

4-6-2026

Systemic Poverty Amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey

Karen M. Acevedo-Quintana
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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Karen M. Acevedo-Quintana

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Walden University
2026

Abstract

Systemic Poverty Amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey

by

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MPA, Walden University, 2020

MJA, Norwich University, 2008

BS, Oswego University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2026

Abstract

Puerto Ricans account for over 20% of Hispanics in New Jersey. It is estimated that 27.8% live below the poverty line. The poverty rate amongst this community is higher than the state average. Prior to this study, no known study examined what advocates for improving socioeconomic conditions amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey believed were the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty. The purpose of the generic qualitative study was to identify and analyze the perceptions of expert advocates regarding the current barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey using interpretivism through the lens of Benet's polarities of democracy theory. Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to select seven research participants. Results produced four themes: barriers to educational resources limit both short and long-term opportunities, healthcare access and one's overall health is impacted by social inequities, community and family alleviate impacts of poverty at the micro level, and discrimination serves as a systemic barrier toward mitigating poverty and oppression. Key findings from participants included the need for educational policy reform due to district zoning limitations and government accountability with respect to ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion policies are properly enforced. Additionally, healthcare accessibility reform was also highlighted as a major concern amongst advocates. The implications for social change based on the findings from this study include educational policy reform with school choice, allowing parent choice in lieu of community zoning and a reformed healthcare system that expands mental health access regardless of one's socioeconomic status.

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Dedication

To my mother, my rock in every season of my life. Your unwavering strength, steady presence, and the way you hold me up when the path is rocky, has made every journey possible. You taught me resilience not through words, but through the way you live, love and persevere. I strive to always carry your courage with me.

To Manuelito, who stepped into my life with an open heart and treated me as his own, offering a father's love not by obligation, but by choice. Your belief in me is a gift I carry with profound gratitude.

To my husband, whose unwavering belief in my purpose carried me through the most demanding moments. You held a space for my dreams even when they stretched us thin. Your patience, encouragement, and unwavering belief in my purpose sustained me in ways words can barely capture. Thank you for standing beside me.

To my brother, Eric, thank you for setting me on the path to understand where I come from so I can fully step into where I am meant to go.

To my brother, Dre, thank you for your unwavering support, the kind that steadied me when the world felt heavy and for always reminding me that I never walk alone.

And to my three amazing children, Destiny, Luis and Alora, whose love has been the heartbeat of this journey. I think of each of you and am reminded everyday why perseverance matters. Thank you for sharing your mother with this dream, for believing in me in your own beautiful ways, and for giving me purpose far greater than any degree.

I love you all!

Acknowledgments

I extend my deepest gratitude to my Chair, Dr. William Benet, whose guidance, expertise, and unwavering support were instrumental throughout this study. I am very grateful to my committee members for their thoughtful feedback, and commitment to strengthening this work.

I also offer my heartfelt appreciation to all the participants who generously shared their time, experiences, and perspectives. This study exists because of your willingness to contribute, and I remain profoundly grateful for your trust.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

This study addressed the systemic issues of poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The Center for Puerto Rican Studies (2024) confirmed New Jersey has the fourth-highest population of Puerto Ricans in mainland America. The poverty rate amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey is 13.5% (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2024) as compared to the 5.7% poverty rate amongst those who identify as White in New Jersey, and the 6.2% poverty rate amongst those that identify as Asian American in New Jersey (Center for American Progress, 2024). Puerto Ricans have resided in New Jersey since the first quarter of the 20th century. However, this group's overall economic and subsequent social progress still lingers behind other ethnic groups.

Background

Information in this section enables readers to establish a deeper understanding of the historical and ongoing political and socioeconomic struggles experienced by Puerto Ricans. The long-term impact of those struggles appears to have affected the continued oppression of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Before the realignment of Puerto Rico from Spain to American rule, Puerto Rico's populace was divided into two distinct civil rights groups, with political activists supporting their divisive causes. Both groups agreed that the socioeconomic status of islanders was oppressive, and that change was the only option. The first group (majority) was negotiating governance policies with Spain. In contrast, the other group (minority) sought to revolt against Spain for their independence (Jiménez de Wagenheim, 2016).

Before the acquisition of Puerto Rico from Spain to the United States of America (USA), the “*Carta Autonómica*” (Autonomic Charter) was approved by Spain on November 25th, 1897. In the Carta Autonómica, Spain approved the political and administrative sovereignty of Puerto Rico while still authorizing their representation in the parliament of Spain, previously known as the Spanish Cortes (Rivera, 2020). In March 1898, the “free Republic of Puerto Rico” held their first independent legislative elections (Nelson, 2015). The plan was to implement the newly formed government for the free Republic of Puerto Rico in May 1898. The Carta Autonómica signified the end of a four-century-long battle for national independence for Puerto Ricans. The Carta Autonómica signified the beginning of freedom from oppression for the inhabitants of Puerto Rico after 400 years of imperialism and subjugation from Spain.

On May 12th, 1898, less than six months after Puerto Ricans gained their autonomy from Spain, the USA invaded Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War (Rivera, 2020). The USA took complete control of Puerto Rico two months after invading the island and implemented governance controlled by military rule (Nelson, 2015). The charter establishing the free Republic of Puerto Rico was not recognized by the USA, and General Nelson Appleton Miles became the first leader to govern Puerto Rico on behalf of the United States of America (Nelson, 2015). The General’s first statement to the islanders, as transcribed from Spanish to English by Nelson (2015) from the original works of Mendez (1922), “The Crónica de la Guerra Hispano-Americana en Puerto Rico: Sucesores de Rivadeneyra”, was as follows:

The chief object of the American military forces will be to overthrow the armed authority of Spain and to give to the people of your beautiful island the largest measures of liberties consistent with military occupation. We have not come to make war against a people of a country that for centuries has been oppressed, but, on the contrary, to bring you protection, not only to yourselves but to your property, to promote your prosperity, to bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our government ... and to give the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization. (Nelson, 2015, p. 16)

By 1899, after the Spanish-American War, Spain gave control of Puerto Rico to the United States by signing the Treaty of Paris (Jiménez de Wagenheim, 2016). Most Puerto Ricans were optimistic during this transition, believing that the United States was a modern democracy, supportive of economic progress (Jiménez de Wagenheim, 2016). Nevertheless, media coverage stateside and politicians were not looking to democratize Puerto Rico or the islanders. Described as “uneducated, simple-minded and harmless people who are only interested in wine, women, music, and dancing” (as cited in Nelson, 2015, p. 16) by the New York Times in 1899. Puerto Ricans entered a new era of oppression.

The Organic Act of 1900, called The Foraker Act of Puerto Rico, was signed on April 12th, 1900 (Library of Congress, 2011b). This federal law maintained the status quo by making Puerto Rico an unincorporated territory (Library of Congress, 2011b). The President of the United States of America appointed a Governor and council to rule over the territory under the premise of federal statutes, ending the military’s two years of rule

in Puerto Rico (Library of Congress, 2011b). The Foraker Act of Puerto Rico did not grant Puerto Ricans the right to vote in elections. The appointed governor was given full autonomy to validate and modify the island's laws. A judicial system similar to the USA judicial branch was also formed (Library of Congress, 2011b). However, because Puerto Ricans were not citizens of the USA or immigrants, provisions establishing inalienable rights in the United States Constitution did not apply to Puerto Ricans. Instead, the United States Congress chose to exercise plenary power over Puerto Rico to keep the island an unincorporated territory, commonly referred to as a possession (Library of Congress, 2011b). For 17 years after implementing the Foraker Act of Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans had no status in the United States. They were entirely controlled by the US government. The United States did not allow Puerto Ricans representation in government beyond the local level for management purposes. The impact of this ongoing tyranny added to the barriers faced by Puerto Ricans. For many Puerto Ricans, the autocracy served only to highlight the importance of Puerto Rico becoming an independent nation (Nelson, 2015).

Despite known negative consequences and adversities the United States of America mandated that English become the primary language in Puerto Rico (Nelson, 2015). All classes and government lead agencies used English as their primary language. Children did not understand what teachers said in class because of the language barrier. Students in Puerto Rico began to drop out of school, many as young as 6 years old (Nelson, 2015). Nelson asserted that children did not want to go home and get in trouble for receiving bad grades. As a result, many children would stay home and help their

parents. Both children and parents determined that since they did not understand what they were being taught in the schools the children were more productive at home (Nelson, 2015). The adverse effects of not completing primary school are immense. A lack of basic formal education often results in lower wages and unemployment. It is also highly probable that the children of families whose parents have little to no formal education will face inequality based on their parents' socioeconomic status. Making English the primary language in Puerto Rico with no regard for the long-term effect of this language barrier is concerning. Language barriers increase the risk of socioeconomic disadvantages and have the potential to have a generational impact.

The policies and regulations instituted by the United States in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War exasperated the oppression experienced by islanders. Before Puerto Rico became a possession of the United States, the populace's economic prosperity came from exporting tobacco, cattle, coffee, and sugar (Jimenez de Wagenheim, 2016). Sugar was the focus and primary source of revenue. The changes in international trade and limitations set by the USA left many Puerto Ricans without employment. Before the takeover, coffee was the most profitable crop on the island. However, due to high US tariff costs for exports, Puerto Ricans lost this source of income (Baker, 2002). Farmers in the mountainous regions of Puerto Rico lost their income due to the change in agricultural needs. Those able to work (primarily in the sugar fields) often only worked for about 6 months annually when sugar production peaked (Baker, 2002). Most laborers from the agricultural market became sugar cane workers, leaving the mountains for the sugar cane plantations or relocating to the heavier populated "urban

slums” (Baker, 2002, p. 35) in search of work. By 1916, 75% of the Puerto Rican population was unemployed, though the inflation rate and high prices gave the perception of prosperity to outsiders of the island. Inflation was a result of foreign capital (Gonzalez, 1964). By 1920, the need for sugar declined, leaving Puerto Rico with “high unemployment, poverty, and overall desperation on the island” (Baker, 2002, p. 34). To further aggravate the matter, the unemployed sugar cane laborers could no longer remain on the farm with their families and live off the land as they once did during the non-harvesting season unless they could pay rent to the new USA landowners (Baker, 2002).

Before replacing the Foraker Act with the Jones Act in 1917, the United States also changed the currency in Puerto Rico (Baker, 2002). America determined that a *peso* was worth only 66 2/3 cents when exchanged for a USA dollar (Baker, 2002). This decision exacerbated inflation and pushed islanders further into despair. Gonzalez (1964) asserts that foreign entities governed 90% of trade between the United States and Puerto Rico. As a result, only an estimated \$124,791 of \$15,657,891 in revenue from trading was owned by Puerto Ricans.

In 1917, the Jones-Shafroth Act gave Puerto Ricans statutory citizenship in the United States, despite their colonial status (Baker, 2002). A few months later, the United States entered World War I (WWI), and 20,000 Puerto Ricans were drafted (Franqui-Rivera, 2013). The skills Puerto Rican soldiers gained through their military training, combined with the economic crisis of 1921, led more Puerto Ricans to seek employment stateside. In Puerto Rico, economic uncertainties intensified when all trade, both exports and imports with Puerto Rico were frozen by the United States during WWI, due to

German submarine attacks in the Caribbean (Baker, 2002). By 1930, New York became the epicenter of Puerto Rican migrants with over 50,000 first-generation Puerto Ricans (Lehman, n.d.).

The Puerto Rican Diaspora migration was at a peak between 1946 and 1947.

Tienda and Nelson (1985) assert that 700,000 Puerto Ricans fled the island during this period, which was equivalent to one-third of the entire population of Puerto Rico (as cited in Baker, 2002, p. 39). From 1947 – 1973, Baker (2002) asserts Puerto Ricans primarily relocated to New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Illinois. From 1950 to 1980, the Puerto Rican population in New Jersey rose from less than 10,000 to over 240,000 (Shaw, 1994). Relocating to the mainland was initially prosperous to Puerto Ricans. The literature suggests that after the Puerto Rican Diaspora of the 1940's, Puerto Ricans living mainland took action to improve their socioeconomic status. However, as deindustrialization rose, the need for unskilled workers declined (Shaw, 1994). As a result, Puerto Rican migrants did not assimilate economically like previous migrants did upon entering the United States. Instead, by 1980, the “average household income was lower than that of any other New Jersey ethnic group” (Shaw, 1994, p. 58), and 27% of them lived below the poverty line (Shaw, 1994).

In 1966, approximately 80 Puerto Rican residents of Newark, New Jersey, joined together to create the Field Orientation Center for the Under Privileged Spanish (FOCUS). Led by Dr. Hilda Hidalgo, Jose Rosario, and Zain Matos. (Washington University Libraries, n.d.) FOCUS was formed after Dr. Hilda Hidalgo learned that the United Community Corporation (UCC), which led the *War on Poverty* in Newark, chose

to allocate only one-tenth of the federal aid they received to the Spanish-speaking community (Washington University Libraries, n.d.). Despite actions taken by Puerto Rican civil rights activist like Dr. Hidalgo to improve their socioeconomic conditions, the *social disorganization* amongst Puerto Ricans, fellow community members, and public servants led to a series of hostile events against Puerto Ricans (New Jersey Historical Society, 1998). As an example, actions taken during this period resulted in the Newark Human Rights Commission looking into employment discrimination amongst Puerto Ricans, which they found substantiated (Shaw, 1994). Though progress was made, little changed, and by 1980 the poverty rate amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey rose by 10%, from 27.5% to 37.5% between 1970 and 1980 (Shaw, 1994). By 1990, about 11.7% of all Puerto Ricans on the mainland resided in New Jersey (Baker, 2002), the former second-highest Puerto Rican population in the United States.

In New Jersey, 5.04% of the population (approximately 449,510) identify as Puerto Rican. The exact number of Puerto Ricans on the mainland today is unknown. However, it is estimated that since 2021 there are 5.8 million Puerto Ricans living in the United States (Mohamad et al., 2023) an increase of .8 million since the estimates shown from 2017 and 2019 (Adames et al., 2019). As of 2021, the Puerto Rican population has shown significant growth on the mainland totaling a 71% increase since 2000 (Mohamad et al., 2023).

Data collected by the New Jersey Department of Education asserted that by February 22nd, 2018, less than 4 months after category four Hurricane Maria ravished the island of Puerto Rico, there was an increase of 886 Puerto Rican student enrollments in

Primary School and High School (Hinojosa, Melendez, & Roman, 2018). Data collected from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that of the 40,013 Hurricane Maria evacuees, 1,690 relocated to New Jersey. However, on May 13th, 2021, a press release on the official online site for the State of New Jersey declared that the state believed about 30,000 Puerto Ricans relocated to New Jersey since Hurricane Maria (State of New Jersey, 1996-2021). The reason for the discrepancies between these two reports is unknown. However, it may be the result of the Commission for Puerto Rico Relief Executive Order No. 10 reporting the total number of evacuees rather than the number of permanent relocations.

Faced with tyranny from Spain for centuries and continued oppression since 1898 under US rule, the socioeconomic conditions amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey continues to represent inferiority in comparison to other races and ethnic groups in the state. There is a gap in the literature regarding what advocates for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty in this community. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify what advocates of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey perceive are the barriers of reducing and/or facilitators of mitigating poverty amongst this community so that their oppression may be alleviated.

Problem Statement

Several Puerto Rican communities in New Jersey live in systemic poverty. The Puerto Rican population is more than two times more likely to be in poverty (13.5%) (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2024) compared to those who identify as white (5.7%)

or those who identify as Asian (6.2%) (Center for American Progress, 2024). The most recent available data indicates that, as of 2019, 12.4% of families of Puerto Rican descent in New Jersey live in poverty, with 36.4% being females who are head of their household, meaning they have no husband but have dependent children (Center of Puerto Rican Studies, 2021). There are an array of variables that may contribute to the poverty rate amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Some of these variables are educational attainment, employability, neighborhood safety, and the overall health of Puerto Ricans throughout the state. There appears to be no previous research analyzing expert advocates' perceptions regarding the current barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to identify and analyze the perceptions of expert advocates regarding the current barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey using interpretivism. By examining these perceptions, I was able to compare participant feedback and assess what expert advocates believe may be hindering poverty reduction amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, so that the findings may contribute to positive social change and to improving the communities overall socioeconomic conditions.

Research Question

What do advocates for the improvement of socioeconomic conditions of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst this community?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) polarities of democracy was the theoretical framework I applied to examine the results from this study. The conceptualization of the polarities of democracy theory is based on Johnson's (1992) polarity management theory, which was used as my conceptual framework. Johnson (1992) asserted that polarities are unavoidable problems and issues that can never be solved but can be effectively managed. By identifying a problem as one that has no single resolve stakeholders with different views can work together to identify the pros and cons of each pole with the intent of leveraging the positive aspects of each pole and limiting the negative aspects of each pole. In polarity management, there are four quadrants that are referred to as poles. Each pole has a positive and a negative side to them. For example, Johnson used the polarity of breathing to explain the four quadrants. The two poles provided in this example are inhaling and exhaling. The positive quadrant of inhaling includes taking in oxygen, while the negative quadrant of inhaling is the creation of "too much carbon dioxide" (Johnson, 1992, p. 21). On the other hand, the positive quadrant of exhaling is the removal of the excess carbon dioxide from our body while the negative attribute of exhaling is the need to breathe in more oxygen. The task of breathing requires the use of both poles (inhaling and exhaling). If someone attempted to apply only one pole, the negative quadrant of that pole would overpower the positive aspects of the pole. Benet (2006, 2013) applied Johnson's polarity management theory as the conceptual framework for the ten values his research suggests are essential for maintaining and sustaining democracy. These 10 values create five paired polarities that work interdependently. The

five paired polarities are: freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights, and communal obligations, and last but certainly not least, participation and representation (Benet, 2022). Based on their alignment all five pairs will be defined and discussed throughout this study.

Nature of Study

The nature of this study was a generic qualitative inquiry into the perceptions of experts in the socioeconomic conditions of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. This methodology is rooted in a philosophical discipline that focuses on understanding human experience (Berner et al., 2017). A generic qualitative inquiry aligned with my study's theoretical and conceptual framework because it enabled data collection based on one or more issues identified during my research. A generic qualitative inquiry approach also enabled me to analyze documents from my literary review, conduct in-depth interviews, and apply pertinent fieldwork observations (see Patton, 2015) to gain valuable insight into the paradigms that influenced the lived experiences and phenomena of those interviewed.

The initial strategy applied to promote purposeful sampling was criterion-based. I planned to interview 15 individuals or until saturation is complete. All interviewees have advocated for positive socioeconomic opportunities and/or reforms that influence Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. All participants have volunteered or worked for an advocacy organization supporting this community, for a minimum of five years. I anticipated that participants who initially volunteered to participate in my study would aid me in

broadening my research strategy by enabling reputational sampling of other key informants.

Assumptions

Ontology

I assume that poverty is a socioeconomic condition that has manifested over time as humans began to develop their communities and selectively choose inhabitants. The decisions made by others to exclude people from their developments manifested gaps amongst community members. Historically these decisions could have been made for many reasons, including but not limited to trade needs, relationships, or genders. Regardless of the reason, there was a divide between those who have and those who do not. Poverty then results from inequality, whether intentional or causation of survival. Fast forward to the current day, I believe that New Jersey continues to strive for democratization for all New Jersians.

Further, identifying and analyzing the perceptions of expert advocates regarding the current barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey is a worthy study that may have micro and macro effects over time. Just as Benet asserted that positive social change, is required to ensure “the survival of the human species” (Benet, 2019, p. 26), I too believe that by identifying and then addressing systemic poverty through positive social change humanity is, in turn, contributing to the survival of those affected.

