included sensitivity, concern, and nurturance, as expressed in the role of the eldest son.

Together, the siblings were able to redefine self and family needs, as well as restructure family affairs so that family functioning could be maintained and Marta's autonomy and differentiation pursued.

Work with Puerto Rican families suggests that traditional approaches to the question of hierarchy within the family be reviewed. The therapeutic approach to the work with these families may require a more flexible and operational basis of role relationship within the family. Although it is standard to support generational hierarchies, the process of rapid social transformation makes the substantive basis for this hierarchy tenuous in many families where the children can quickly surpass parents in technical knowledge and expertise, status, marketability, and income; often they have a greater mastery of the urban Latino and American culture. A therapist who focuses on the family without considering its multiple contexts may operate within a family model that assumes a generational hierarchy that is actually contradicted by the social and familial reality.

Some adolescents, owing to their level of biculturalism, social achievement, or developmental maturity, are able to assume executive or other functional leadership within the family. The clinical criterion to be observed in such situations is whether this role is assumed with the implicit sanction of the parents or in a manner that undermines parental status and role, thus generating family dysfunction and psychopathology (Garcia-Preto, 1996). For example, a socially contextualized family role for a functional and well-differentiated adolescent in a poor Puerto Rican migrant family is one of great responsibility for the family unit as a whole and for the parental and sibling subsystems in particular. In our experience, it is the lack of these types of family responsibilities and expectations that tends to correlate positively with antisocial behavior and social anomie.

Group Therapy

Using group modalities is a good way to obtain a fuller view of the adolescent (Gil, 1996), as it can provide a surrogate extended family and a microcosm of their world in which they may feel safer and more able to trust others. In a group, these adolescents can practice interpersonal strategies and discuss conflicts and dynamics common to their developmental stage without singling out one person as the problem.

In the process of becoming adolescents, Puerto Rican children encounter parental and social demands that are harsh and, on occasion, detrimental to their well-being. For example, based on the cultural expectation of *respeto,* parents expect the adolescent to remain compliant and passive toward the adults, particularly older relatives. However, the social experiences associated with being an ethnic and social minority do not necessarily support the practice of respect; in their experience, many adults in authority discriminate, use, and abuse them based on their ethnicity, race, or gender; this can happen in school settings and workplaces, as well as in other social interactions. The adolescent may not know how to respond effectively to the attacks or even realize that an attack of this nature is taking place. Thus, rather than expect adherence to traditional cultural values such as "giving respect" to adults, regardless of the particular situation, in group therapy adolescents could reconsider and reconceptualize response styles and behaviors in different contexts of development.

Very important among the many pressing issues of adolescence is gender identification. In the case of Puerto Rican teenagers, concepts such as *machismo* and *marianismo,* for example, inform the gender behavior. These notions of masculinity and femininity are passed down over generations without being critically analyzed. In spite of the negative effects it may have on the teenager, the cultural definition of *gender* remains rigid and unchangeable and becomes confused with *ethnicity.* For example, raising a daughter without directly addressing issues of dominance in heterosexual relationships will leave her unprepared to develop a more egalitarian relationship with a male partner. Not addressing cultural aspects supporting the inequality of women in relationships may leave her thinking that to be a Puerto Rican woman she will have

to conform to the cultural stereotype. Not addressing cultural homophobia with gay or lesbian teenagers will leave them feeling defective and will facilitate self-hatred.

The process of adolescence for Puerto Ricans also involves the definition of their ethnic identity. Puerto Rican adolescents do not necessarily identify with their parents' idea of being Puerto Rican. Rather than expecting accommodation to the values of the parents (or expecting parents to accommodate to their values), the therapeutic task is one of reframing growing up within the context of the evolving values of the family and of the culture.

We have found that organizing groups around a theme tends to be more effective in working with adolescents. In an attempt to depathologize the experience of Puerto Rican adolescence, the group is organized around themes relevant to their developmental stage rather than around diagnoses. Some examples of these themes are sexuality, issues around being the eldest child, growing up with grandparents, or issues of ethnic identification.

> In a group composed of five girls of Puerto Rican descent between the ages of twelve and fourteen, they all shared the process of becoming women. The girls were second- and third-generation Puerto Ricans living in New York City. According to their parents, their "unacceptable behavior" included outings with boys, disrespectful interactions with the parents or other adults (including yelling, refusing to speak Spanish, rejecting Puerto Rican food), and inappropriate, sexualized dressing. The girls agreed to participate in a group to discuss the difficulties associated with growing up and negotiating freedom with their parents.

The group started by exploring the meaning of being a Puerto Rican woman. They all professed having a clearly New York Puerto Rican identity but had no clear idea of what that meant. They held on to stereotypical notions such as the sexualized Latina or the maternal Latina but had no alternatives to it.