Epistemology

Sociological inquiry contains an indefinite number of variables, making the root causation of any topic impossible to answer holistically (Patton, 2015). Poverty, for example, is measured in the United States by applying dozens of variables. The Census Bureau uses over 20 monetary income sources to calculate the poverty threshold in America. Some of these variables include but are not limited to earnings, public assistance, various forms of compensation, child support, and pension or retirement income (U.S. Department of Commerce, n.d.). Though the poverty threshold does not change in the U.S. based on geographical location, inflation is taken into consideration by the Census Bureau (U.S. Department of Commerce, n.d.). While the Census Bureau admits that the variables applied to determine an individual or family's poverty status are not absolute, the output is used as a statistical yardstick to determine the poverty threshold in the United States. I assumed that the poverty threshold data specified by the U.S. Census Bureau was an adequate starting point for evaluating the barriers to and/or facilitators of mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Axiology

The values I have concerning both democracy and poverty shape my axiological assumptions. Based on my ethical and moral values and my studies, I concede that Johnson (1992) has accurately assessed that the existence of unsolvable problems requires polarity management to leverage the positive aspects of both poles to promote the best outcomes. Furthermore, I concur with Benet's (2019) axiological assumption that there are ten democratic values necessary in a democracy, which can be paired as

polarities. I also agree with Dr. Benet that these polarities can work for or against one another depending on how they are managed or applied by policymakers, government leaders, and the people they represent. The 10 values, as mentioned previously, are “freedom, authority, justice, due process, diversity, equity, human rights, communal obligations, participation, and representation” (Benet, 2019) and are pillars of equal importance. When rationalizing the relevance of poverty in a democracy, I considered Benet’s (2020) definition of democracy as “an either/or solution to the problem of oppression in both the workplace and society” (Benet, 2020) and that democracy “should provide a system of governance that (a) overcomes oppression (our deepest fear), (b) achieves human emancipation (our highest aspiration), and (c) develops, healthy, sustainable, and just organizations and communities” (Benet, 2020, pg. 1). Those who grow up and live in a state of poverty consistently suffer from oppression. The results from oppression from poverty are vast; they include but are not limited to homelessness, malnutrition, increased susceptibility to crime and violence, and a lack of accessibility to healthcare resources and educational opportunities. I assumed that by effectively leveraging the polarities of democracy, leaders at all levels can better attain the positive aspects of each polarity and reduce or mitigate poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Methodology

Qualitative research is subjective. However, for my study, it was of immense value to understand the perceptions of advocates leading the charge to reduce poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey so that their knowledge could be assembled and

applied toward mitigating oppression amongst this group of people. I assumed that advocates lived experiences would enhance one's overall understanding of the barriers to reducing poverty and facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. By interviewing and having candid discussions with participants, I believed themes would emerge that aligned with those identified throughout this study. I anticipated these themes would align with the ten values specified in Benet's polarities of democracy theory. I assumed that this scientific investigation would provide policy makers and leaders with insight regarding the barriers to, and facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, and potentially serve as an additional platform for policy reform that would assist in the ongoing fight to mitigate oppression.

Scope and Delimitations

This research focused on advocates who directly supported initiatives that reduce the socioeconomic barriers experienced by Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. There is no known study that focused on the opinions of these advocates to objectively understand their beliefs, and experiences as a means of developing methods of intervention in support of determining the specific barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Viewpoints regarding the civil liberties and constraints, the judicial system process, the educational opportunities, and the health care available to Puerto Ricans in New Jersey are focused agenda items that I intended to ask the study participants to share their experiences about as part of our discussions.

Limitations

The breadth of this research contained a limitation that is inherent to all qualitative studies. This limitation was methodological and is a researcher's bias (see Patton, 2015). I intended to limit the potential for any bias by conducting data collection techniques that are consistent with established procedures (see Babbie, 2017). For example, member checking limited the potential for bias by allowing participants to review my analysis of their feedback. Additionally, by focusing on the topics discussed and information given to me from the interviews I conducted, I limited the amount of bias in my studies. I also intended on transcribing the interviews so that I could embed them within this study, further substantiating all analysis and findings. I planned to either audio-record or video record each interview so that I may reflect on all nonverbal cues observed. By member checking, having an audio or video recording of each interview, and journaling my reflections from each interview, I was able to exercise a "valuable research strategy" (Babbie, 2017) that strengthened the credibility of this study.

Another challenge I anticipated encountering during my research was obtaining the number of participants I hoped to interview to finalize my study. This challenge would exist if I were unable to find advocates who are willing and able to participate in my research. I planned to avoid the possible limitation of not finding enough interviewees to participate by offering those who prefer not to meet face to face the option to interview with me via a video recording platform, such as Zoom. Additionally, I was hoping that upon locating the first few advocates who are willing to interview with me they would assist me with finding other expert advocates who were also willing to participate in my

study. This method of obtaining participants for a study is referred to as snowball or referral sampling and used when researchers have difficulty in finding participants who meet the sampling criteria of their specific study (Berner et al., 2017).

Significance

This study is significant because it allowed me to explore the gap in the literature regarding the barriers to and facilitators of changing the economic status of the diaspora of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Additionally, my research through the application of the polarities of democracy as my theoretical framework can provide public servants insight into what is currently having a positive impact on improving the economic status of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, and what actions or attributes may be a disservice to this community. Positive social change through advocacy is a critical component of improving the welfare of others (Christens, 2012). The results from this study may yield government officials with an additional tool to facilitate positive social change for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey who are in poverty by identifying themes that correlate with public policies in need of updating. The results from this study also added to the 1955 New Jersey Division against Discrimination's last published study of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Summary

In this chapter, the purpose of this generic qualitative study and research question were identified to highlight the need to evaluate the potential causes for systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. By conducting this research to determine what expert advocates believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty

amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, this study may facilitate the development of new and revised public policies to reduce the hardships Puerto Ricans experience in New Jersey. Additionally, the results from this study may be assessed to determine its applicability for mitigating poverty for other minority groups.

The primary goals of this study were (a) to identify what advocates believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey; (b) to bring awareness to the field regarding the stagnant socioeconomic progress within Puerto Rican communities throughout New Jersey; and (c) to determine if by applying Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theory to understand democracy better one can establish policy and reforms to promote positive social change for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey in poverty. The information from this study may assist with further developing of programs, public policies, and initiatives geared at reducing systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework that I used as the assessment tool for interpreting the data collected from research participants. Following the overview of the theoretical and conceptual framework, a review of the literature regarding Puerto Ricans in New Jersey allowed for theme development that can assist with understanding how systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey may have transpired. The concept of systemic poverty was discussed based on the alignment of the themes developed after thematic analysis. The discussion of the theories being applied for this study and the development of the themes based on their alignment as possible causations for systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey will

enhance the understanding of how systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey may be reduced.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the migration experiences of Puerto Ricans, highlighting a journey for equality and inclusion in America. I also discussed some of the political and socioeconomic barriers Puerto Ricans faced pre and post their inclusion as citizens of the United States. I determined based on the literature reviewed that in New Jersey, Puerto Ricans are two times more likely to be in poverty compared to those who identify as white or Asian.

Throughout Chapter 2 I will dive deeper into the history of the Puerto Rican diasporas. As well as some of the inequities experienced by Puerto Ricans on the island and stateside. I will review my literature search strategy, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks I applied throughout my study and my literature review. During my literature review the key variables that appear to impact the poverty rate amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey included migration, stereotypes, racial, ethnic, and national origin-based discrimination, and classism. Each highlighted variable along with the impact of those variables served as a potential theme for my study. Each theme then served as a measure to assess if through the application of the polarities of democracy theory, policy reform or actions could be taken to reduce the poverty rate amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Literature Search Strategy

My research consisted of online search methods, including the Walden University Library, Academic Search Complete, EBSCO Host, and Google Scholar for peer-

reviewed scholarly articles. Additionally, I was able to research the Puerto Rican Community Archives developed by the New Jersey Hispanic Research and Information Center at the Newark Public Library. Keywords and phrases such as *poverty amongst Puerto Ricans*, *low-income Puerto Ricans*, *Puerto Ricans in New Jersey*, *mainland Puerto Ricans*, and *Puerto Rican Americans* yielded minimal results. However, by highlighting a variety of themes that did surface during my initial literature reviews I was able to use key words in conjunction with the words *Puerto Rican*, *Hispanic*, *Latin*, and *Latinx* to locate additional literature specific to the various themes that were most prevalent when conducting my literature search on poverty and low-income Puerto Rican communities in New Jersey. The additional keywords used during my literature search were as follows: *migration*, *diaspora*, *discrimination*, *racialization*, *gentrification*, *employment*, *classism*, *education*, and *advocacy*.

Theoretical Foundation

My research on the perceptions of expert advocates regarding the current barriers to, and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey applied Benet's (2006, 2013) polarities of democracy as the theoretical framework. Johnson's (1992) theory of polarity management is the conceptual framework. To provide clarity regarding Benet's (2006, 2013) polarities of democracy theory it is necessary to first explain Johnson's polarity management theory. It is in part through the application of Johnson's theory that Benet developed five paired values, which he attests consist of two poles within each paired value. The two poles are interdependent to one another, and all

necessary, “to guide healthy, sustainable, and just social change efforts” (Benet, 2013, p. 26).

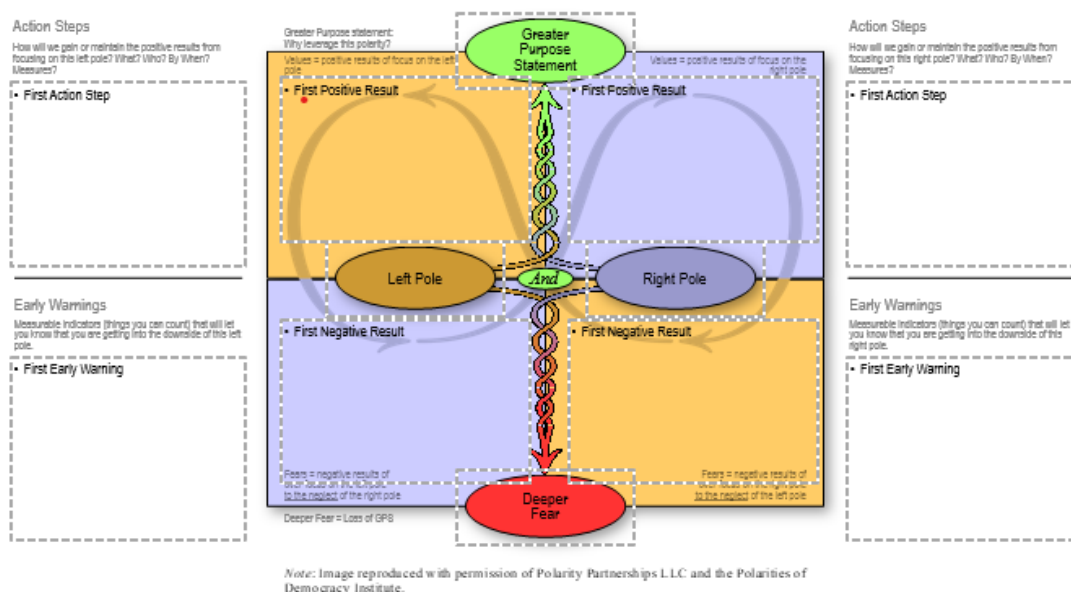
Johnson’s Polarity Management Theory: Conceptual Framework

Deciding how to address a complex issue is a difficult task. Johnson’s (1992) polarity management theory describes some complex issues as unsolvable yet manageable. Polarity management of an unsolvable problem as described by Johnson is through the application of both/and thinking in lieu of either/or thinking. According to Johnson (2020), “polarities are interdependent pairs that need each other over time” (p. 11). Neither can exist independently. Johnson describes polarities as having four quadrants. Two quadrants are positive while two others are negative. The four quadrants are each associated with the polarities in question, as well as the positive and negative aspects of each. In summation, Johnson (1992) asserted managers and decision-makers must consider both poles and all quadrants when making critical decisions. Furthermore, they must leverage both polarities for optimal results, as opposed to trying to simply pick one polarity over the other.

Johnson’s (1992) polarity management theory recognizes that in certain situations there are two poles that are polar to one another. These poles are interdependent and create a polarity that requires effective management by means of leveraging the positive aspects of both poles while simultaneously working to minimize the negative aspects of each pole. The model for polarity management enables society to address chronic issues that are neither avoidable nor solvable. The polarity management concept as visualized by Johnson is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

A Framework to Visualize Johnson's (1992) Polarity Management and the Infinity Loop



Polarity management can be conceptualized by envisioning a paradox between two positive things such as being awake or being asleep. Both being awake and being asleep are needed for survival. However, if you sleep too much it will have a negative impact on the time you are able to spend on awake activities. Similarly, if you are awake all the time the lack of sleep will have an adverse impact both on your physical and mental health. The need to both sleep and be awake shown as an interdependent polarity within an infinity loop depicts the never-ending relationship that the two poles have with one another. Polarity management applied to persistent problems with no indefinite answer for resolution make leaders, management, and those responsible for finding resolution able to decipher between the negative and positive aspects of both poles so that

they can then focus on leveraging the positive aspects of both poles and effectively manage the polarity in question.

Benet's Polarities of Democracy – Theoretical Framework

There are five polarities that must be constantly managed based on Benet's (2006, 2013) polarities of democracy theory. The five paired polarities are: freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights, and communal obligations, and last but certainly not least, participation and representation (Benet, 2022). Benet's (2020) definition of democracy asserts that to make the promise of democracy a reality requires the effective management of each of the five polarities. If the five polarities are effectively leveraged the positive aspects of each pole can be maximized while simultaneously limiting the negative aspects of each pole. These five polarity pairs independently applied to an issue can serve to mitigate various forms of oppression, such as poverty. The five polarity pairs are also interconnected and at times enable the leveraging of two or more of the five polarity pairs to maximize positive attributes of each pole (Benet, 2013). There is interconnectivity of acts within a democracy and therefore they are all intertwined. The themes developed through my literature review appear to align with the values presented in Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy. Figure 2 is a visual of Benet's (2013) 10 values of democracy arranged as interdependent poles as depicted by the polarities of democracy theory.

Figure 2

The Polarities of Democracy Theory as an Either/Or Solution to Oppression, With the 10 Values Arranges in Their Polarity Relationships



Note: Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships LLC and the Polarities of Democracy Institute.

During Benet’s doctoral and post-doctoral research, the polarities of democracy theory emerged and from his studies the underlying assumptions and his source of values. Benet’s (2019) philosophical assumptions assert that holistically the human species’ ability to survive is contingent on recognizing that our behaviors will determine the fate of humankind. Benet asserted that “democracy is the solution to oppression” (Benet, 2019, p. 1). The 10 values of Benet’s polarities of democracy enable people to work together by recognizing that each value is critical to the survival of the human species. Benet (2013, 2020, 2022) recognized that individually the values are incomplete and will not result in indefinite sustainment. On the other hand, if one can leverage each polarity, as required with the goal being to overcome oppression, Benet believes that people can

maximize the positive qualities of each pole to enhance democratization and alleviate the oppressed.

Since inception, the polarities of democracy theory have been applied as the theoretical framework for over 26 studies. Tobor (2014) completed an ethnographic case study on Urhobo culture and the amnesty program, while Strouble (2015) completed a case study on racism vs. social capital with a focus on communities with a majority Black population.

Sanchez (2021) also used Benet's polarities of democracy theory to conduct a study regarding the effects of Latino inequity in the Illinois State Government. Sanchez interviewed eight Hispanic leaders who all had 10 or more years of experience working in a Latino community. Sanchez conducted a complete literature review regarding the employment rate of Latinos by the state government, analyzed the feedback provided by her research participants, and took note of the body language of her participants to triangulate the data collected. Sanchez applied Benet's polarities of democracy to her study and found that all five polarities could be used as an anchor to develop positive social change efforts to decrease the gap in the number of Latinos hired by the State of Illinois.

Griffin (2017) also applied Benet's polarities of democracy as the theoretical framework to determine if housing opportunities were democratically managed, to ensure equal and fair opportunities to two homeless shelters in New Jersey. Griffin examined the perceptions of staff workers to assess the housing first model's democratic processes. Upon completion of his study Griffin found that the knowledge management of housing

opportunities and resources available to those seeking housing assistance was inequitable. He surmised that through policy change at all levels of government, there is an opportunity to increase accountability of the housing first model to ensure equal access to housing for homeless people throughout New Jersey. This result appears to align with Benet's equality and diversity pair and is interrelated with justice and due process. Griffin discovered that staff workers unanimously expressed a desire for a higher participation rate in combatting chronic homelessness in their community. This feedback aligns with Benet's (2013) paired values of representation and participation. The responses from Griffin's (2017) study on homelessness validate that the representatives combatting homelessness in Burlington County need the support of the people in their community. One of the responses from a participant was

As case managers...we are the frontline individuals that help them to believe in themselves again and recover from situations that they have found themselves in, but we also need other organizations to help who are not looking for a profit but simply want to help. (Griffin, 2017, p. 17)

In this example, representation from the homeless shelter workers is evident. However, the lack of leveraging from the participation pole throughout the community may be preventing the positive change that the shelter employees are working toward, as they advocate to reduce homelessness.

Benet (2013) viewed his polarities of democracy theory as the key to the ongoing battle to end oppression. The five paired values, when accurately assessed against a particular issue, can enhance the democratization process in the United States, as well as

facilitate mitigating oppression in societies throughout the world. It is the responsibility of stakeholders to continuously observe, assess, and address changes amongst polarities to manage them effectively without over stimulating one polarity resulting in detriment to the other.

In part, paired values contained within the polarities of democracy theory are intended to assist policymakers and government officials to make the promise of democracy a reality for everyone. Policy makers in any given society can maximize the positive aspects of each pole, for the betterment of humankind. The polarities of democracy theory will be the lens I use to assess the perceptions of expert advocates regarding the barriers to, and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Review of the Literature

New Jersey has the fourth largest population of Puerto Ricans in mainland America (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2024). However, after Hurricane Maria in 2017 New Jersey became the fourth largest state for Puerto Rican residents. As of 2020, New Jersey founded the New Jersey /Puerto Rico Commission spearheading the latest known program intended to enhance economic wealth in PR through various partnerships between the Commonwealth and the State (City of Newark, 2018). In New Jersey, Puerto Ricans have a higher mean income when compared to Puerto Ricans in other states and on the island. However, the fact remains that Puerto Ricans in New Jersey are still suffering from systemic poverty at alarming rates. As Trias-Monge (1997) stated, Puerto Ricans have often been met with oppression throughout history. Though there are Puerto

Ricans in New Jersey who are prosperous far too many continue to live in low-income communities and suffer from marginalization and oppression.

The Puerto Rican Diaspora

The Puerto Rican diaspora is not a standalone event in history. The diaspora has and continues to occur seemingly due to traumatic events. As initially discussed in Chapter 1, Puerto Ricans began migrating to the mainland in the early 19th century (Baker, 2002) by means of at will migration, primarily in search of economic prosperity. From 1914 to 1930, approximately 3.4% of the island's population began migrating from PR to the mainland through U.S. labor recruitment contracts (Baker, 2002). The settlement of Puerto Ricans stateside and establishment of communities during this period was in part the result of the US' decision to stop the trading of goods from PR to Europe (McGreevey, 2018) resulting in extreme economic hardship for islanders. America aware of the economic decline and loss of income to resident islanders allowed U.S. business owners to acquire cheap laborers (Baker, 2002) from PR. The acceptance of jobs as cheap laborers for Puerto Rican migrants served as both a means of income after having their primary means of sustainment shut down by the US government and served to provide for their families. The initial migration of Puerto Ricans stateside consisted primarily of males for the purpose of labor. However, as time progressed families also migrated and established residencies stateside.

Puerto Ricans were first reported as inhabitants of New Jersey in the 1920s (Jones, 1955). Isham B. Jones, a field representative employed at the New Jersey State Department of Education Division against Discrimination conducted the first known

government lead study regarding the status of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Jones found that upon migrating from Puerto Rico to New Jersey Puerto Ricans were unaware of the resources available to them as citizens. The New Jersey social service departments during this period were little help to Puerto Rican migrants. Jones asserted that Puerto Ricans who sought public assistance only did so for about 3 weeks. Puerto Ricans feared that they would be forced to return to Puerto Rico by the agency for seeking assistance. Various state departments illegally took it upon themselves to hire contractors to deport Puerto Ricans who went to social servicing agencies for help. While not known for certain, one can presume that assimilation of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey was negatively impacted due to illegal deportation by the Social Service Agency, though they exist to provide relief and aid to those oppressed by socioeconomic disadvantages.

Unaware of the programs and resources available, Puerto Ricans in New Jersey struggled with necessities. The language barriers and skin color of Puerto Ricans impacted their ability to find housing (Jones, 1955). Most ended up in “the slum district, the rooming house district, and the unwanted housing in rural villages and towns” (Jones, 1955, p. 45). Jones substantiates through his field research that Puerto Ricans in New Jersey suffered from racial and ethnic discrimination and though US citizens, they were treated like foreigners when attempting to assimilate in America. The actions of public servants toward Puerto Ricans in New Jersey were intolerant and displayed an ideology that categorized Puerto Ricans as foreigners to whom the public servants of New Jersey felt since not endogenous were not entitled to the same equities as their fellow Americans. Aranda (2007) found that the experiences of many middle-class Puerto

Ricans left them feeling displaced, lonely, and isolated on the mainland. Despite these feelings many Puerto Ricans found a way to blend the sociological theories of assimilation and acculturation citing finance, healthcare, and social connections as some of the reasons for choosing to migrate from PR to the mainland or remain stateside.

The second diaspora of Puerto Ricans to the mainland was a result of the United States' industrialization efforts (Ayala, 2020; Baker, 2002). Operation Boot Strap was a federally led program intended to increase employment rates throughout Puerto Rico by developing manufacturing businesses on the island. The employment rate in Puerto Rico under Operation Boot Strap did improve. However, the double exploitation (Ayala, 2020; Baker, 2002) experienced by islanders further oppressed Puerto Ricans on the island. Puerto Ricans were taxed 25% more than mainland Americans for consumer items, and they were paid 50 – 75% less than laborers stateside (Peoples Press, 1977). The Industrial Incentives Act of 1947 enticed developers to industrialize Puerto Rico. As a result, agriculture was no longer the primary source of revenue for islanders. Local farmers were no longer profiting enough to sustain themselves, so while the net income for industrialization business owners peaked at \$621 million (Green, Skidmore, & Smith, 2013), the revenue did not improve the socioeconomic status of residents. The goal of Operation Boot Strap may have been noble, but the negative results included the inflation of goods, a 25% additional tax fee for consumer items, the loss of agricultural jobs which forced many resident landowners to sell, and another mass migration of Puerto Ricans from the island to the mainland (Ayala 2020; Baker, 2002; Sanchez-Korrol, 2017). As highlighted in the background section of Chapter one, the total number of Puerto Rican

residents on the mainland increased by a third between 1944 and 1960 (Sanchez-Korrol, 2017). Most of the Puerto Ricans who migrated during this period settled in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Illinois (Baker, 2002)

According to the Puerto Rico Statistics Institute (2000 – 2018) over 50,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States annually from 2006 – 2017, following the 2006 economic crisis of Puerto Rico (Hinojosa, 2018). While specific details regarding this period of annual migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland are not specified, it is evident that the economic crisis in Puerto Rico and a desire for a more prosperous future either for self, or their descendants have a long history of being a primary reason Puerto Ricans relocate stateside. Regardless of the exact reason for the ongoing diaspora with 50,000 additional Puerto Ricans migrating annually from 2006 – 2017 to the mainland the results were an increase to the number of Puerto Ricans stateside. When added with the diaspora that occurred from the 1940s – 1960s, the total of migrant Puerto Ricans on the mainland by 2017 was approximately 1,437,662.

In 2017, Puerto Rico succumbed to two catastrophic hurricanes (Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria), and another diaspora from the island to the mainland ensued. The accuracy of the data on the migration of Puerto Ricans from the island to the mainland during this period is not definitive. The rapidness in which this migration occurred and the disbursement of migrants throughout the United States has made it difficult to solidify the exact migration numbers throughout the mainland (Hinojosa, 2018). However, based on nontraditional methods of data collection such as teralytics to assess smart phone usage mobility and school enrollment increases of displaced children it was estimated

that over 450,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the mainland within the first 5 months post Hurricane Irma and Maria (Hinojosa, 2018). These data are not conclusive and dependent on where one looks the actual number of migrants from Puerto Rico to the mainland in the aftermath of these two hurricanes fluctuates. From July 2017 to July 2018 air travel data estimated that 168,295 Puerto Ricans migrated. Whereas U.S. Census data from this period show 129,000 migrants (Acosta, Buckee, Irizarry, & Kishore, 2020). Though the exact number of migrants from PR to the mainland is unknown. However, extensive media coverage in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Maria solidifies a mass migration did occur (Hinojosa, 2018).

There are currently more Puerto Ricans living in mainland America than the island (Ayala, 2020). As of 2018, 64% of Puerto Ricans in the United States reside stateside. Described as a diasporic people Puerto Ricans have fled the island regularly since colonialism of Puerto Rico by the United States from Spain. The impact of migration, and the acceptance, or lack thereof from stateside American throughout history appears to have negatively impacted the socioeconomic status of many Puerto Ricans. When Puerto Ricans leave the island of Puerto Rico, they “leave a homeland with its own distinct identity and culture, and the transition can involve many of the same cultural conflicts and emotional adjustments that most immigrants face” (Library of Congress, n.d.). The International Office of Migration (2019) defined diasporas as “migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experiences and background” (p. 49). The customs, values, behaviors, and beliefs amongst Puerto Rican migrants vary from Americans who live on

the mainland. In New Jersey, almost 20% of the estimated 500,000 Puerto Rican migrants residing in the state live in poverty (Adames et al., 2019). In 2021, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 10.2% of New Jersey residents lived below the poverty line and the estimated total population in the state was 9,261,699 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021c). Based on these known data points about 944,693 residents in New Jersey live in poverty of which over 10.5% are Puerto Rican.

The reoccurring diaspora of Puerto Ricans though apparent does not appear to have robust monitoring in New Jersey. Perhaps the systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey shares a linkage with the diasporas and migration experiences of Puerto Ricans relocating to New Jersey. Many of the people who relocate to New Jersey from Puerto Rico appear to stay with relatives upon arrival, one must consider the monetary impact this experience has on both the relocating family and the relatives that welcome them into their homes.

Stereotypes Against Puerto Ricans

Stereotypes and biases lead to discriminatory practices. Whether a stereotype is perceived or actual the threat of stereotypes “negatively affects the performance of any marginalized group” (Picho-Kiroga et al., 2021, p. 232). Propaganda in the media and stereotypes conveyed in the entertainment industry in movies, and other performance outlets contribute to the negative stereotypes that exist about Puerto Ricans. According to Jones (1950), the public believes that Puerto Ricans carried knives, are loud, and uneducated. The stereotypes of the 1950’s is what Americans read in the local newspapers and heard on the news as they formed their opinions on Puerto Ricans in

general. The New York Times (NYT) is a newspaper that is respected throughout the US and often used by social scholars and historians as a reference in their studies (as cited in Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2019). The NYT published a study of how Puerto Ricans were portrayed in from 2010 – 2016. The results displayed both explicit and implicit constructions of racial threat (Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2019). The findings within this study overtly highlighted an ethnos racial divide between Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic communities, specifically Dominican and Mexican. The divide highlighted by the NYT between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans and against between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans was displayed in the preceding examples of discriminatory practices impacting Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Additionally, 30% of the samples shared by the NYT covertly made distinctions specific to the cultural differences of Puerto Ricans, other Hispanic groups, and whites (Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2019). The NYT though not all inclusive has portrayed Puerto Ricans as conflicting with other Hispanic groups and a contributor to the cultural dysfunction within the Hispanic communities in America perpetuating Puerto Ricans as problematic despite the evidence of multiple Puerto Rican lead advocacy groups actively working to remove these stigmas. ASPIRA which means aspire in Spanish is a private, non-profit organization (NPO) formed in 1961 for Puerto Ricans to negate the negative effects of discrimination and stereotypes impacting their community through civic engagement (ASPIRA, 2022). The NPO, ASPIRA and the positive steps advocates of ASPIRA take to end discrimination and mitigate poverty have spanned across New York and New Jersey since 1968. The outreach initiatives by members of ASPIRA are inclusive and include Latino and non-Latino groups who suffer from

oppression (Foundation Center, 2022). ASPIRA has facilitated the development of nationally recognized programs such as the Juvenile Delinquency Alternative Initiatives. Other Puerto Rican led organizations that support all Hispanics include but are not limited to the Puerto Rican Action Committee (PRAC), and the Puerto Rican Association for Human Development, Inc. (PRAHD).

Known as State Ideological Apparatuses, the media is a tool by which the information given to the public is used to form and internalize personal beliefs, and philosophies. Further stereotypes interpolated by the NYT include labeling Hispanics as being hyper-fertile, lazy, and lacking morals (Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2019). Stereotypical propaganda against Puerto Ricans is displayed in the musical and movie, *West Side Story*. Originally released in 1957 and then remade in 2019, *West Side Story*, is considered by many to be “the most influential story portraying Puerto Ricans” (Hatzipanagos, 2021, p.1). *West Side Story* portrays Puerto Ricans as gang members, uneducated and prone to violence. Described as less demeaning than the original version the song *America* in the 2019 make of *West Side Story* contains “the most anti-Puerto Rican lyrics in the whole show or film” (Hatzipanagos, 2021, p. 1). The song includes references to the United States being superior to Puerto Rico and insinuates Puerto Rico should sink into the ocean. This song lyric suggests the United States is culturally superior to Puerto Rico simply because of a belief that the United States is better than Puerto Rico. Bratt (2022) found that whether an individual claimed superiority over another using culturalism or racism the correlation between the two factors maintained a strong association with traditional racism. Therefore, while the direct racism against

Puerto Ricans may not appear as affluent as it has in the past the media continues to promote state ideological apparatuses that may contribute to the negative personal and cultural beliefs that Puerto Ricans are inferior to other Americans, even though they too are American citizens.

Negative stereotypes often result in propaganda and media coverage which serve as a gateway to the public for understanding different societies and cultures. The negative stereotypes of Puerto Ricans in the media may have a direct correlation on the discrimination and systemic poverty faced by Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Discrimination (Race, Ethnicity, and National Origin-Based)

Structural (also referred to as Institutional), perceived, systemic, and actual discrimination based on the ethnicity of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey have emerged from my literature review. “Hispanic origin (ethnicity) is considered a separate concept from race. People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race” (New Jersey State Data Center, 2000 p. 5). Discrimination in any form may stem from the generational perceptions of exclusion in societal settings, such as the workplace, in schools, or in specific communities. Rocco (2014), a political theorist, conceded the continued oppression of Puerto Ricans exists because despite their inclusion as a territory Puerto Ricans continue to be racialized as perpetual foreigners. The categorical practice of racial identification in America appears to create a constant divide amongst Puerto Ricans and other Americans. As a result, Puerto Ricans appear to continue to suffer from the exclusionary tool of ethnic and/or racial barriers (Jimenez de Wagenheim, 2016).

Individuals oppressed through systems of colonialism and racial hierarchy is how Puerto Ricans are described by some sociologists when comparing their hardships of assimilation to that of those with a European descent (Goldberg et al., 2006). Goldberg et al. (2006) conceded that the United States Euro-American dominant groups have a direct correlation with why the majority of Puerto Ricans in the United States are unable to raise their overall socioeconomic status the way Europeans did soon after their arrival to the United States.

It is in part the systemic and structural racism that reinforce the negative causal pathways that lead to systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Hence the reason many immigrant Europeans who settled in America were able to improve their socioeconomic status whereas Puerto Ricans continue to struggle.

Misperceptions of a Hispanic, Spanish, or Latin individuals being an immigrant is an example of both structural and systemic discrimination that negatively impacts Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Mr. Ernesto Galarza, a New Jersey native of Puerto Rican descent being arrested after a co-worker, at his job site was arrested for attempting to sell drugs (U.S Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, 2014). Mr. Galarza who was eventually cleared of charges, was jailed an additional three days after posting bail due to the issuance of an immigration detainer. Local officials held Mr. Galarza under immigration detainment permissive authorities though he had both a valid Social Security Card and driver's license with him when he was arrested. Anti-immigrant policies target the Hispanic community (Benson, 2022), and the detainment of Mr. Galarza is an example of the structural racism that continues to affect Puerto Ricans in New Jersey despite their

citizenship. While both immigration concerns and migration from Puerto Rico to New Jersey are two distinct issues immigration laws are often a proxy for racial and ethnic discrimination that appear to have a negative impact on Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

A study of perceptions of race and discrimination amongst Latino and Hispanics of Caribbean descent included 822 Puerto Ricans who concluded that dark-skinned and young Hispanics of Caribbean descent maintained a higher rate of perceived discrimination compared to that of White, older Latino/Hispanics who participated in the study (Araujo-Dawson, 2015). Gomez (2000) found that darker Latino/Hispanic males are more likely to make less money than their white counterparts (as cited in Araujo-Dawson, 2015). These findings align with Cano et al. (2021), who found that 20.7% of Puerto Ricans in his study felt that both inter and intra ethnic discrimination exists when dealing with the courts, seeking employment, educational opportunities, housing, and when interacting with the police.

Puerto Ricans report amongst the highest amount of perceived ethnic discrimination (as cited in Cano et al., 2021). Cano et al. (2021) validated the stereotype and ongoing division of Puerto Ricans as compared to other Americans. Puerto Ricans are grouped with first, second, and third-generation immigrants of Hispanic descent throughout the study, though they are not immigrants at all, a frequent reoccurrence throughout many of the journals and literary documents reviewed for this study. The example of including Puerto Ricans in immigrant studies further segregates them from their fellow Americans and invites misleading information to its readers by labeling Puerto Ricans under immigrant American studies when they are not immigrants at all.

Despite the ongoing inclusion of Puerto Ricans in immigrant studies, the data does facilitate one's ability to develop a deeper understanding of perceptions within a variety of Puerto Rican communities. The information is also useful in understanding some of the concerns Puerto Ricans have in the United States. Cano et al. (2021) found that Puerto Ricans believe that the higher their use of the Spanish language the more likely they were to be discriminated against. Of all Hispanic ethnic groups in Cano et al. study Puerto Ricans ranked having the second highest perception of a prevalence of ethnic discrimination amongst the seven ethnic groups studied with 40.9% of all Puerto Ricans who participated affirming their belief that they fell victim to one or more forms of ethnic discrimination.

Ethnic discrimination is a form of social exclusion that often directly correlates with poverty (Beech et al., 2021). Perceptions of ethnic discrimination are also known to cause individuals to have an increase in unhealthy responses and behaviors (Williams, 2009). The perceived ethnic discrimination amongst Puerto Ricans (Cano et al., 2021) has the potential to result in a myriad of health problems. Both clinical and community studies have concluded that with perceptions of ethnic discrimination mental and physical health risk increase (Beech et al., 2021). These conditions include but are not limited to diseases such as high blood pressure, and drug use, mental ailments which include depression and anxiety, and physical health problems such as hypertension (Williams, 2009). All the effects of discrimination faced by Puerto Ricans in New Jersey potentially decrease their employability and may subject them to systemic poverty because of their ethnicity.

Shaw (1994) asserted that employment discrimination is a distinguishable contributor to the systemic poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. For many Puerto Ricans, working in the agricultural sector was and continues to be a primary means of employment. It took over 30 years of working as farm laborers in the US for Puerto Ricans to obtain equal domestic worker rights under the labor market regulations and the Wagner-Peyser Act (Garcia-Colon, 2017). Yet some New Jersey farms are either managed or owned by employers who continue to discriminate against Puerto Ricans. Farm employers have asserted their dissatisfaction because Puerto Ricans did not leave the area they were hired to work at when the season was over. Comments such as, “In our area, we feel that Puerto Rican labor would not be practical. We like Mexican laborers better... when it is over, they go back home, to Mexico, don’t furnish a social problem or relief” (as cited in Garcia-Colon, 2017). This example of ethnic discrimination has resulted in Puerto Ricans receiving less favorable treatment when seeking employment in New Jersey. Despite the number of revisions to public law advocating for Puerto Ricans to be hired over immigrants in the agricultural market the structural discriminatory practices of hiring immigrant migrants over domestic Puerto Ricans appears to continue.

Since the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 domestic hires for seasonal agricultural workers became a federal mandate. However, there are agricultural farm employers who continue to show resistance. Though a direct violation of the H-2A program, which allows agricultural employers to hire migrant workers only after giving precedence to qualified citizen applicants, immigrant workers are still hired on many

farms in New Jersey though a pool of qualified Puerto Rican seasonal workers are available (Garcia-Colon, 2017).

Up until 1993, a Farm Labor Program was in place whose primary responsibility was to advocate for the hiring of Puerto Ricans over immigrants for seasonal agricultural work. The termination of this oversight resulted in the Glassboro Service Association in New Jersey replacing their Puerto Rican laborers with Mexican laborers (Garcia-Colon, 2017). Noted as having the highest employment rate for Puerto Ricans throughout New Jersey, Glassboro Service Association maintained records that indicated well over 13,000 Puerto Ricans were either contract employees from PR or walk in employees who presumably already lived stateside (Lopez, 2021). Glassboro Service Association served as a distribution center for migrant farms throughout New Jersey (Lopez, 2021). Therefore, when the Farm Labor Program ended, and the Glassboro Service Association replaced their Puerto Rican employees with Mexican workers multiple migrant farms throughout New Jersey also replaced their domestic employees with the immigrants hired made by Glassboro Service Association.

In 2015, Cassady Farms, LLC in Monroeville, New Jersey paid \$175,000 in a settlement after being charged with unlawful discrimination against over a dozen Puerto Ricans seeking seasonal employment on their farm. The Wage and Hour Division's South Jersey District Office director conceded that Cassady Farms, LLC violated the H-2A laws by hiring immigrant migrant workers though migrant domestic workers were fully qualified and available. Additionally, there was evidence that Cassady Farms, LLC gave Puerto Rican workers poorer living conditions compared to those given to the

immigrants they hired (Garcia-Colon, 2017). Cassady Farm, LLC not only paid out \$175,000 to the 13 Puerto Ricans who filed suit for discrimination in back wages, they also paid a fine of \$57,870 in civil penalty charges as part of their settlement. (Forand, 2015)

Racial, ethnic, and origin-based discrimination has led to stereotypes against Puerto Ricans that exasperate the inequalities faced by Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. For example, a Dominican appellate in the State of New Jersey, filed a complaint through the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity alleging he was the victim of discrimination based on his nationality and national origin (CSC Docket No. 2014-2508). The findings showed no substantiating evidence to corroborate the appellant's allegations. However, the appellant himself violated the New Jersey policy prohibiting discrimination in the workplace on multiple occasions by sarcastically referring to himself in front of several witnesses as a "dumb Puerto Rican" (State of New Jersey, 2015, pg. 1). Witnesses also heard the appellant making derogatory and stereotypical comments against Puerto Ricans whenever he made a mistake. Statements such as "That's just the Puerto Rican in me" (State of New Jersey, 2015, pg. 2) and "I'm Puerto Rican: I don't speak English" (State of New Jersey, 2015, pg. 2) were some of the other stereotypical comments made by the appellant. This example not only exemplifies the ongoing stereotypes face by Puerto Ricans in New Jersey but also highlights the fact that real stereotypes exist and plague Puerto Ricans both directly and indirectly. This example also highlights the stereotypes Hispanics of different ethnicities bestow upon Puerto Ricans which may directly facilitate the ongoing real and perceived discrimination Puerto Ricans in New Jersey endure.

In the case of *Rios v. Meda Pharm, Inc.*, 2021 N.J. Lexis 553 (2020) Plaintiff Armando Rios, Jr., filed a complaint under the New Jersey Law against Discrimination (LAD) after his direct supervisor called him a “spick” on multiple occasions at work. He originally complained about a hostile work environment to the Director of Human Resources, but his complaints were dismissed. Mr. Rios’ supervisor placed him on probation a few months later for “poor performance.” In June 2-16, only 4 months after being placed on probation Mr. Rios was terminated. The New Jersey Supreme Court concluded that the term “spick” is indeed derogatory against Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic groups. The court further acknowledged that this term when used to describe a Puerto Rican or any Hispanic employee could adversely impact the interaction the employee has with someone who uses the term. The courts found that the supervisor did discriminate against Mr. Rios’ and violate the New Jersey LAD. The court also stated that this form of discrimination should be added to the annual antidiscrimination training requirements and specified in policy as a violation of the New Jersey LAD. Disparaging terms such as “spick” communicates contempt of others solely because of their race or ethnicity and continues to have a negative impact against Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Latinos and Hispanic people of Caribbean descent have a higher percentage of people with skin melanin (Araujo-Dawson, 2015), and as a result, they “are often labeled as Black in the US.” (Araujo-Dawson, 2015, p. 243). The labeling of people as Black or White is a systemic label used to classify one’s race in America that has resulted in many dark-skinned Puerto Ricans purposely not disclosing their African roots to advance in life (Suarez, 2019). Intra-racialization amongst Puerto Ricans based on color became

prevalent during the US civil rights era, a mere 35 years after Puerto Ricans were accepted as US citizens (Jiménez de Wagenheim, 2016). Many watched the news from the island or after having migrated to the US and immediately recognized America's distaste for dark skin and so there the racialization between Puerto Ricans began to grow within, causing a divide amongst some within their own ethnicity (Jiménez de Wagenheim, 2016). As previously mentioned, employability was often perceived as less available to dark skinned Puerto Ricans when compared to their light skinned counterparts and so the omittance of African American roots for some Puerto Ricans became an approach used to gain socioeconomic prosperity. The intra-racial divide is a form of structural discrimination that may or may not be an additional cause of poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The fact that some Puerto Ricans may be hindering the socioeconomic progression of their own people shows a divide that others can use to exploit the negative attributes of some for their own personal gain.