As part of the group process, the girls explored ideas associated with the cultural definitions of womanhood. These involved the definitions based on *marianismo,* the Puerto Rican culture, and the mainstream American definition of Puerto Rican women. Through these discussions, the girls were encouraged to challenge their definitions, behavior, and self-expectations, the expectations

of boys, and those of their families. Through exercises and discussion, the group experimented with developing alternative models for their womanhood. For example, what will it be like not to comply with boys' sexual advances? Will that make them less of a woman? What other things are they capable of accomplishing in addition to motherhood? How would they behave if they were not so sexualized?

Issues of shame and pride were very attached to their definitions of being Puerto Ricans. They all felt proud of being Puerto Rican, but they could not identify anything in particular that made them feel good about it. Upon exploration, they all had negatively identified with the stereotypes of Puerto Ricans as welfare recipients, teen parents, or uneducated people, which made them feel ashamed. This contradiction was processed in the group. We explored how being Puerto Rican was often characterized by mainstream American society and by Puerto Ricans as something negative due to the social history of these groups. In our discussion, we talked about how sometimes it was easier to go along with stereotypes than to challenge and question them. We were able to identify aspects that made them proud. The cultural values of familism and friendship, the artistic cultural trends, and Puerto Rican moral codes were among those values they felt proud of.

We also discussed the differences between the cultural values of their parents and those of their own, contextualizing the differences within their historical, cultural, and personal experiences. The emphasis of the discussion was then shifted from criticism of the parents to developing an understanding of evolving cultural values, and to developing ways of negotiating with their parents.

Community Interventions

The following case illustrates the impact of an educational intervention on an older adolescent searching for a positive identity in his transition to adulthood.

> A nineteen-year-old Puerto Rican male was raised in the New York City Public Housing Projects with his mother and three siblings. He had a prior history of school failures and had been arrested three times. After completing the Roberto Clemente Center/Bard College Course in the Humanities, he concluded: "I wasn't interested or noticed where I was, I just got places, did what I had to do,

and got back. Now that's changed. The whole city is open to me. I go places and I'm looking up at buildings all the time. I recognize the Doric columns all around. It's like I was living in that Plato's cave."

The ecological systems perspective not only allows for but calls for expanding interventions from the individual to the family, group, and community levels. Because so many Puerto Rican adolescents and young people come from poor families, their education, as well as the values and worldviews associated with it, is often circumscribed by those in their immediate experience. In addition, many are burdened with the personal consequences that arise from social ills and drop out of school prematurely. Reciprocal feedback loops are built from the societal to the personal level, where education is perceived as "not for me/for you." Over time, the society and the young people begin to articulate discrimination in the form of "what is needed and desired is *job training*."

From the ecological-systems point of view, it is the responsibility of the community center, including mental health centers, to address problems in and of the community such as poverty and social marginalization at the community level also. Study of the humanities can break the isolation and expand one's way of critically understanding society and one's place in it.

It is precisely education that empowers the few in power over the many others who are job-trained. On this basis, in 1996 Earl Shorris (1972) founded the Clemente Course in the Humanities for poor young people who have been marginalized by the mainstream educational system. The Clemente course is a six-credit college-level course offered originally at Roberto Clemente Center in New York City and now throughout the United States. It is offered in academic collaboration with Bard College. At the RCC, every year about thirty young persons from the Lower East Side of Manhattan begin a two-semester college curriculum in the humanities, which offers courses in art history, philosophy, literature, American history, and writing.

The personal transformation that takes place over the nine months of study is a more trusted and enduring outcome than the valuable college credits that Bard College awards. The students' measured self-esteem increases significantly (Shorris, 1972). Community gratitude and feedback is uplifting. An agency director in

the community remarked: "You do not have to recruit here or tell me about the program. Lydia (a parent enrolled in their young parents program) used to walk around defeated, with little enthusiasm for life. She questioned all the time why she had her kid, and her fitness as a parent. Last year, while taking the course in the humanities, she began to walk with her head high. It's amazing how proud she now feels. She now participates vigorously and is a leader in our programs; she won't stop talking about it. Can I take it?"

Summary and Conclusion

Puerto Rican adolescents are a significant and expanding at-risk population group. Sociohistorical, cultural, and migration characteristics differentiate Puerto Rican emigrants from previous arrivals. Their role as second- and third-generation youth in their growing-up process is to integrate the culture of their seniors with their own American Puerto Rican culture. As a result of this integration process, a significant number of problems can be expected. Mental health practitioners must be prepared for the challenge that providing services to Puerto Rican adolescents and their families constitutes.

Cultural factors, values, and clashes between parental and adolescent generations cannot be overemphasized as necessary considerations in the assessment and treatment of Puerto Rican adolescents. Neglecting to pay attention to the processes of value orientation and value conflicts can lead to an overemphasis on intrapsychic or family dynamics that may limit the effectiveness of treatment. A contextual approach expands and complements the training in individual, group, and family assessment and treatment of Puerto Rican adolescents. This perspective argues for the need to expand clinical areas of competence to include issues of migration, history, social class, and the role of the community. Therapists working with this group need to understand that more than one worldview competes for these youngsters' attention as a viable life course. Failure to understand this tends to result in ineffective therapy.

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