The impact of direct and indirect race, ethnic and national origin-based discrimination can have a myriad of negative effects on the socioeconomic status of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. McDaniel (2019) described a mental concentration camp as an escape from the persecutions of hatred” (McDaniel, 2019, p. 112). McDaniel (2019) compared the perceptions of Japanese Americans need to band together in the aftermath of the attacks on Pearl Harbor and the US' decision to relocate them to concentration camps to compare the need of oppressed groups of like cultural values to come together when experiencing opposition from outsiders.

The profound new terminology, mental concentration camp can be applied holistically to the perceptions one holds because of multi-faceted experiences faced by oppressed individuals and groups. A concentration camp is a place used “for political prisoners and members of national or minority groups who are confined for reasons of state security, exploitation, or punishment, usually by executive decree or military order” (Britannica, 2020, p. 1). The definition further goes on to state that “Persons are placed in such camps often on the basis of identification with a particular ethnic or political group rather than as individuals and without benefit either of indictment or fair trial” (Britannica, 2020, p. 1) Definition 1b of the word mental as defined by the Britannica Dictionary (2022) is, “existing or happening in the mind” (p. 1). Therefore, the term, mental concentration camp can be applied to not only the acuity that specific groups feel the need to band together for their safety, but also as a state of mind that is the result of both real and perceived systemic discriminatory practices against an entire group. One may concede that it is plausible that the generational impact and perceptions of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey due to the diasporas of their people, stereotypes, and the discrimination that oppresses them have placed some of them in a mental concentration camp which adds to the variables impacting their systemic poverty.

Classism

Classism in New Jersey is widespread. The disparities between communities who are thriving economically opposed to those communities who suffer from poverty is alarming. Simply defined classism is “the operant form of oppression” (Smith & Mao, 2012). For Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, we will look at how gentrification and

educational disparities amongst communities based on socioeconomic stature may promote classism in the state.

Gentrification is a process where neighborhoods are purposefully reorganized to entice people from a higher income bracket to relocate into specific communities so that the value of the neighborhood may increase. Gentrification is intended to facilitate the revitalization of urban communities (Callinan, 2020). Upgrades to the infrastructure and amenities enable the property value to be raised and change the dynamics of the community. Freeman (2005) argues that gentrification is a form of classism that excludes those with low-income from certain neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are classified as being gentrifiable if the median income of the city falls below the city-wide median income (Callinan, 2020). Whether intended or not a direct result of gentrification is the displacement of the original residents. This perpetuates economic and social inequalities.

The median incomes in New Jersey vary from one town to the next. According to the New Jersey Policy Perspective (2021) the median household income is \$28,838 as opposed to the overall median household income for the state, which is \$96,269. In Camden City, the Puerto Rican population is just over 24,000 (Ferré-Sadurni, 2016). Camden City has a White population of 15.2% and a Hispanic population of 52.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b). In Camden, New Jersey the fear of being displaced due to gentrification is a real concern and community members have shared that they do not feel welcomed in many areas of Camden that are undergoing revitalization due to “exclusion from white spaces created by new development” (Danley & Weaver, 2018, p. 74).

Historically, gentrification was forced upon Puerto Ricans in New Jersey by means of “disinvestment, arson, redlining, public neglect, deindustrialization, racism, and urban renewal” (Betanacur, 2009, p. 389). Common practices to promote the revitalization of communities by means of gentrification disregard the negative impact it has on the low-income residence being displaced. Puerto Ricans in New Jersey have felt victim to founded acts of “racial manipulation, prosecution of their organizations, police harassment, public plans threatening displacement, and White landlord abuses” (Betanacur, 2009, p. 389) due to gentrification and classism.

The Puerto Rican and African American community that existed in the 1960’s and 1970’s, in Central Ward (subdivision of Newark), New Jersey was cited as being blighted and in ruins. As a result, the entire community was demolished, and inhabitants relocated to housing projects in neighboring areas. After destroying the once predominantly Puerto Rican and African American community the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry and the Newark Campus of Rutgers University were built (Ramos-Zayas, 2009; Hidalgo, 1970).

Historic examples of the negative impact of gentrification on Puerto Rican Communities in New Jersey are prevalent. Between 1978 and 1983, 55 people were killed, and nearly 8,000 low-income residents (majority of which were Puerto Rican), were left homeless after a series of arsons spread through New Jersey (Gottlieb, 2019). The burned down homes were replaced with condominiums, and luxury apartments for the middle class. Described as “gentrification arson” (Gottlieb, 2019, p. 393) these acts

resulted in multiple congressional hearings from 1980 – 1982. Yet despite their being over 500 fires no one was convicted or penalized for these crimes (Gottlieb, 2019).

Gentrification results in the segregation of people based on their economic means and appears to promote classism. The impact of gentrification diminishes the alliances amongst the marginalized. Examples, include housing vouchers such as the ones given to Puerto Rican residents of Newark, New Jersey in the 1990s, to entice and enable them to relocate (Ramos-Zaya, 2009). The alleged voucher incentive for relocating resulted in the disbanding of Puerto Rican civil groups. As a result of enticing marginalized groups to relocate for the sake of gentrification the communities were disassembled, resulting in backwards progress for socioeconomic enhancement and the separation of key leaders and advocates from the organic community.

From 2000 – 2016 gentrification in Jersey City, New Jersey resulted in the Puerto Rican population downsizing from 17% to 8%, while the White population rose from 46% to 56% (Cruz, 2016). In Bergen-Lafayette where the majority of Puerto Ricans in Jersey City reside the median home sale price rose from \$126,500 to \$480,000 between 2001 – 2018, an increase of 280%. These statistics provide a sense of the economic and demographic changes being experienced by Puerto Rican residents of Jersey City. The exacerbation of housing costs and subsequent rental rates leads to displacement of those Puerto Rican residents who are low-income residents and less affluent than the new residents joining the community.

Described by Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh as the new frontier, Paterson is close to NYC. The proximity between Paterson, New Jersey and New York offers

professionals a reasonable commute with lower living cost when compared to residence of New York. As of 2019, Paterson, New Jersey was home to an estimated 21,435 Puerto Ricans (Data USA, n.d.). While the median income is \$38,939 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Puerto Ricans make up approximately 48% of the Hispanic community and about 15% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Similarly, to Jersey City, the increase in property value and rental cost in Paterson is described as a means to push out the working class (Chao, 2021). In 2019, a 104-unit affordable housing development was sold to a private entity with reports showing that it led to the displacement of 70 low-income families (NorthJersey.com, 2019).

Displacement is described by the School of Chicago, “in terms of competition, invasion, succession, and replacement” (Betanacur, 2009, p. 384) with the intent of enabling various groups of people to unite in a location for purposes of community, network, and support. Some argue the long-term intent for these groups is to climb the socioeconomic ladder, making displacement a positive disposition. However, Vidal Neil, a Camden activist in a heavily populated Puerto Rican neighborhood noted that “they’re not building for us” (Danley & Weaver, 2018, p. 2) as revitalization efforts at the Camden waterfronts continue. If succession is not preceded by positive socio and economic progress for those displaced than the revitalization efforts simply reduce certain areas of concentrated poverty without addressing the root cause of poverty or improving the inequities faced by those displaced.

Rather than displays of obvious racism and discrimination gentrification is applied to segregate classes by income level. Gentrification has had a negative impact on

low-income Puerto Ricans in New Jersey and promotes classism (Danley & Weaver, 2018). Smith (1996) described the displacement phenomena of the lower class by the upper class as a class war, a war in which the results lead to conflicts within a community and displacement of individuals and families. Whereas investors and those interested in changing the makeup of low-income communities prefer to call the change a revitalization. The lack of solidarity amongst the Hispanic community has too resulted in limited resistance throughout the gentrification process (Gonzalez-Sobrin, 2019) leaving Puerto Ricans in New Jersey that suffer from systemic poverty to relocate to some of the poorest cities in the State. Whether described as an urban revitalization, or displacement, gentrification perpetuates classism by separating groups based on economic capabilities or inabilities. Understanding the possible impact of the classist nature of gentrification on Puerto Ricans in New Jersey with a low-income may facilitate identifying the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst this community.

In addition to gentrification, there appears to be disparities in the resources and opportunities made available to public-school students (K-12 system) in New Jersey based on the economic wealth of each particular school district. In a New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP) report Black and Hispanic/Latinx communities were highlighted as having inadequate public-school funding (Black & Weber, 2021). While the educational funding and resources reported viewed discuss the Hispanic and Latinx communities of New Jersey holistically Puerto Ricans make up over a third of the public-school K-12 enrollments for Hispanic/Latinx children. The impact of having limited access to a quality education increases the risk of achievement gaps due to unequal educational

experiences. These gaps have the potential of creating significant barriers for those graduating high school.

Enrollment boundaries in New Jersey public-schools appears to be a local decision since it is determined by the local school board or municipality. However, the Adequacy Budget New Jersey determines how much a municipality should allocate toward student educational expenses before any additional aid is provided to a district (New Jersey School Board Association, 2023). New Jersey determines what state allocations will be distributed to their public-schools based on what the formulas in the Adequacy Budget New Jersey determines each municipality should be able to invest at the city level. This budget weighs heavily on property taxes due to the township by homeowners regardless of payment. This may be in part because students in low-income communities are at a disadvantage.

Since 2018, 20% of the New Jersey student body enrolled across 47 school districts are majority Hispanic/Latinx (Black & Weber, 2021). The diversity of Hispanic/Latinx students increased from 411,962 to 787,007 between 2000 – 2019, of which approximately 231,750 are Puerto Rican. Table 1 shows that the majority of school districts with over a 90% Hispanic/Latinx enrollment are well above the census poverty rate though the entire state of New Jersey only has a 13.2% poverty rate amongst children between the ages of 5-17 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021c).

Table 1*New Jersey School Districts With Greater Than 90% Hispanic/Latinx Enrollment*

District	Census poverty rate (Ages 5-17)	Percent Hispanic/Latinx students
Union City	28%	96%
Passaic City	28%	93%
Guttenberg	30%	93%
Perth Amboy	24%	92%
West New York	28%	91%
New Brunswick	28%	90%

Since 2014, the Base Per Pupil Amount (BPA) has been used to determine how much it would take each child to receive an adequate education for the school year. Elementary age students are used to determine the BPA for all students and then several factors are applied to determine if the allocation amount for a specific group of children is acceptable. Students who receive free or reduced lunch are considered at risk and additional allocations are made to the districts where these students reside. However, this is capped at 40 percent of the school's total student body (New Jersey School Board Association, 2023). Students who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP) also appear to increase the total funds allocated to public schools in New Jersey. However, if the student is already included in the free or reduced meal weight the weight of their LEP is reduced from .46% to .0981% (New Jersey School Board Association, 2023). Despite the monetary allotments given to schools in low-income communities it appears reductions for children who fall into multiple needs categories may be having a significant monetary impact on funding actually received from the state in school districts with the greatest need.

Recognized as a key determinant for overall health and well-being classism through gentrification and educational inequities in areas with a high concentration of Puerto Ricans appear to have a negative effect on the overall ability of Puerto Ricans from these communities to rise above poverty. The impact of classism on education may have long-lasting negative effects for Puerto Rican communities where poverty is prevalent.

Advocacy

Advocacy process reviews are critical for addressing low income and minority communities. They enable the evaluation of the effectiveness of advocacy efforts and identify areas where improvements can be made. For Puerto Ricans in New Jersey this is particularly important given the historical and ongoing marginalization of many from this community.

New Jersey is home to several advocacy groups that concentrate on mitigating oppression and poverty for the Puerto Rican population within the State. Four of these advocacy groups are (a) Puerto Rican Association for Human Development, (b) Puerto Rican Unity for Progress, (c) New Jersey Puerto Rican Congress, and (d) Puerto Rican Action Board – Hispanic Federation. Each advocacy group highlighted supports the common issues that many Puerto Ricans in New Jersey residing in low-income communities suffer from accessing. This includes access to food, health care, educational opportunities, employment, and affordable housing. These advocacy groups exist to promote positive social change through focused efforts and play an extremely significant role in reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. According to a study by

Galbraith et al. (2019) advocacy process reviews can help to identify gaps in advocacy efforts and ensure that the needs and perspectives of low income and minority communities are being adequately addressed. Given that these communities may face systemic barriers and may not have access to the same resources and opportunities as more privileged groups. Advocacy groups usually have firsthand knowledge of the adversities faced by the marginalized communities they support. Additionally, within the advocacy agency methods to increase the likelihood of providing adequate support to those they serve should also consistently be reviewed and refined to address the current needs of those they represent. For this study it is the barriers to, and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey that will be investigated based on the lived experiences of advocates. Below are brief descriptions of the four agencies I intend to initially look for participants for this study.

The Puerto Rican Association for Human Development have 12 social impacting programs intended to meet human service needs throughout Middlesex County, with a concentration of their support going to those residing in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Their programs provide preventive health care assistance, youth development, housing, education, care for senior citizens and those who are disabled (Puerto Rican Unity for Progress, n.d.)

The Puerto Rican Unity for Progress, New Jersey (PRUP, N.J.) consists of six key organizational programs. Each program focuses on one or more resources intended to assist residents within Camden, N.J. who suffer from poverty and oppression. Their case management program aids with obtaining educational opportunities, affordable housing,

and employment for low-income community members. For over 40 years PRUP, New Jersey has assisted low-income individuals and families throughout Camden, New Jersey with financial, educational, housing, and medical assistance. (Puerto Rican Unity for Progress, n.d.)

Specific issues that have a negative impact on Puerto Ricans/Hispanics in New Jersey is what the New Jersey Puerto Rican Congress advocates for in the state. They focus primarily on addressing residents of low-income communities. Their objectives focus on education, both general employment and labor marketability as well as the work conditions of those employed. Finally, their third goal is health care oriented and facilitates finding both affordable and accessible care (Puerto Rican Congress, n.d.).

The Puerto Rican Action Board, New Jersey (PRAB-NJ) is an advocacy group that provides early childhood services, youth services, family services, housing services, and social services throughout Central, New Jersey. PRAB has partnered with over 120 different community service organizations to facilitate one's journey to self-sufficiency. (Puerto Rican Action Board, n.d.)

Evidence exists based on the success stories described by each of the agencies highlighted that advocacy is an effective means to improve the socioeconomic status of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey who suffer from poverty. Serving as a catalyst for change, advocacy groups are representatives of the marginalized who need help. Therefore, discussions with members from one or more of the advocacy agencies identified above as well as from other agencies with similar missions and goals will assist me with

determining if the themes noted throughout this paper are barriers to and/or facilitators for reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Alignment of Themes

Marshall (1950) defined citizenship based on the full rights bestowed upon an individual, thus enabling them to participate in and reap the benefits of social, economic, and political inclusiveness. Described as a “marginal form of belonging” (Valle, 2019, p.27) concedes that Puerto Ricans interpret their status as citizens based on (a) the state’s marking PR and Puerto Ricans as inferior and (b) racialization processes that have led to Latinos being categorized as foreign (Valle, 2019) This exclusion appears to be the sentiment of first-generation migrants and may have a generational impact on stateside Puerto Ricans based on what appears to be a positive correlation between poverty and large Puerto Rican communities in New Jersey.

The racialization of Puerto Ricans on the mainland, the Puerto Rican diasporas of the 20th and 21st century seem to contribute to the systemic poverty faced by a significant amount of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The effects of the diaspora, racism, and classism highlighted throughout this chapter all look as if they have negatively impacted the upward socioeconomic position amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. For some Puerto Ricans, the negative impacts of their socioeconomic status appear to result in the development of a mental concentration camp, one that hinders pragmatic socioeconomic growth. The media appears to have evolved overtime from portraying Puerto Ricans as an uneducated and violent group to that of a group in conflict with other Hispanic communities. A portrayal that continues to perpetuate problems and highlight differences

between Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic communities. Internalized perceptions amongst some Puerto Ricans that they do not belong anywhere based on classism within their own ethnicity, their residence, or income level also appear to negatively impact their upward mobility in society. Being a citizen appears to have created ambiguity for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey when they attempt to act in solidarity with other Hispanic communities, and though many of the experiences of Latinx upon immigrating to New Jersey are similar to that of Puerto Ricans upon migrating from PR their opportunities are vastly different.

Puerto Ricans are racialized as not equal to their fellow Americans. Though citizens of the U.S. the island's status as an unincorporated territory enables the federal government to unilaterally impose a series of legalities that limit the number of rights and support, they receive from the federal government. The unique cultural identity of Puerto Ricans on the mainland further appears to contribute to racialization against Puerto Ricans in that they find opposition of acceptance both stateside, and when on the island of PR. This may be due to their decision to identify culturally as Puerto Rican yet assimilate on the mainland. Adding to the negative implications of racialization, Puerto Ricans "had to combine self-help with struggles against racialization and displacement" (Betanucar, 2009, p. 387) as gentrification became prevalent in New Jersey decades ago and now appears to have started in many of their communities again.

Conclusion

Throughout Chapter 2, some of the plausible causes of poverty amongst many Puerto Ricans in New Jersey were highlighted based on my literary review. Given the

nature of many scholars to homogenize Puerto Ricans with other Hispanics it is difficult to determine the exact causes of poverty amongst this community. However, the many periods of migration from PR to the mainland is a reoccurring theme in the literature and appears to share a positive correlation with poverty amongst some Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Additionally, the hardships faced by Puerto Ricans due to both intra and inter ethnicity conflicts and their marginalization based on class also appear to negatively impact their socioeconomic mobility.

Advocates of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey have worked alongside government officials, other advocates, and within the Puerto Rican communities they serve to combat oppression and mitigate poverty. Natural disasters such as Hurricane Maria and the poverty rates in Puerto Rico appear to have a direct correlation with the number of Puerto Ricans migrating to the mainland. Additionally, evidence suggest that the lived experiences of many Puerto Ricans in v are discriminatory either based on their ethnicity or social class. By exploring the perceptions of advocates for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey the gap in literature regarding what these advocates believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst this community can be identified. The polarities of democracy theory suggests that there are democratic poles that can be leveraged to improve the democratization process based on the proper management of each pole. Therefore, throughout this study the polarities of democracy theory will be applied to the feedback provided by participants to determine if by applying one or more segments of the polarities of democracy and/or suggestions from advocates of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey actions can be taken to reduce poverty for this community. In

chapter three, I will describe the qualitative general approach I intend to take to conduct interviews with advocates of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey to better understand their perspectives on what the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey are based on their lived experiences.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of expert advocates regarding the current barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Using the major themes noted throughout my literary review, questions were asked to advocates regarding their lived experiences as they pertain to those themes. These themes were the Puerto Rican diaspora, stereotypes, discrimination (race, ethnicity, and national origin-based), and classism.

Research Design and Rationale

The intent of this study was to answer the following research question: What do expert advocates in the socioeconomic conditions of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst this community? In this study, a general qualitative inquiry (GQI) was applied as my research method. I based this decision on the ontological belief that poverty is a social construct, which has developed into a systemic issue. “Socially constructed through the subjective person who experiences it” (Thorne, 2008, p. 49) poverty and how specific communities and groups may be able to address the barriers to/and facilitators of reducing poverty are personal. My intent was to conduct semi-structured interviews with participants who serve as advocates for mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. A GQI approach was well-suited to studying the experiences of advocates because it allowed me to explore the perceptions, and meanings each participant attached to their lived experiences when advocating for those Puerto Ricans in New Jersey they represented. Part of a

qualitative study involves collecting data through open-ended questioning, semi-structured interviews, and observations. This approach allowed me to gain a better understanding of the context in which the participants experienced the barriers to and/or facilitators of poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

By using a generic qualitative research approach, I was able to generate insight that went beyond statistical measures and captured some of the unique experiences of advocates who help Puerto Ricans in New Jersey that are in poverty. Braun and Clark (2013) asserted that the goal of a generic qualitative study is to gather data about a phenomenon when little may be known about the topic. This approach enables a researcher to develop greater insights, by gathering rich data for exploratory purposes. The responses, opinions, and lived experiences of the advocates who participated in this study served as a powerful tool for gaining a deeper understanding of the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The findings can help to inform policy makers, so that they are better enabled to address poverty related issues that are being faced by this community.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher I understood my role in this study is critical because I am responsible for both the design and data collection. My data analysis and my interpretation of the data collected were all critical elements to the trustworthiness of this study. Braun and Clarke (2013) emphasized the importance of reflexivity in a generic research study and the importance of researchers to acknowledge their own biases.

As a Puerto Rican female residing in New Jersey, I have my own preconceived notions regarding why some Puerto Ricans in New Jersey may suffer from systemic poverty. I too have opinions on what the barriers to and/or facilitators of mitigating poverty in this community may be. Though raised in New York, I believe both states share similarities regarding the systemic issues that these Puerto Rican communities endure. I have experienced adolescence in a low-income environment and being stereotyped based on my ethnicity. I have witnessed Puerto Ricans being racially profiled and targeted by police officers, and harassed solely because of the communities that they live in. I recognized that these experiences posed a potential bias within my study. To avoid the inclusion of my personal biases I applied rigorous research protocols. These protocols included an audio recording of the interviews conducted, a transcription of each interview, member checking, and journaling for reflection on things not necessarily substantiated otherwise. An example of what I journaled based on other GQI methods were nonverbal cues presented by participants during my interviews. I also applied my chair and committee's expertise to validate the objectivity of my analysis.

Merriam (2009) noted that researchers in qualitative studies must apply a range of skills and competencies. One of which is to ensure that the study is rich in data and that analysis is grounded in the material. By identifying patterns and themes that emerged from my study, applying the data collected from my participants, and applying the data collected from my literature review I aimed to avoid the inclusion of any biases gained throughout my own lived experiences.

Methodology

I conducted semi-structured interviews with study participants. This method enabled me to apply an analysis approach based on the themes that evolved from my participants. Nowell et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of gathering trustworthy criteria that is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. Whereas Guest et al. (2012) discussed the importance of triangulation and data saturation when applying a thematic analysis to one's study. Therefore, I applied specific measures throughout my research to ensure that participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis were all compiled with objectivity and precision.

Participant Selection Logic

Selection for participants were from advocacy groups that support low-income Puerto Rican communities in New Jersey, such as those noted in Chapter 2. These entities were selected for this study because of their known advocacy efforts throughout the communities they serve. The focus of this study was specifically to identify the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The advocates that volunteered to participate all had the ability to answer research questions specific to the population they support. In addition, criterion sampling of participants was applied prior to recruitment to ensure participants met the minimum requirements noted in Chapter 1. I started my quest for participants by contacting individuals who were publicly noted on the world wide web as being an advocate in low-income communities with a high concentration of Puerto Ricans. Once participants were identified I hoped that they would be able to assist me with purposive recruitment efforts. When this recruitment

effort was no longer producing results, I went to an advocacy event in New Jersey for the Latino community at a university that publicized their advocacy efforts for Puerto Ricans. It was more difficult than expected to locate participants though during my literature review there were multiple contacts listed on social media and advocacy websites that I visited for my study. Advocates listed often did not reply to my emails or requests for participants. Many also stated they would initially participate but later neglected to respond to the informed consent procedures as required and were therefore disqualified from participation. My plan was to interview 15 advocates or until saturation was complete. Saturation was reached after interviewing seven applicants. How saturation was determined will be discussed in Chapter 4. All advocates selected worked for a minimum of 5 years promoting positive socioeconomic opportunities and/or reforms that influence Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were the primary instrument throughout this study. Patton (2015) gives an overview of data collection techniques that include interviews, observations, and document analysis. An outline of the questions each participant was asked can be found in Appendix A and served as the foundational inquiries for this study. The questions developed are aligned with the ten values contained within the polarities of democracy theory. By positioning the interview questions with both positive and negative aspects from each of the 10 values I believed that participants would present enough data to mitigate concerns with trustworthiness during the data analysis phase.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participant and Data Collection

Once volunteers were identified they were each screened prior to acceptance to ensure they met the criteria for the study. This was done by phone and email based on the availability of the participant. Once suitability was established, I obtained informed consent. During the screening process the goal was to ensure participants were suitable and obtain informed consent through meaningful dialogue about my study. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) discussed the importance of providing participants with information about the study, which includes the purpose, procedures, benefits, and any known risks. Prior to the start of my research all participants were advised that their privacy and the confidential nature of the study would be respected and adhered to. Finally, all participants were required to reply via email upon receiving their informed consent acknowledging that they understood the details of the study, their role as a participant, and their rights as a volunteer for the study.

During the actual interview stage of my study, I used an audio recording device so that I could capture everything being said during the interviews. I also took notes during each interview. This allowed me to reflect on any new or relevant comments made by the participants during the review stage of my findings. Finally, at the conclusion of each interview I gave participants an opportunity to add any additional information they may have wanted to share. I also allowed them the opportunity to ask me questions relevant to the study. Rowlands (2021) asserted that giving participants transcriptions of their interview for review improves the data quality by ensuring the data output reflects their

true beliefs. Therefore, after audio recordings were transcribed participants had the opportunity to conduct a review of the transcripts to improve data quality.

Data Analysis Plan

Once all my data was collected my plan was to first code the data manually. This enabled me to gain a better understanding of the information and begin to formulate my findings. Saldaña (2016) highlighted the importance of initial and secondary manual coding prior to conducting computer assisted coding to reduce the amount of information placed into the qualitative software database. Upon completion of my initial and second cycle of manual coding I used the qualitative software NVivo to further codify and categorize data collected. Bazeley (2013) highlighted the ability of NVivo to organize imported data from a variety of sources to assist with coding and analysis. Additionally, NVivo facilitated creating visual data and the consolidation of textual analysis based on the information I imported.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Addressing trustworthiness during qualitative studies is imperative to the overall findings. It mitigates the amount of bias that a researcher may include in their research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four criteria to strengthen qualitative studies that have since been adopted by researchers. The four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. When all four criteria are applied to the analysis of a researcher's data the trustworthiness of their study is strengthened. Additionally, Kahlke (2014) addressed how researchers can strengthen the trustworthiness of their research and findings through triangulation, member checking, and by providing an audit trail. The

techniques established by Lincoln and Guba are now applied during qualitative studies to address trustworthiness of research (Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility

The value placed on qualitative research is dependent on the believability of the researcher as an instrument of objectivity and full disclosure. Applying triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity to ensure credible results support the accuracy of the data collection, process, findings, and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). Therefore, I conducted member checking, data transcription, and provided a complete description of the lived experiences shared by participants to strengthen my study. By applying these measures and working toward ensuring transparency at each phase of my study I intended to address any concerns regarding the credibility of my study.

Dependability

To ensure dependability throughout my study the research question, participant selection methods, data collection methods, analysis software, and all relevant parts of my research can be duplicated by others. Patton (2015) asserted that the data collection method needs to be aligned with the type of study a researcher conducts and that the study should outline in detail all the steps taken so that the material can enable others to replicate the research. Based on prior qualitative studies the use of NVivo facilitates the data analysis process and transparency in data collection facilitates by member checking, transcription, and transparency all enforce the trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Bazeley, 2013). Therefore, it was my intent to present the details of my study with transparency. Enabling others to clearly identify sources, rational for analysis and the

development of themes developed throughout the course of my field work and reflection of the literature review.

Transferability

The expert opinions of the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey is a phenomenon that has the potential to apply to multiple communities who suffer from similar experiences. While the opinions from my participants are not all encompassing, the data is transferable when conducting research on low-income systemic issues in qualitative research. By purposeful sampling, the transferability of the data collected increases (Patton, 2015). Braun and Clarke (2019) recommended that alternative interpretations of the data may be considered to enhance the transferability of the research. By reviewing the data collected based on the polarities of democracy theory alternative interpretations of what are considered the positive and negative aspects of my findings may be drawn based on the individual lived experiences of participants.

Confirmability

It is a researcher's responsibility to avoid subjective interpretations and the inclusion of bias within their study. However, as human beings we all have our fallacies. Therefore, by applying a systematic approach and reflecting on my own assumptions before making final conclusions I strengthened the confirmability of my study. In qualitative studies transparency and the presence of a complete audit trail strengthen the trustworthiness of one's study (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Patton, 2015). Having participants

review the transcriptions of our interviews, and continuously reflecting on my work and findings, I limited subjectivity and strengthened the trustworthiness of my research.

Ethical Concerns and Procedures

Protecting the confidentiality and rights of participants and following protocol during field research is key to eliminating ethical concerns and procedural mishaps. The American Psychologist Association (2017) discussed the importance of protecting participant confidentiality which I intend to do by ensuring data and information collected on everyone remains confidential. Additionally, I intend to speak with participants prior to their participation so that I can both make sure they are fully aware of the purpose of my study, the protocol procures that will be in place throughout the study, the benefits, the potential harms of their participation, and what measures I intend to take to safeguard their identities throughout the process. The IRB processes that Walden University included on their dissertation checklist will be followed throughout my study and I waited until the IRB granted me written permission before I began any field research. My IRB approval number is 01-0-24-0638566. Once I began my field studies, I ensured participants acknowledged informed consent before interviewing them. Interviews were recorded, and transcribed and participants were given the opportunity to review the transcriptions before any final analysis was done. Finally, I have safeguarded the identities of participants and consolidated all research material and findings at my residence, so that an auditable trail exists.

Summary

My research goal was to conduct a general qualitative study based on phenomenological principles to gain perspective of the lived experiences of advocates who assist Puerto Ricans in New Jersey living in poverty regarding the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty in their community. Throughout this chapter, I provided an outline of my role as the researcher. I also included the measures I took throughout this study to recruit participants and strengthen the trustworthiness of my research.

Prior to starting any field research, I ensured the IRB steps outlined in the Walden Dissertation Checklist were adhered to and that I had written approval to start my field work. Interviewees served as an advocate for positive socioeconomic opportunities and/or reforms that had an influence on Puerto Ricans in New Jersey for a minimum of 5 years. Before starting any interviews with participants, I ensured they were aware of the purpose, goals, and procedures of my study. All participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary, they had the right to stop the interview at any time and that they will remain anonymous. Gaining research participant trust was critical. Therefore, they were advised of my intent to audio record and transcribe their work in advance. Finally, they had the opportunity to review the transcription of my interview with them, so that their lived experiences were properly captured. They understood that the gap in the literature regarding their opinions on the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey was the purpose of the study. The findings from this study will provide insight regarding what actions, steps and measures may be taken or avoided to mitigate poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Based on the

findings from this study, policy administrators and government officials can create or improve upon current policies and methods being employed to reduce poverty amongst this community. The next chapter will include my data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to identify and analyze the perceptions of expert advocates regarding the current barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Using interpretivism, I intended to determine whether one or more of the polarity pairs in Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013, 2022) polarities of democracy theory could be applied to address the many complexities and variables that impact systemic poverty amongst this community. The general qualitative research technique applied throughout my research was semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to collect rich qualitative data on the experiences and opinions of advocates. I strengthened my analysis by taking notes of each participant's mannerisms and tone throughout the interview process. The results of my analysis were based on qualitative thematic analysis. I identified themes to address the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. After manual coding, I used the software NVivo to further organize the data. The main research question was as follows: What do advocates for improving the socioeconomic conditions of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst this community?

Setting

Using the Microsoft Teams collaboration platform, each semi-structured interview was conducted in a virtual setting with real-time conversations. Each participant communicated via an online video call. Four of the seven participants enabled

their cameras during the interview, while the other three either chose not to or were unable to due to technical difficulties. Before starting any interview, participants were asked whether they were ready to begin and whether they were in a quiet, private area. As the interviewer, I was in my personal home office and used a private meeting link for each interview.

Demographics

As previously noted, semi-structured interview protocols were applied to collect data from participants. The original target size was 15 or until saturation was achieved. After interviewing four participants, I noticed they consistently identified the same key themes, indicating data saturation, as no new insights were emerging from the study. I then interviewed three additional participants to confirm if I had reached thematic saturation. My decision to interview two more research participants was based on the application of Guest et al.'s (2020) three-part saturation assessment for qualitative studies. The first part of the framework was a review of the four initial semi-structured interviews that I conducted. I concluded that I had reached a thematic baseline after noting that the results from all four interviews identified the same themes, which I will discuss in depth later in this chapter. After I believed I reached thematic saturation, I conducted three more interviews to assess for new themes. Guest et al. (2020) referred to the additional sampling as the Run Length. It is designed to test for new themes. After interviewing three additional participants and finding that no new themes emerged, I determined that data saturation was reached by quantifying the percentage of new themes. I had no new themes. Giving me a threshold of 0%.

All seven participants identified as New Jersey residents. They were also Puerto Rican. Three participants were male, and four were female. All participants had well over the 5-year minimum requirement for advocacy service to Puerto Ricans in New Jersey and met the criteria for inclusion in this study. Table 2 contains the demographics and characteristics of each participant.

Table 2

Participant Demographics and Characteristics

Participant ID	Gender	Years in advocacy
P1	Male	Over 30 years
P2	Male	Over 50 years
P3	Female	Over 45 years
P4	Female	Over 20 years
P5	Female	Over 20 years
P6	Female	Over 30 years
P7	Male	Over 45 years

Data Collection

Throughout this study, all semi-structured interviews were conducted after the participants attested to meeting all selection criteria. Participants all exceeded the minimum criteria requirements of (a) having advocated for positive socioeconomic opportunities and/or reforms that influence Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, and (b) having volunteered or worked for an advocacy organization supporting this community for a

minimum of 5 years. To ensure participants' confidentiality, each interviewee was assigned a unique alphanumeric code based on their gender and the order in which they were interviewed.

I solicited participants by first searching advocacy agencies that supported Puerto Rican communities in New Jersey via the World Wide Web. Once I had a list of organizations, I reviewed their public contact lists and sent an email invitation (see Appendix A) requesting their support. I also looked up advocates by name on social media and sent them private messages. Out of the 46 individuals I contacted by email and social media for participation, 24 replied. Of the 24 that responded, 12 met the criteria and agreed to participate. Five of the 12 advocates who met the criterion established for my study were never interviewed. Thematic saturation was achieved following the initial four interviews, with no new substantive themes emerging during the three subsequent interviews conducted to confirm saturation. Although four additional individuals were identified as potential participants, they were not included in the final sample due to nonresponse following initial contact and multiple follow-up attempts. The fifth anticipated participant missed two scheduled interviews and then stopped responding to my follow-up attempts to reschedule. The remaining seven advocates who expressed their willingness to participate were sent a copy of the informed consent form via email. The seven remaining participants replied to the email I sent with the informed consent form, writing "I consent" to indicate their understanding of the studies purpose and their voluntary willingness to participate.

Interviews were conducted over 4 months based on each volunteer's availability. During the interview, there were moments when the internet would lose connectivity and then reestablish a connection. Minor connectivity disruptions occurred during some interviews, with both the duration and frequency of interruptions varying across sessions. However, no single connection loss exceeded one minute. There was also no disconnection that required a call back once an interview had commenced. These brief interruptions did not compromise the integrity or continuity of the data collection process. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and facilitate thematic analysis. In addition to the recordings, handwritten notes were taken during each session to document nonverbal cues, mannerisms, and tones. I was personally acquainted with one of the seven participants. The relationship was limited to our adult children who had participated in the same extracurricular activities during secondary school years. This prior connection was disclosed and did not influence the conduct or interpretation of the interview.

Appendix B contains the semi-structured interview questions presented to each participant. P1 was the first individual to respond to email inquiries and agreed to participate in the study. Snowball sampling initiated from P1 led to the recruitment of P2, who was previously identified as part of an advocacy group listed on open-source platforms. However, P2 did not volunteer until after P1 discussed the study with him directly. P3 and P4 responded independently to the initial email solicitation and volunteered without intermediary contact. P5 was recruited via snowball sampling from P4. P6 was identified via social media correspondence and later found to be connected to

the researcher through a shared professional network. Finally, P7 was recruited via snowballing from P5.

After each interview, I reviewed the transcription and sent a copy to the interviewee for their review. A transcription of each interview was sent to the respective interviewee to allow them to confirm the accuracy of the information gathered before I began analyzing the data. This was to ensure I completely captured their thoughts and that the transcriptions were accurate. Five respondents confirmed the accuracy of their interviews, while two did not confirm or deny the accuracy of their transcriptions.

All transcripts for this study are stored on my password-protected personal laptop. All printed notes and journaling done throughout the course of this study are stored in a secure vault in my home of record. The data collected throughout this study will remain secure and assessable only to me for a minimum of 5 years.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted at the conclusion of my data collection to develop themes from the semi-structured interviews, applying the questions in Appendix B based on the grouping of words and phrases from each participant's responses. As emphasized by Guest et al. (2012), manual coding in qualitative research is an analytical process. Therefore, to strengthen the trustworthiness of my manual coding, I conducted three iterations. During my first manual coding review, I highlighted phrases and comments from each participant that were significant to the barriers to and/or facilitators of poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. During my first manual coding iteration, I did not think about themes. My goal was to let the themes emerge naturally.

During the second manual coding iteration, I grouped similar statements. For example, all statements about education were grouped together. At the end of my second manual coding session, I organized the broad topics into specific categories. These included education, health, community, and discrimination. Finally, during my last iteration of manual coding, I reviewed the categories to identify a specific overarching theme.

Upon completing my manual coding, to further strengthen the themes developed, the interviews were uploaded into NVivo 14 for further data analysis. In NVivo, each interview was coded using queries to confirm how many times the keywords from my themes appeared. NVivo 14 facilitated objectivity in the manual coding and in the themes developed. Table 3 displays the combined codes from both the manual and NVivo 14, along with the analysis, categories, and subsequent themes that emerged.

Table 3*Combine-Coding Themes Developed From NVivo and Manual Coding*

Codes	Category	Theme
State tuition / State regulations / State College / State Requirement / science / school / regionalization / technology / magnet school / trade school / taxes/ college student / class action lawsuit / equal education / quality education	Access to education	Barriers to educational resources limit both short- and long-term opportunities
Corporations / Union / Jobs / Job Security / Paying Jobs / Job Titles / Civil Service System / Income level / interview process / interview / interview / interview / temp agencies / Police Department / Fire Department / Civil Rights / leaders	Discrimination (race, ethnicity, and national origin-based)	Discrimination and stereotypes are systemic barriers toward mitigating poverty and oppression.
Medical / Reproductive rights / Latino Health / Mental Health Clinicians / Actual Health / vaccination rate / Information dissemination / Federal Level / Federal Funding / Funding / Funding Increase Programs / Social Service Agencies Urban / particular community / community activism / Hispanic / micro / community / catholic family / immediate family / Local level	Health and healthcare	Healthcare access and health is impacted by social inequities and perceived image of self
Urban / particular community / community activism / Hispanic / micro / community / catholic family / immediate family / Local level	Community and family	Discrimination serves as a systemic barrier toward mitigating poverty and oppression.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness as a researcher is vital to the integrity of one's study. To mitigate concerns about trustworthiness while conducting this study, I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework and employed several strategies. These strategies included techniques to increase credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability within the context of my study.

Credibility

As noted in Chapter 3, through triangulation, I reviewed the similarities and differences in perceptions of advocates to evaluate the accuracy of applying a concept or idea as a barrier to and/or facilitator of poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Data triangulation was applied to validate emerging themes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2015) recognized triangulation as a qualitative research strategy that enhances the validity and reliability of a study. Additionally, both my dissertation chair and committee member conducted independent reviews of my work to minimize the potential for biases that I may not have recognized during my data analysis.

Transferability

Poverty does not discriminate. It is a systemic problem being faced in communities and nations throughout the world. The purposeful sampling method and the use of poverty as a key variable in this study enable the transferability of this study among other groups experiencing poverty. Additionally, just as I have used the polarities of democracy as a lens for interpreting the data, other scholars and researchers can

analyze the data under the polarities of democracy or a myriad of theories for alternative interpretations.

Dependability

I avoided bias in my study by acknowledging its presence and disclosing that I am a Puerto Rican residing in New Jersey. Additionally, I openly admit to having preconceived notions regarding some of the barriers to and facilitators of mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Therefore, I have methodically taken steps during the data collection and analysis process to limit the potential for bias. This was done by ensuring the data collection techniques employed were transparent and could be replicated by others who may seek to validate or expand on the study. Babbie (2017) recommended valuable strategies, such as journaling and transcription, which I employed throughout my study. As a result of both actions, the dependability of my findings is replicable, and the studies value is strengthened. All participants were also afforded an opportunity to conduct member checking and review their transcripts to ensure their thoughts were properly captured.

Confirmability

To establish confirmability as a criterion of trustworthiness, the findings of this study are based on a thorough analysis of the data collected. The semi-structured interviews provide rich data directly from each participant. I took notes to capture contextual and nonverbal cues, and I journaled throughout my study so that I could review my interpretation of data collected after each semi-structured interview. By applying my notes, journal entries, and semi-structured interviews, I was able to

triangulate as described by McLeod (2024) through a multidimensional view of each participant's experiences. There is an auditable trail for research transparency. By triangulating data from my literary reviews and interviewee responses, I was able to cross-check my findings rather than relying solely on one method of analysis.

Results

Participant responses revealed several interconnected themes that highlight the structural and personal dimensions of social inequity amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Barriers to educational resources were consistently identified as limiting both short- and long-term opportunities, restricting access to stable employment and upward mobility. Health outcomes were described as deeply influenced by socioeconomic conditions and perceived self-image, with some individuals internalizing biases that may affect their physical and mental well-being. Despite these challenges, participants emphasized the critical role of community and family in mitigating the impacts of poverty at the micro level. Additionally, responses underscored the tight linkage between cost of living, employment opportunities, and overall standards of living, highlighting that socioeconomic factors shape nearly every aspect of daily life. Finally, participants recognized that essential services provided by government agencies and social welfare organizations can meaningfully alleviate inequities when delivered with cultural competence and fairness.

Theme 1: Barriers to Educational Resources Limit Both Short- and Long-Term Opportunities

Significant challenges due to educational inequalities were a barrier that advocates expressed contributes to poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey and across low-income Brown and Black communities throughout the state. Participants P1, P2, P3, P5, and P7 specifically emphasized that disparities in resources within these communities continue to drive systemic educational inequities due to district zoning-based segregation.

P1 discussed concerns about segregation in public schools based on regionalization and district zoning. When asked what socioeconomic factors P1 believed were impacting poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, P1's response was, "education, our students." P1 continued to say that "although they're part of the educational system, they're often segregated into school districts that really don't provide them the resources that they need." P1 asserted that "there's no diversity" and stated that "the afterschool programs are lacking in terms of, you know, coaches and teachers and you know resources." Since a large portion of school funding is determined by local property tax schools in low-income areas with less total revenue often receive less financial support for local educational expenses.

P1 shared stories of their students who experienced discrimination. P1 stated his former students told him that fellow educators told them they were not capable of doing certain things. Though P1 did not specify what those things were, he conveyed that those educators' comments had led his former students to lose confidence in themselves. P1 did

assert that his former students disclosed to him that they were made to feel as if they could not succeed because of their ethnicity and the environment, so they were better off not trying. P1 claimed the students who dropped out of school were returning students at the time of these discussions.

P2 believed that educational opportunities for Puerto Ricans in poor communities throughout New Jersey are at a disadvantage due to the lack of communication between the public schools and parents who are ill-equipped either financially or due to language barriers to advocate for their children. P2 asserted that the lack of communication is a disadvantage that leaves Puerto Ricans in New Jersey uninformed of the additional resources available for their children. P2 claimed the communication barrier was especially true for those with learning disabilities or who qualify for 504 benefits, which provide school-based accommodations to facilitate equal access to learning. P2 believed that due to this communication gap, the children are “shoved into special education programs,” ultimately “losing ground and time”.

P3 and P1 shared that since 2018, there has been an ongoing class-action lawsuit against the State of New Jersey regarding school desegregation. The state is accused of continuing to promote segregation by placing children at a disadvantage and forcing them to go to school in communities that are under-resourced. P1 and P3 both further asserted that zoning practices restrict students to specific public schools unless their families possess the financial means to pursue private education. As of October 2023, the state has not addressed the segregation issues raised by the lawsuit. However, P3 stated that “they

are in the space of mediation between the law firms and the state of New Jersey on what this could look like.”

Research participants describe the impact of zoning and separate school districts as a leading inequitable factor in education amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. P3 explained,

This is not about sprinkling color into a district. This is about balance. This is about fairness, and this is about funding, quality resources, teacher tenure, and incentives, and all of it. It's the entire spectrum. The basic premise of the lawsuit is that what we are fighting for the state already has in their regulation, and they're not doing it. That's a big deal.

P5 expressed,

We've already heard folks say things like, I live in a specific community, and I paid \$5 million for my house and I'm not sending my kid to Camden. I paid to not live in Camden, and that's valid in some ways, but you also won't let the kid from Camden sit next to your kid either.

P5 believed that the schools in communities with a high population of vulnerable Puerto Ricans, other Latinos and Black people such as Camden, Trenton, and New Brunswick do not have the resources and educational opportunities that schools with predominantly white students have in areas such as West Windsor and Hightstown. P5 asserted, “schools.”

P5 went on to share a personal experience regarding the absence of a Talented and Gifted (TAG) program in her school district. In this experience, the participant had to

obtain special permission from the Board of Education Superintendent before she could enroll in the TAG program at the out-of-district school. The request was eventually approved; however, this was only after P5 walked to the Board of Education office daily for an extended period, until the Superintendent agreed to meet with her and her mother.

During the same experience, P5 also shared the stereotypes endured by administrators while in pursuit of better educational opportunities. P5's experiences as an advocate lead her to believe that the children of low-income and single-parent households are stereotyped within the educational system. Providing an example, she experienced firsthand, P5 asserts that an administrator once stated, "She is on welfare, she is going to be a problem," when considering whether or not to accept her as an out-of-district Puerto Rican student for a Talent and Gifted program. P5 feels the school administration had the underlying assumption that, because she was coming from a rough neighborhood, and a school others described as the "zoo," she would be problematic.

Participants throughout this study believed that, though not legal, segregation still exists in practice within the New Jersey public school systems. P1 explained that "due to the ways schools are set up in the state of New Jersey, there's segregation that still exists in our state." They described a school system that is reflective of the racial and ethnic makeup of their communities, reinforcing patterns of segregation without explicit legal mandates. The school district boundaries are described by participants as a barrier to removing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey because the school district boundaries amplify disparities in wealth and opportunity by preserving unequal access to educational resources and opportunity.

Theme 2: Healthcare Access and Health Is Impacted by Social Inequities and Perceived Image of Self

Social inequities based on limited access to resources such as testing, language access resources and distrust in local officials and healthcare institutions appears to continue to influence health outcomes amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey living in poverty. Distrust in healthcare institutions and local officials that appear rooted in historical neglect and maltreatment leads to reluctance to seek help and ask questions. Language barriers further complicate matters, as does the proximity and availability of medical resources, as reflected in feedback from advocates when recalling the dissemination of vital information during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the interview, P1 assertively highlighted that he was aware of research that confirmed discrimination and biases affecting the mental and physical health of both Latinos and African Americans. P1 further suggested that Puerto Ricans in New Jersey may navigate their social landscape based on racial and ethnic stereotypes, a dynamic that can ultimately affect their overall health.

One advocate stated that during periods of crisis, the Public Health Emergency Response System lacked Latino representation at the County level. Using the COVID-19 pandemic as an example, one participant stated,

At first, Latino immunization COVID vaccination rate was very, very, very low. But why? Because they didn't have anybody out there to deliver the message. The right message and the right way using the right words, the right vehicles, the right modalities. None of that was happening.

During this period in 2021, P2 reported that none of the 121 county health offices had a Latino representative available to discuss concerns about the low vaccination rates amongst Latinos in New Jersey.

P2 felt that New Jersey failed to ensure that a trusted messenger was available during the initial immunization phase of COVID to ensure that the most vulnerable population of the Hispanic community fully understood the importance of being vaccinated. P2 claims that the State chose to send out the Police and others who had poor relationships with the Hispanic community due to both perceived and real unfair treatment to serve as the messenger. One participant's sentiment shed light on the distrust Puerto Rican communities in low-income neighborhoods may have on law enforcement:

Whose hated more in the Puerto Rican community that the cops, right? Come on. You know in Paterson, the cops took a Puerto Rican guy. They picked him up off the street. They beat the fuck out of him. Excuse me. They beat the crap out of him, and then I guess threw his body in the river or the woods cause it's been two years, and the guy has disappeared. So, you know, why would you make the state police the primary messenger.

The community was not receptive, according to one advocate, which is why the Latino immunization COVID vaccination rate was initially extremely low.

P1 openly shared that they also advocate for disabled people and that they, too, are disabled. He called attention to research showing that discrimination and biases against Latinos and African Americans are known to negatively impact their overall health. P1 expressed his deep concern that misinformation circulating through

mainstream media and social networking plays a significant role in reinforcing stereotypes that promote discriminatory practices:

I'm on social media and the news where you know someone is calling Puerto Rican, you know, like an immigrant or saying go back to your country or things like that and those comments have affected those particular people in a negative way.

P1 believed that these types of comments spread rapidly and have negatively shaped public perception in ways that make stereotypes appear credible, ultimately contributing to the persistence of discriminatory attitudes and systemic inequities faced by not only Puerto Ricans in New Jersey but all Puerto Ricans.

P1 used an example they read on social media, commenting that a Puerto Rican should "go back to their country." P1 then appeared to be deep in thought before commenting again. P1 then shared,

I think that leads, of course, to a socioeconomic impact, whether that person internalizes, you know, those feelings or those comments that they hear, whether they hear them once or constantly from different places. You know, if you go to school, then you hear things like that from other students or professors or, you know, you go to college or even work. Right. And you hear these negative comments like what do they do to you?

P1 admitted that he does not know what these comments might do to someone and that the results of these comments will impact Puerto Ricans differently. However, he highlighted that such types of comments and behaviors can contribute to adverse health

conditions: “Some people react differently to those things, but you know there is research that says that systemic discrimination or biases that are built into the US system impact Latinos.” He also stated,

Research shows that Latinos and African Americans have different levels of cortisol in their system which can be elevated by these comments and lead to actual health conditions like, you know, high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. So, I mean, discrimination does impact our self-image, and those types of things I think do have an actual effect on our community that other communities don’t feel.

P3 discussed the need for an increase in accessibility to healthcare, health insurance concerns, drug cost issues for those who are the most vulnerable within the brown and Black impoverished communities, and language barriers impacting healthcare accessibility. P3 highlighted current advocacy efforts focusing on reproductive rights for women and made a point to highlight that while she recognizes this study is focused on Puerto Ricans, all Latinos and Black people in the low-income communities being advocated for are suffering from the same lack of resources and support from the state. On a positive note, P3 did highlight that Medicaid was recently expanded for undocumented children through a program called “Cover All Kids”. Under the Cover All Kids program in New Jersey, every child 19 years old and under is eligible for healthcare coverage that includes dental, mental health, specialty care, and primary care services (American Academy of Pediatrics – New Jersey, 2025).

Both P1 and P6 believed it is critical that Puerto Ricans in New Jersey have access to vital healthcare as a facilitator to reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. P6 elaborated by explaining that, from a healthcare perspective, whether Latinos are seeking care and need help because they do not understand procedural processes, such as referrals or how to apply for insurance, not having access to essential health care services is a socioeconomic barrier that does not help the community or society as a whole.

Theme 3: Community and Family Alleviate Impacts of Poverty at the Micro Level

Community and familial networks serve as critical mechanisms in mitigating the adverse effects of poverty among Puerto Ricans residing in New Jersey, particularly at the micro-social level where tightly knit support systems are prevalent. Empirical accounts from participants underscore the significance of community-based organizations that deliver targeted interventions addressing poverty-related challenges. Additionally, the role of family as a socioeconomic safety net, alongside the mobilization of cultural identity and social capital, emerges as a foundational strategy for fostering resilience and enhancing communal cohesion. These interrelated variables are consistently identified as instrumental in enabling individuals and families to navigate and reduce the multidimensional burdens of poverty.

P2 highlighted the emergence of Latino community-based organizations in New Jersey dating back to the 1970s, emphasizing their foundational role in supporting Puerto Rican populations at the micro level. These organizations were established to address localized socioeconomic challenges and gradually garnered governmental support,

including public funding, to expand their services. Initially focused on the Puerto Rican community, many of these agencies broadened their scope in subsequent decades to include other Latino groups as demographic shifts occurred. As P2 noted,

Several of them have been around for many years, 50 years since the 70's... helping the community and those agencies receive funds from the government, and they target, specifically Latinos. You know in the 70's and 80's, it was largely Puerto Ricans then in the 90's and 2000's as other groups started to become prominent, they expanded their scope.

P2 cited the Puerto Rican Action Board as a prominent example of such an organization—originally formed to serve Puerto Ricans, it has since evolved to support broader communities of color, including both Latino and Black populations, reflecting a dynamic and inclusive approach to community advocacy and support services.

Participants identified neighborhoods such as New Brunswick and Perth Amboy as key sites of Latino demographic diversity, encompassing Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Guatemalan populations. Within these communities, outreach efforts are predominantly localized, relying heavily on informal networks and interpersonal communication. According to participant accounts, service utilization is largely driven by word-of-mouth referrals, in which individuals who receive assistance—such as members of the Mexican or Nicaraguan communities—subsequently inform their families, neighbors, and social circles. This grassroots dissemination of information fosters broader engagement with available resources and reflects a culturally embedded mode of trust-building and community navigation.

As stated by P2,

There's this network of organizations that provide a strong foundation in the community for day-to-day help. They're not going to change the education system, or housing issues, but if you have a problem with your landlord, they can help you. If your kids are having a problem with a teacher in the school that's maybe giving them a hard time, they can help you. So, it's at that micro level that they have a very significant role in our communities.

Local nonprofit agencies in New Jersey are believed to serve as facilitators in reducing poverty among Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. They offer specialized, culturally competent services. P5 felt that in New Jersey, "We rely a lot on the nonprofit sectors to provide services and assistance," and that while "New Jersey does something, they do more than other states. I don't think they do enough. They could do more." All of the research participants felt strongly that local non-profit organizations help mitigate poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. P2 further stated, "Better collaborations with government, with corporate, and you know with the community in general to help address the issues impacting poverty for Puerto Ricans and with other communities that are in the same boat" could potentially result in long term positive socioeconomic change.

Advocates consistently emphasized the critical role of bilingual individuals within Latino communities, describing them as part of a "trusted network" essential for the dissemination of vital information at the local level. Bilingualism was identified not only as a linguistic asset but as a key community and familial competency that facilitates the

circulation of knowledge regarding available resources and ongoing developments within the neighborhood. This capacity for intra-community communication was viewed as particularly impactful at the micro level, where informal networks often serve as conduits for support and engagement. One organization frequently cited in this context was the Puerto Rican Action Board, recognized for its early efforts to service the Latinx community by establishing one of the first bilingual daycare centers for Puerto Rican children, an initiative that exemplified culturally responsive service delivery.

Theme 4: Discrimination Serves as a Systemic Barrier Toward Mitigating Poverty and Oppression.

Four research participants asserted they had long argued that discrimination and stereotyping are a systemic problem that goes beyond social ailments. Through exclusion, biased policies, and cultural stigmatization, advocates have asserted that discrimination continues to create barriers to socioeconomic mobility for all marginalized communities. Participants believed that discrimination is not only interpersonal but institutional, manifesting in housing, employment, education, and access to public resources. The comments and beliefs shared by advocates support the opinion that discrimination and stereotyping are facilitators of economic exclusion that promote poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, as well as other marginalized brown and Black communities. One example of systemic discrimination shared by advocates is in housing and financial services. As P1 stated, “There’s just discrimination literally built into the system that says if you’re Black or brown, you’re not gonna get a loan... the neighborhood you live in, it’s such garbage that we wouldn’t give you a loan anyway.” P1’s comment reflects the

enduring impact of redlining and credit discrimination, where communities of color were denied access to mortgages and capital, limiting their ability to build generational wealth. P1 believed that this exclusion is not accidental, rather he believes it is structural. P1 asserted that denial of loans based on race and geography perpetuates cycles of poverty and reinforces segregation.

P1 also highlighted that American political discourse reinforces discriminatory practices. According to P1,

Discrimination happens all the time and we're living in a US that is way different than when I was growing up and we saw discrimination, we're living in the US where, you know, people like Trump and people who support him openly, will say things about other races, will say things about illegals, will say things about rapists, and, you know, clump everyone who is Latino, including Puerto Ricans, into this.

Research participants warned that such rhetoric and stereotypes as highlighted above often lead to discriminatory practices. Participants affirmed that discrimination serves as a barrier to mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. This view was expressed based on their lived experiences and perceptions regarding hiring practices and policy implementation. P1 expressed that when those in power share stereotypical and discriminatory views, barriers for reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey are only amplified.

The following shares how study participants believe discrimination facilitates poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, drawing on a series of statements and

quotes that reflect their lived experiences and institutional realities. Many of these statements are intertwined with the previously shared themes. However, they are worth reiterating, as they all represent separate variables that serve as a barrier to mitigating poverty. When combined, they reflect the severe adverse impacts of discrimination when institutionalized as a common practice.

Most advocates emphasize that discrimination is embedded in the architecture of American institutions. P1 noted,

Some people in employment situations felt that their boss might, you know, be a racist or be someone that wouldn't be supportive of Puerto Ricans or other Latinos by not giving them a raise or not giving them, you know, an opportunity to move into a different position. But instead hired, you know, someone who was white. Umm, and we see this a lot in places like police departments. You know where we have Latinos working as police officers and they don't get to move up, you know, even my cousin who tried to move up within a Police Department was denied the next level and eventually they just were like, well I'm going to go work somewhere else.

This statement highlights the discussions that advocates have with individuals who feel directly impacted by employment discrimination.

P1 shared perceptions of discrimination in upward mobility in both police departments and fire departments. P1 asserted that obtaining employment in police stations and fire departments for Puerto Ricans and Latinos exists. However, he emphasized that socioeconomic barriers and discriminatory behaviors arise when

promotions become available, and promotion by “whiting is active.” Based on his lived experiences, he determined,

We know that places like fire departments, police departments, all these jobs have been historically Whiting for a reason. And that’s because you bring your son and your daughter and your nephew in right, and they become these jobs where certain families have been doing these jobs for generations, which leads, you know Puerto Ricans out and African Americans out. And they become these jobs that are just like patronage jobs. What does that say? Well, either you know Puerto Ricans can’t do these jobs or there’s a system set in place that doesn’t allow them to.

P3 provided examples of discrimination amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey that are unique to Puerto Rican migrants coming to New Jersey from the island of Puerto Rico. P3 describes the experiences shared by Puerto Rican migrants coming to New Jersey who go to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to obtain a State License but are turned away because they do not possess a Birth Certificate. P3 explains that many Puerto Ricans born on the island, though American citizens, live in remote areas, where there is no access to local hospitals. Therefore, they are often born at home or other locations and often have parents who never obtained a birth certificate for them. Therefore, when they migrate to New Jersey as adults, the discrimination they experience by State employees at the DMV is “nasty.” Advocates further asserted that while “Some people react different to those things ... research ... says that systemic discrimination or biases ... are built into the US system to impact Latinos” and that “Discrimination does impact self-image.”

To expound on advocate opinions as they pertain to employment discrimination, they highlighted that Puerto Ricans may be hired at police and fire departments; however, “you don’t see fire chiefs or police chiefs that are Puerto Rican. Again, because of the racism and discrimination built in.” They highlighted lawsuits to support their assertions, stating “Some groups, like the Latino Officers Association or African American Officers or Firemen’s Association have sued these places and said, you know what you’re doing is discriminatory.”

P2 provided an example where he asserted that in New Jersey, both government agencies and the public continuously lump the Hispanic community together because it is easier for them. He claims that they fail to take into consideration that Puerto Ricans are different from Latinos from South America and Europe. P2 confirmed during our interview that the culture, dialect, and mannerisms amongst Latinos vary, and that lumping Latinos together is a stereotype that he believes in New Jersey negatively affects Puerto Ricans more than other Latinos, because as U.S. Citizens, Puerto Ricans have certain inalienable rights. P2 described this concern as “...an additional, you know, slam against our community”:

There is discrimination across the board, and you know we know that because statistically speaking, if we just say how long have Puerto Ricans been involved in the US compared to other groups, Irish, Italian, European, you know, and where are we today? We’ve obviously advanced some, especially since, like Operation Bootstrap, which was not a fun time for Puerto Ricans however there is no distinction made. Whether you are Puerto Rican, Latino, Hispanic, whether

you're from Mexico or El Salvador. So, it's hard to say that we are not being discriminated against at all levels.

P1 asserted.

You know discrimination is happening. It's going to continue to happen, and they are more vocal, those people who are white supremacist or, you know people who feel that we Latinos are taking over the country, that we are going to take over their politics and their jobs, and their economy. Just wait, we're going to continue to see this, we're going to continue to struggle.

Summary

In Chapter 4, the purpose of this generic qualitative research study, the research question, and the criteria for participants were restated. Afterward, I described my data collection procedures, spotlighting the use of manual and automated coding to develop and align my themes, based on the frequency of words used during the interviews and the context of their use during the manual coding process. Further data collection included personal notes taken during the interviews and documenting changes in each participant's mannerisms or tone. Finally, during data collection, I revalidated the methods used to strengthen the trustworthiness of my study drawing primarily on frameworks such as Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The process applied to reinforce the overall trustworthiness of this study reinforces the studies overall credibility.

In Chapter 5, the data presented in Chapter 4 will be interpreted within the context of existing literature. It will also address the limitation of the study, and recommendation

for future scholarly research. Finally, potential implications for inclusion of research findings for positive social change are also provided as a reminder that research studies are not just academic but an actionable guide that policymakers can apply to improve conditions for those they serve.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was twofold. First, it aimed to explore the perceptions of expert advocates regarding the existing barriers to and/or facilitators of poverty reduction among Puerto Ricans residing in New Jersey. The interviewees all advocated for positive socioeconomic opportunities and/or reforms that influenced Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Second, it sought to interpret the perceptions of our expert research participants through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory (Benet, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2022). The goal was to determine if the polarity pairs could be applied by public administrators to address systemic challenges and promote positive solutions to issues affecting this community. All five polarity pairs within Benet's (2006, 2012) polarities of democracy theory were found to have applicability with the four key themes that emerged from this study.

Interpretation of Findings

This study explored how the polarities of democracy theory could be applied as a democratic process to mitigate the current barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. As a reminder, democracy as defined by Benet (2020) is “an either/or solution to the problem of oppression in both the workplace and society” and requires a philosophy of both/and thinking to maximize the positive aspects of polarity pairs. Therefore, it is through this lens that my research findings for the polarities of democracy suggest that by effectively leveraging the five pairs and 10

values to alleviate oppression for the community represented throughout this study is feasible.

Description of Findings Compared With Peer-Reviewed Literature

Similarly to the insights shared throughout the literature review, research participants confirmed that Puerto Ricans in New Jersey continue to face inequities. Historically, factors that influenced poverty amongst this community included migration, stereotypes, racial, ethnic, and national origin-based discrimination, and classism. Results from this study highlighted that the disparities Puerto Ricans in New Jersey endure presently reflect a larger systemic crisis that impact many Brown and Black low-income communities. Research participants identified three themes that served as barriers to mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey: restricted access to educational resources, experiences of systemic discrimination, and adverse health-related factors due to social inequities. Conversely, participants also identified the presence of community and familial support networks at the micro-level as a theme that facilitates mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Upon examining the literature review, socioeconomic challenges including language barriers, a lack of awareness of available resources, and discrimination appear to have in part directly correlated with the patterns identified in the study. Earlier studies reinforced the perspectives that surfaced in the data, while the findings also identified topics not previously addressed in prior research.

Educational Resource Challenges: Past and Present Findings

While my literature review did not explicitly highlight education, it emphasized the lack of support from social service agencies, language barriers, and discrimination in public services (Jones, 1955), all of which suggest that families may have faced challenges navigating the school system to advocate for their children's needs. My study respondents narrowed this focus, explicitly framing educational resource limitations as both an immediate and generational impediment. Research participants asserted that limited educational resources negatively affect individual academic achievement and long-term community mobility and opportunity. In contrast, the literature review situated educational barriers within a larger context of systemic disadvantage, including media stereotypes and wider social exclusion. Interviewees emphasized that limited primary and secondary educational opportunities lead to diminished opportunities, including reduced access to higher education, professional careers, and economic stability. Both my study and the literature identify that overcoming these barriers is essential for improving life chances. However, despite this shared belief study participants find that persistent inequality in the educational system still exists and is one of the fundamental reasons for socioeconomic imbalance. Educational inequalities were noted to impact not only Puerto Ricans in New Jersey living in poverty but the broader low-income community as well.

My study participants highlighted the *Latino Action Network v. State of New Jersey* school segregation case that started in 2018 as a prime example of the structural policies that promote segregation and inequality. P1 asserted that because of "the way the schools are set up in the state of New Jersey, there's segregation that still exists today in

our state.” P1 continued our discussion by highlighting that while New Jersey is “one of the most diverse States ... segregation directly impacts Puerto Ricans and other Latinos.” P1’s opinion is reciprocated by P3 who highlighted that as of the time she was interviewed the state and representatives of the case were in mediation regarding the segregation allegations brought against the state.

Overall, the literature review and contributors to the study both underscored the critical role of educational resources in shaping outcomes for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The literature review established a comprehensive understanding of barriers faced when attempting to navigate the American educational system, whereas the experts interviewed drew a more explicit connection between educational access, short-term and long-term opportunities. Despite the landmark case, *Hedgepeth and Williams v. Board of Education of the City of Trenton*, which made segregation illegal (N.J., 1944) research participants highlighted structural segregation as a systemic socioeconomic barrier that persists.

The literature showed that public schools in historically marginalized communities have faced disparities in funding, teacher quality, and academic opportunities. Rothstein (2017) argued that government policies historically enforced patterns, creating enduring disparities in wealth and opportunity. My study suggests that the disparities tied to socioeconomic differences between communities still exists and have a large negative impact on marginalized communities that have a high Brown and Black population. My studies suggest that policies limiting where a child can go to school based on their residence limit access to high-quality resources and reinforce racial and

socioeconomic segregation. Rothstein's analysis and this study's analysis suggest that these educational inequities are not accidental but rather the result of deliberate policy choices that have resulted in generational gaps in educational opportunities, and long-term gaps in wealth.

Health Impact Findings Examined in Relation to Earlier Empirical Evidence

The health outcomes of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey are shaped by a variety of complex interplays of historical migration, structural discrimination, and social determinants (Guarnaccia et al., 2022). Aranda (2007) highlighted that throughout the Puerto Rican diaspora to the mainland, access to healthcare was one of the leading factors in their decision to migrate. However, my study findings suggest that despite the healthcare benefits associated with residing on the mainland, social inequities amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey are negatively impacted due to constraints on healthcare accessibility. Findings also suggest that mental health issues due to perceived image of self are, in part, a direct health consequence of these challenges. This analysis describes the study's findings, noting that in the original literature review, specific health concerns were not detailed. Rather healthcare was identified as a positive motivation for migration from Puerto Rico to the mainland.

Drawing from the information grounded in previous studies of the Puerto Rican diasporas, labor exploitation, discrimination, and classism, health is discussed as an outcome of these broader social forces. During my initial literature review, it was not a central theme. Grounded in previous studies, physical health was discussed in terms of displacement, inadequate housing, and poor labor conditions. Whereas my study's

findings directly address physical health, citing barriers to health care access, disparities in vaccination rates during the COVID epidemic, and psychological effects of discrimination (e.g., hypertension, diabetes, heart disease). Lastly, contextualized by earlier scholarly discourse, mental health was discussed in terms of displacement, isolation, and the psychological impact of migration and discrimination. By contrast, the study's results indicate limitations in healthcare access and highlight mental health concerns, with clear connections identified between experiences of discrimination, self-image, and psychological outcomes.

When extrapolating health-related data from the literature review and research findings, complementary perspectives emerge on the challenges faced by Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The literature review presents the lived experiences of Puerto Ricans throughout diasporas as they migrated from Puerto Rico to the mainland, while the findings from this research present the perceptions of expert advocates who have volunteered or worked for an advocacy organization supporting Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Research participants elucidated the lived experiences and direct impact they believe these inequities have on the physical and mental health of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Both highlight the need for culturally competent advocacy, systemic reform, and community empowerment to address the root causes of health disparities and promote holistic well-being.

Micro-Level Community and Family Ties Across Research

A review of each study participant's perceptions and comments was conducted, identifying both similarities and differences with the literature review. My findings

determined that community and family networks are valuable support systems in lessening the adverse impacts of socioeconomic hardships. Community and familial challenges encountered included socioeconomic pressures and instances of discrimination, as described in the literature review. Both the literature and feedback from study participants portray the Puerto Rican communities as crucial to the group as a whole in supporting one another through socioeconomic challenges.

The Puerto Rican diasporas highlight the initial lack of resources and support available to migrants upon their arrival in New Jersey. The literature review of the Puerto Rican Diaspora examined factors influencing Puerto Rican migration to the mainland and the lived experiences of those migrants. It provided a detailed account of the economic hardships, industrialization efforts, and natural disasters that fueled various waves of migration from Puerto Rico to the mainland (Acosta et al., 2020; Ayala, 2020; Baker, 2002; Hinojosa, 2018; Jones, 1955; Sanchez-Korrol, 2017). Across the literature, evidence of strong family cohesion, reciprocal caregiving, and micro-level support consistently emerges. Cabrera et al. (2022) found that families mitigate the negative impact of poverty by providing emotional support, assisting one another with childcare, and financially supporting one another.

Research respondents assert that community and family alleviate the impact of poverty at the micro level among Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. P2, P4, and P5 stressed the importance of informal networks and interpersonal communication for disseminating information and building trust within the community. P5 stated, “even through the dysfunction, you know the village is there.” Familial networks are described as having

both positive and negative impacts within the Puerto Rican community. P5 described family networks that would talk down on members who were facing adversity due to their own actions, such as a teenage pregnancy, but then also described that she felt the young mother could rest assured that she and her child would receive help from the family.

Bilingual individuals are identified as essential resources, helping circulate vital knowledge about available services and developments to ensure culturally competent support. P2 felt that police officers working in a predominantly Hispanic area should be partially bilingual to build trust within the community. After highlighting his prior work experience as an Attorney General, P2 stated, “I have a bit of a public safety background, so it is as a police strategy” that he recommends police officers working in Hispanic neighborhoods be at least partially bilingual. P2 further stated that he believed, “It puts your detainee or the person that you’re dealing with more at ease when you’re communicating in their language.” P5 highlighted that, in itself, bilingualism is a form of advocacy grounded in her own life experiences. She asserted that as a young girl her advocacy began, “as a translator and interpreter” for her mother to expand their access and challenge inequities.

Local non-profit agencies also historically provided and continue to provide a resource network at the micro level that helps alleviate some of the socioeconomic hardships experienced by Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The literature review highlighted the use of non-profit organizations as culturally responsive and vital to Puerto Ricans who need assistance due to language barriers and a lack of understanding of their rights

as U.S. citizens. Additionally, at the micro level, non-profit organizations throughout the literature review served as emergency response teams for Puerto Ricans who needed food assistance, housing, and clothing.

P4 asserted, “The current income and the size of most families, generally speaking, within Puerto Rican families, there are many children and many family members, not just immediate family living in the same home, and the income does not always meet the size of the family.” P4’s description of the composition of a family’s size in many Puerto Rican homes in New Jersey supports the literature that states extended families often share resources with households to reduce financial burdens and come together to assist one another whenever a financial need arises (Ayala, 2020; Baker, 2002; Cabrera et al., 2022). My research participants describe the micro-level support as a safe haven that promotes a cultural tradition of reciprocity, making it a collective responsibility to combat poverty.

Study participants consistently reaffirmed the data contained in the literature review, maintaining the opinion that local nonprofit organizations were essential to mitigating the negative effects of poverty by providing essential resources to those in need. In contrast to the literature review, feedback from my study participants reveals a notable shift within the once local Puerto Rican nonprofit agencies, specifically that they are extending their services not only to Puerto Ricans but also to the broader community.

P2 shared that the no-profit organizations he was affiliated with

have been around for many years, 50 years since the 70s. Umm, helping the community and those agencies receive funds from the government and they target

specific Latinos. You know in the 70s and 80s it was largely Puerto Ricans here, then in the 90s and 2000s, as other groups started to become prominent, they expanded their scope ...Over the years as the New Brunswick Latino population shifted from Puerto Rican to Mexican and now Guatemalan ... you know the population changed and so their focus shifted a little bit along with that.

The growth in the number of patrons served by local non-profit organizations has increased their overall demand for assistance. The increase in service requests has created new challenges as the agencies try to service all low-income members residing in the areas they serve.

During my literature review, I found that early migrants were mostly men seeking labor opportunities. Some of these men were eventually joined by their families, which led to the establishment of Puerto Rican communities on the mainland. Similar to the Puerto Rican diasporas explored in my literature review, my study participants assert that the bulk of migrants entering New Jersey from Puerto Rico are motivated by the belief that there is economic opportunity on the mainland. The experts interviewed acknowledged that ongoing economic challenges in Puerto Rico and environmental factors are key reasons for ongoing migration, which has resulted in the Puerto Rican population on the mainland surpassing that of Puerto Rico (Ayala, 2020; Irizarry-Mora, 2023). The mix of permanent and temporary migration amongst Puerto Ricans appears to have rapidly shifted to a majority of permanent migration. The increase in total population across the mainland suggests that micro-level interactions will become more central to community survival and resilience.

Five out of seven experts highlighted that grassroots responses to poverty strengthen Puerto Rican communities. They described family ties and mutual aid networks that operate through faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and other informal community groups as being available to respond quickly during a crisis. At the micro-level, organized groups are recognized as able to provide food, temporary housing, and emergency assistance during a crisis more quickly than formal institutions.

Despite the shift in migration patterns from temporary and circular to permanent, mutual aid networks, familial support systems, and community organizations remain fundamental to survival among Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Informal networks and local organizations foster local empowerment in low-income neighborhoods by serving as trusted intermediaries. Study participants highlighted the relevance of a multilayered grassroots response to mitigating the impact of poverty for Puerto Ricans and all Brown and Black communities in New Jersey. They emphasized how these groups help residents navigate complex systems, highlighting the importance of the polarity pair Human Rights and Communal Obligations.

Discrimination Findings Situated Within Broader Literature

A comparative review of the data in the literature and the information provided by research participants highlights discrimination as a prevailing concern. Throughout the literature review and when reviewing the data from research participants, systemic and structural forms of discrimination, including racialization, exclusion, and socioeconomic barriers, were described. Scholars have examined and confirmed perceptions of workplace discrimination and exclusion across various communities due to ethnic

discrimination (Araujo-Dawson, 2015; Cano et al., 2021;; Jimenez de Wagenheim, 2016; Rocco, 2014). In contrast, participants in this study highlighted both individual and collective perceptions. They discussed personal experiences, reported incidents, and expressed opinions regarding discrimination. Across these accounts, the persistence of barriers rooted in ethnic and racial discrimination was consistently acknowledged. However, experts describe the current discrimination and stereotypes as having evolved to being treated as a second-class citizen and marginalization with regard to politics and job placement.

Both the literature review and findings determined that Puerto Ricans residing in New Jersey have encountered discrimination grounded in their Latino identity. Despite Puerto Ricans being unique from other Latino ethnicities in that they are American citizens, the results from this study conclude that they continue to be mischaracterized as immigrants. The findings from this study continue to highlight how Puerto Ricans are marginalized through systemic discrimination, being treated as outsiders in their own country. The experts who participated in this study all expressed their grievances with the negative impact the territorial status of Puerto Rico still has on Puerto Ricans residing in New Jersey and throughout the mainland. Three participants felt very strongly that narratives portraying Puerto Ricans as reliant on social services persist without a true understanding of the historical and current hardships due to the withholding of benefits and events such as during Hurricane Maria. These narratives are believed to reinforce stigmatizing assumptions about Puerto Rican communities.

Participants asserted that discrimination and stereotypes that target Puerto Ricans have created social exclusion across generations. One participant highlighted the historical example of Puerto Rican service members who were denied military benefits for housing and disability, though they were entitled. This expert participant believes these actions resulted in long-term consequences. By depriving these soldiers of their entitlements, opportunities for home ownership, educational benefits for themselves or their children, and other tools for economic mobility Puerto Ricans were restricted and unable to advance their social and economic capital. As a result, future generations of Puerto Ricans were denied opportunities.

Research participants also highlighted the role of political discourse in reinforcing discriminatory practices and stereotypes in hiring and policy implementation, a sentiment McDaniel (2019) also shared. Study experts emphasized that discrimination is institutionalized in America and impacts all aspects of upward mobility as it pertains to employment, particularly in police departments and fire departments. Rocco (2014) also asserted to this phenomenon. Experts identified specific challenges encountered by certain Puerto Rican migrants in New Jersey. For example, challenges in obtaining state identification are frequently linked to the absence of a birth certificate, a circumstance commonly arising from adverse living conditions and inadequate access to medical facilities in Puerto Rico.

Both my literary review and my study participants recognized the pervasive nature of discrimination and its impact on the socioeconomic status of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Present day, the discrimination faced today are understood to stem from

misperceptions of their immigration status, and skin color, with darker-skinned Puerto Ricans experiencing higher rates of discrimination. Research respondents further broadened the analysis by addressing systemic dimensions of discrimination emphasizing the role of socioeconomic class and the consequent exclusion of residents from marginalized communities.

Applying the Theoretical Framework to Address Themes From Chapter 4

To facilitate the advancement of understanding poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, this section applies the polarities of democracy theory to the thematic insights shared by research participants. By examining the polarity pairs freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation (Benet, 2022), this framework offers a lens through which to interpret the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. The participants' narratives illuminate structural inequities, cultural resilience, and institutional gaps that both hinder and enable socioeconomic advancement. Through this democratic lens, the analysis seeks to identify actionable strategies that “guide healthy, sustainable, and just social change efforts” (Benet, 2013, p. 3).

Theme 1: Barriers to Educational Resources Limit Both Short and Long-Term Opportunities

This analysis draws on the freedom and authority polarity from Dr. Benet's polarities of democracy framework to examine the barriers to educational resources being limiting to both short and long-term opportunities. The data revealed how institutional

authority manifested in part through educational policies, bureaucratic systems, and in some places discriminatory practices. By reviewing these tensions through the polarities of democracy lens, this study aimed to highlight the need for democratic systems that leverage governance with individual responsibilities to minimize socioeconomic marginalization and promote societal well-being (Benet, 2006).

Research participants described educational disparities specific to district segregation that are due to zoning laws. In New Jersey, zoning laws are established under the Municipal Land Use Law, which gives municipalities the authority to regulate public schools in the neighborhood. The ordinances established by the municipality determine community boundaries and school catchment areas, thereby affecting student enrollment procedures and access to educational resources (New Jersey Department of Education, 2023; New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, 2022). Study participants believed the ordinances established have created resource disparities that are a key barrier limiting freedom of choice amongst parents who want to ensure an equitable education opportunity for their children. This limitation to equitable access despite current legal actions taken by the Latino Action Network, reflects a structural imbalance. Government authorities have not adjudicated the appeal case or resolved the issues voiced by the community, demonstrating the failure to effectively leverage the participation and representation polarity.

Study participants shared that parents have gone so far as to resist authority by using fake addresses to enroll their children in better school districts in the surrounding communities. This demonstrates acts of resistance against bureaucratic control. The

actions of these parents are signs of resistance to current policies despite the risks of criminalization. Parents using a false address to access better schools reflects a failure to leverage several polarities of democracy pairs: freedom and authority, justice and due-process, diversity and equality, and participation and representation. These tensions appear to be mismanaged because policies are prioritizing rigid authority and municipal boundaries over equitable access. The current practices appear to undermine justice, equality and representation in educational decision making.

The polarity pair of diversity and equality is also emphasized by the study participants in this study as a critical tension, as defined by Benet's polarities of democracy framework. Four out of five participants expressed concern with the de facto segregation in New Jersey that exists due to school zoning policies. The expert advocates who participated in this study highlighted that policies fail to leverage the diversity and equality polarity which in turn has resulted in a disproportionately negative impact on the Brown and Black low-income communities. The current practices demonstrate a systemic failure to leverage the positive aspects of equality, which Benet (2013) asserted should manage resources to ensure distribution is fair. According to research participants, neighborhood school zoning reinforces segregation and unequal resource distribution, limiting diverse student integration and equitable access. Contributors to this study further claim that equality is being undermined by structural barriers that prevent already marginalized students from accessing the high-quality education that is being afforded to students who live in higher income communities. Benet upheld democratic systems that neglect equality risk systemic injustice and socioeconomic marginalization similar to

what experts in this study are describing as what the impact of current policies are having on the families in the low-income communities being described throughout this study.

Diversity complements the equality pole. P1 emphasized that fostering diversity is essential for achieving a high-quality education. According to Benet (2013), diversity extends beyond demographic representation but also a source of inclusion that promotes innovation within a democratic society. Furthermore, the majority of the expert participants advocated for substantive integration strategies that honor cultural and ethnic distinctions and facilitate shared educational experiences.

Another polarities of democracy polarity pair, as defined by Benet (2012) represented in the educational disparities shared by study participants is participation and representation. Participation underscores the essential role that individuals and community members play in actively engaging with and shaping the democratic process. Whereas, representation denotes the voice of the people based on the elected officials selected by the people through democratic processes, such as voting (Benet, 2013). Throughout this study research participants vocalized participation in the democratic process by parents, advocates, and community members desiring freedom of choice and equitable access to high quality education for students. Research participants discussed the mobilization of individuals and communities in an effort to challenge state zoning laws which they argue perpetuate socioeconomic segregation. This action can be described as a form of participatory resistance. Both New Jersey School Boards Association (2023b) and New Jersey Spotlight News (2025) have highlighted the concerns expressed by the individuals and advocates of these community members with

concerns of their lack of adequate representation at the state level as a possible leading cause for the lack of movement of the communities' endeavors for resolution surrounding their concerns.

Benet (2013) emphasized the importance of a sustainable democracy, requiring the management of all polarity pairs outlined in the polarities of democracy theory, leveraging the positive aspects of each pole while minimizing its negative aspects. Both citizen engagement and government responsiveness are required and must be leveraged through the application of polarity management for the greater good. The current conditions appear to exemplify Benet's warning that overemphasizing one pole without the other can lead to democratic dysfunction and social injustice. All warning signs of the unintended consequences of mismanagement, specifically as it pertains to the polarities of democracy.

Theme 2: Healthcare Access and Health Is Impacted by Social Inequities and Perceived Image of Self

In addition to the three polarity pairs emphasized in Theme 1 and 2– freedom and authority, equality and diversity, and participation and representation – a fourth polarity pair within Benet's polarities of democracy framework is human rights and communal obligations. Throughout this study, research participants highlighted healthcare access and overall health as being a barrier to mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. For this study, access to quality healthcare that is affordable is being categorized as a basic human right. However, Stainton (2024) asserted that despite New Jersey ranking nationally as a top performing healthcare system, Latino and Black residents in

New Jersey are less likely to access quality care. Latinos and Black people are also more likely in New Jersey to experience disproportionately poor health outcomes – an observation that P1 also emphasized during our discussion.

The study findings suggest that many Latinos face challenges in accessing healthcare due to limited understanding of healthcare systems, lack of knowledge about insurance enrollment processes, or unemployment. Research participants assert that these barriers hinder individual well-being, and that it has a broader implication for socioeconomic stability. P1 and P5 were adamant that these individuals needed to be identified so that these systemic issues could be addressed.

P2 provided an example of applying communal obligations to strengthen healthcare system outreach. During the COVID-19 pandemic P2 described the healthcare access limitations to illustrate the tension between the human rights and communal obligations polarity pair. He highlighted that initially the Latino vaccination rate in the state was extremely low, citing “ineffective messaging” and a lack of “trusted messenger” as the reason. P2 emphasized, “Am I going to trust the state trooper more than my local pastor?” His statement aligned with highlighting the importance of culturally embedded communication channels which Benet (2013) argued fosters inclusion and trust.

During the second wave of community outreach P2 asserted that the vaccination rates amongst Latinos increased significantly. This improvement was attributed to the strategic emphasis on communal obligation. Though not titled as such the need for vaccination was not solely framed as a personal health decision but a collective

responsibility to protect families, and the broader community. This was done based on local community members, public health campaigns and bilingual communications specifically targeting the Hispanic community. The messaging was culturally relevant and aligned with Benet's polarities of democracy framework. The second wave of outreach is a prime example of human rights (vaccinations) and communal obligations (outreach) leveraging the positive aspects of both polarity pairs to improve health outcomes. The cohesive efforts of the community in this example strengthened trust and fostered civic engagement.

Theme 3: Community and Family Alleviate Impacts of Poverty at the Micro-Level

Participants consistently described socioeconomic barriers rooted in systemic inequities as a barrier for mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. This structural exclusion is a human rights concern due to the immediate and long-term negative impact the inequities experienced have on members of this community. The polarity pair human rights and communal obligation are inadvertently highlighted by research participants.

Throughout the interviews expert participants described the essence of the polarities of democracy theory. Their descriptions highlighted that when properly managed these two polarities can work interdependently to promote sustainable democratic systems (Benet, 2006, 2013). Participants also asserted that non-profit organizations were essential micro-level support entities to mitigating poverty. Family and community support networks were also highlighted as an important contributor to alleviating the impact of poverty at the micro level.

Nonprofit organizations empower community members and cultivate the communal obligations pole. By bringing together community members to ensure that basic human rights are available to one another. Six out of seven experts in this study highlighted time spent as young advocates within their communities, helping local community members by volunteering at local food pantries and churches, and later at local non-profit agencies with specific ties to the Puerto Rican community. Research participants affirmed that their roles and the purpose of these agencies were to assist with ensuring that basic human rights and needs were provided. Though these organizations are unable to enact macro-level policy change, participants did share they do fulfill communal obligations by assisting with mitigating the impact of poverty by promoting individual dignity and collective resilience, both positive attributes of effective management of the polarity pair human rights and communal obligations.

At the micro-level of society, P5 described another tension between that polarity pair, human rights and communal obligations, in the context of teenage pregnancy within low-income Puerto Rican communities in New Jersey. The example of teenage pregnancy in low-income Puerto Rican communities illustrates the polarity pair of human rights and communal obligations by showing how community members step in to fulfill essential needs when formal systems fall short. On the human rights side of the polarity pair, young mothers are entitled to access to healthcare, childcare, economic stability, and to pursue their educational goals. Yet in many marginalized communities, these rights are not met due to structural barriers such as limited social services and inadequate public assistance. This gap highlights the need to leverage the positive aspects of the other pole,

communal obligations, as extended families, neighbors, and local non-profit organizations assume responsibility for ensuring the well-being of both the teenage mother and her child. P5's example offered a valuable illustration of the relationship between human rights and communal obligations within this community because at the micro level local non-profits and community support exemplify the interdependent management of the polarity pair human rights and communal obligations. Through community partnerships, specifically within marginalized communities' services essential to human rights management can be effectively delivered.

At the micro-level helping those facing economic hardships that impact one's ability to access basic things needed for survival, such as food and shelter, reflect society's commitment to protecting human rights. The actions taken by Puerto Ricans in these communities embody the polarity pole: communal obligations. Based on the lived experiences of research participants many of the Puerto Ricans facing adversities in low-income communities have embraced the polarity pair of human rights and communal obligations. They share in supporting the well-being of the broader community (Benet, 2022). Leveraging the positive aspects of both human rights and communal obligation is crucial to the success of Puerto Ricans and all residing in low-income communities. The micro-level grassroots strategies employed demonstrate the ability to apply both the human rights and communal obligation values to create what Benet (2013) described as a more just and sustainable approach to poverty mitigation.

Theme 4: Discrimination and Stereotypes are Systemic Barriers Toward Mitigating Poverty and Oppression

A reoccurring issue raised by participants throughout this study resulted in the development of Theme 2: discrimination and stereotypes are systemic barriers toward mitigating poverty and oppression. Particularly the tendency for many people to discriminate based on stereotypes made against Puerto Ricans.

One stereotype highlighted was labeling Puerto Ricans as immigrants despite their U.S. citizenship. The data provided to me by participants led me to focus on the polarity pair of equality and diversity, as defined by Benet's polarities of democracy framework.

Benet (2013) emphasized equality as ensuring respect across all groups, regardless of race or ethnicity. However, according to all but one research participant the judgmental attitudes of some that label Puerto Ricans in a negative manner fails to uphold equality. Four of seven participants assert that the misconception of Puerto Ricans being immigrants despite citizenship being granted over 100 years ago reflects a failure to sustain equality.

During the study P3 provided a real-world scenario in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria of a Puerto Rican migrant seeking an identification card in New Jersey. She described how the migrant was unable to obtain the identification card due to the absence of their birth certificate. During our discussion P3 emphasized that this was not an isolated incident. She asserted Puerto Ricans born in remote, underserved areas who lack formal documentation often face these issues. The absence of a birth certificate now

becomes a barrier to accessing basic rights, since without an identification card access to all public services may be denied.

The mismanagement of diversity contributes to systemic injustices. Diversity, as Benet (2013) explained, recognizes the value of everyone's lived experiences and cultural differences. In the experience shared by P3 Puerto Ricans migrating to New Jersey are discriminated against by mainstream bureaucratic systems. They are being treated as outsiders and being denied access to basic identification cards due to the cultural differences commonly found in Puerto Rico when compared to mainland America, indicating a failure to integrate diversity into democratic practice among fellow American citizens. This example symbolizes the complexities of how the negative aspects of equality (such as requiring everyone to have a birth certificate to obtain an identification card) can further marginalize migrant Puerto Ricans in New Jersey.

Limitations of the Study

The qualitative study was limited by the use of a small sample size with some experts being obtained through snowball sampling. Additionally, participants were drawn exclusively from New Jersey, which further narrows the scope of the findings. As a result, the conclusions may not be generalizable to broader populations.

Finally, the research question in itself was a limitation to the study because the focus for this research analysis was to identify barriers to and/or facilitators of mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. Research participants, however, highlighted their perceptions of systemic barriers that they assert impact a much larger

community. Therefore, the focus of the study in itself did serve as a limitation. However, it also serves as a gateway to future research suggestions.

Recommendations

This study applied the polarities of democracy framework to examine the complex democratic concerns expressed by research participants. In responding to the central research question, what do advocates of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, participants simultaneously described what they perceived to be injustices in New Jersey that they assert affect marginalized communities throughout the state. Future research could build upon these findings by exploring the gaps highlighted by study participants.

The diasporas of Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico to New Jersey reflects reoccurring migration. As of 2024 the Puerto Rican population in New Jersey represents about 52% of the total population of Hispanics in the state (Figueroa-Lazu & Deslouches, 2024). Based on the known disparities that already exist amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey a recommendation for future research is to study the impact migration has on families already residing in New Jersey based on familism. The impact of the assistance given to migrating Puerto Ricans on those Puerto Ricans already residing in New Jersey is not well known. Perhaps with a better understanding of this impact action can be taken by administrators to apply the human rights polarity pole to alleviate financial hardships that the hosting family may experience. Simultaneously, families and non-profit organizations can potentially apply the polarity pole of communal obligations to assist

migrant families with adapting economically in mainland America while leveraging the positive aspects of both poles and minimizing the negative aspects of overusing any one pole over the other.

Study participants advocated for school choice options in New Jersey. They focused on the importance of giving this option to low-income communities whose public schools were perceived as unequal when compared to schools in higher income communities. Therefore, a study on parental engagement both with school choice options and with ensuring that parents who are less involved are actively sought out for the sake of their children's future can be conducted. A study of this nature could expand upon the results of a 30-year-old study conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education (1995) that found inequities in education increased for low-income families whose parents were less involved by providing recommendation for positive social change.

Finally, a future research endeavor that scholars can pursue based on this study includes a qualitative analysis of advocates of Puerto Ricans in other geographical regions. Future studies also have the flexibility to modify the demographics within their own study. For example, researchers can expand their study to include all demographics within a particular region, depending on their specific research goals by applying the polarities of democracy framework to refine democratic sustainability models.

Implications

Policy reform with strategic and ethical management can have profound implications for positive social change. Participants from this study shared both lived experiences and perceptions of systemic policy issues affecting Puerto Rican in New

Jersey who are in poverty. These concerns also extended to broader perceived inequities that impact entire groups who reside in marginalized communities throughout the state.

The polarity management framework (Johnson, 1992) offers a practical tool to operationalize the principles of Benet's polarities of democracy framework (2006, 2012, 2013) in support of democratic governance. Positive social change can be applied through the application of both/and thinking philosophy to polarized values making the polarities of democracy theory a strategic decision-making tool. The following section presents sample polarity maps derived from issues raised by participants in this study.

The data contained in these samples represent courses of actions developed after an analysis of the data collected by research participants. These examples are intended to illustrate how Benet's polarities of democracy theory can be applied to develop and sustain democratic governance. Figures 3 and 4 are illustrations of polarity maps with an infinity loop for the polarity pair freedom and authority and the polarity pair human rights and communal obligations.

Figure 3

Applying the Polarity of Freedom and Authority: A Mapping Framework for Managing Freedom and Authority and Public-School Selection Policy

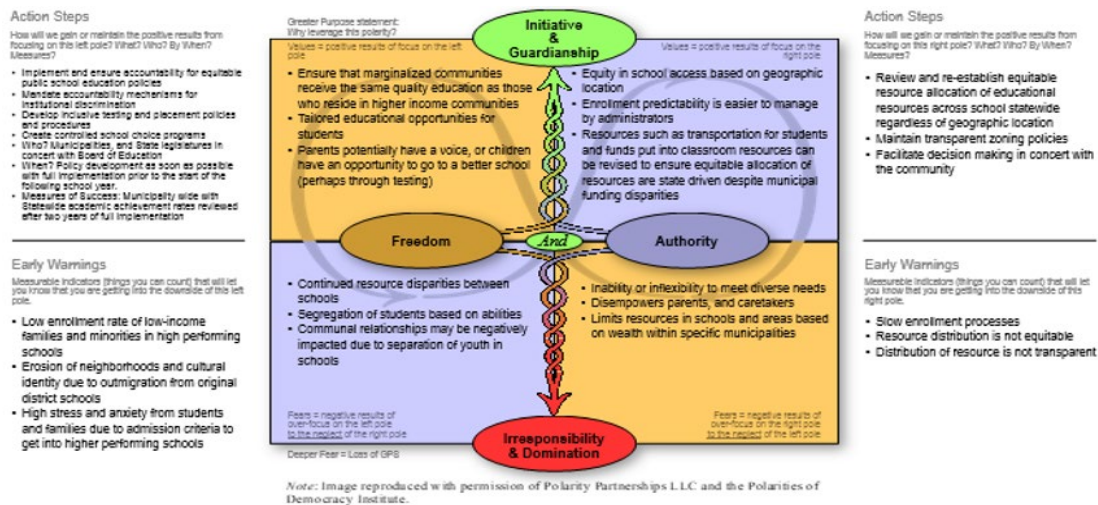


Figure 3 displays a polarity map that illustrates the need for both parental involvement and institutional governance for the management of a school selection policy to effectively maximize the positive aspects and minimize the negative aspects of the freedom and authority polarity pairs. Parental involvement in school selections empower parents to advocate for their children. As a recognized indicator for student success, parental involvement strengthens their child's motivation and is believed to enhance their academic achievements (Sharma, 2024). Through parental involvement in school selections, they have the ability to align educational goals to each child's unique learning styles and needs. In communities with low-income families the ability for parents to be involved in school selection becomes even more critical to ensure equitable access to a quality education by offering parents the freedom to choose an educational environment that aligns with their child's needs.

Also highlighted in Figure 3 is the need for institutional governance, specifically as it pertains to the processes that are put into place for decision making. Having effective governance regarding application processes, testing scores, and special needs to determine how parents would go about selecting the school that best aligns with their children's needs will ensure that overcrowding in schools is monitored and that educational resources are allocated equitably based on availability. To remain effective institutional governance for school selection must be transparent and continuously include processes that involve advisory councils with representation by both parents, professional educators, and government officials.

By leveraging parental involvement and institutional governance a loop of feedback such as depicted by the infinity loop on a polarity map allows for continuous management and feedback from both groups that will in turn enhance educational quality. Parents know firsthand what their children need to thrive while government officials and educational leaders understand the capabilities and limitations that serve as the framework to implement positive social change. Together, they have the ability to build an inclusive, student centered educational system that is more equitable to all students.

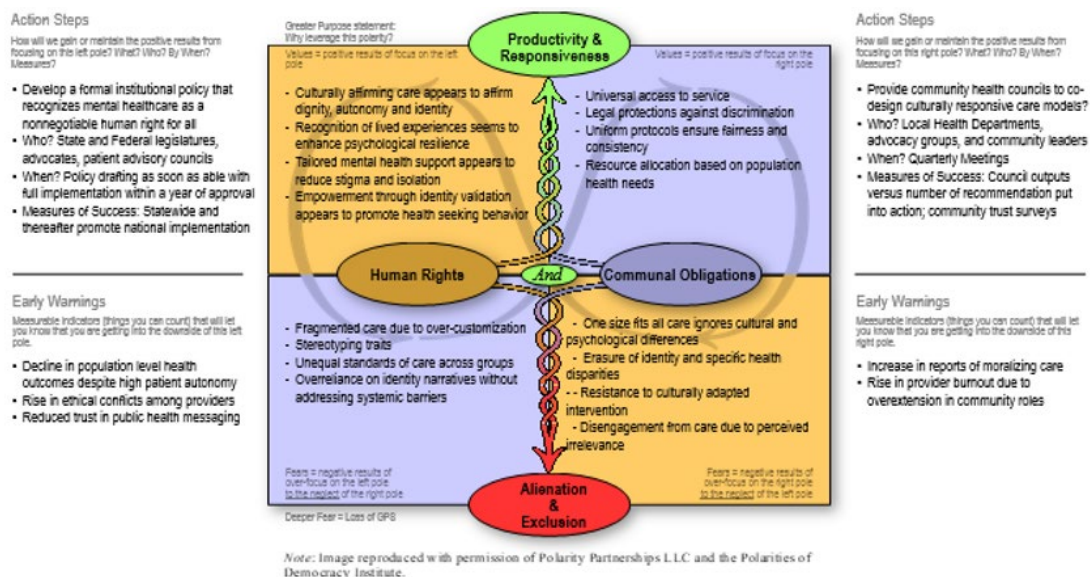
Municipalities and state legislatures, in collaborations with Boards of Education should establish a comprehensive policy framework to advance positive democratic social change through equitable public schooling. This framework must include fair and accountable education policies, enforceable mechanisms to identify and address institutional discrimination, inclusive testing and placement procedures, and controlled school choice programs that expand opportunity without exacerbating segregation. Based

on an analysis of the experts interviewed throughout this study and the application of the polarities of democracy framework policy development should begin immediately, with full implementation varying by municipality based on a phased approach. Success should be evaluated at the municipal level, with statewide academic achievement data reviewed after two years of implementation to assess progress, guide refinements, and ensure that equity-driven reforms are producing meaningful, measurable improvements in education outcomes.

Figure 4 displays a polarity map for the polarity pair human rights and communal obligations in response to mental health support.

Figure 4

Applying the Polarity of Human Rights and Communal Obligations: A Mapping Framework for Managing Human Rights and Communal Obligations in Response to Healthcare Accessibility



The World Health Organization (WHO) affirms that “mental health is a basic human right for all people” (World Health Organization, 2023). In Chapter 1, Benet’s

definition of a democracy was applied to highlight the relevance of mitigating poverty. As a reminder Benet (2020) asserted that a democracy “should provide a system of governance that (a) overcomes oppression (our deepest fear), (b) achieves human emancipation (our highest aspiration), and (c) develops, healthy, sustainable, and just organizations and communities” (p. 1). It is with this axiological assumption that mental health support is highlighted as a basic human right and fundamental to democratic governance. Mental health support affirms the value of each individual and aligns with Benet’s assertion that each individual is given the opportunity to attain their full human potential.

Within a democratic society civic engagement is vital. It is through civic engagement that social support networks are created to mitigate oppression and promote mental health literacy. By understanding the different types of mental health distress community members can reduce stigmas and promote inclusivity. When combined with the underlying belief and understanding that democratic societies are obligated to address inequities, mental health becomes a vital concern that needs to be addressed for inclusion. Acknowledging communal obligations as a civic duty promotes mental health support and strengthens democratic engagement which in turn helps society as a whole.

The polarities of democracy provides a framework for addressing ill structured problems based on two democratic interdependent values with the overarching goal being to enhance human emancipation, civic participation, and institutional legitimacy (Benet, 2006). When combined with polarity mapping, government officials can mediate conflicting priorities to better determine what aspects of each interdependent value

should be leveraged to maximize the positive aspects of both democratic values while minimizing the negative.

Applying a framework such as the polarities of democracy and polarity maps to enforce accountability and transparency in government practices is critical for positive social change. To address systemic poverty and inequities impacting Puerto Ricans and all marginalized groups in New Jersey transparent governance is key to promoting upward mobility.

Based on analysis of participant data and guided by the polarities of democracy framework, it is recommended that state and federal legislatures, working collaboratively with advocates and patient advisory councils, should prioritize the development of a formal institutional policy that recognizes mental healthcare as an inalienable human right. Policy drafting should begin as soon as possible. While a statewide transformation cannot realistically occur instantly, a phased approach with specific timelines for law implementation, funding capabilities, and service delivery systems will enable the development of multiple goals spread across a feasible timeline for long-term structural change. Codifying this right in law would reinforce democratic values by affirming dignity, inclusion, and equal opportunity, while creating a foundation for accountability in healthcare systems. Success should first be measured at the statewide level, with demonstrated improvements in access, quality, and equity serving as the basis for promoting and scaling national implementation that advances mental health justice across the country.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze expert advocates' perceptions of the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty among Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, using an interpretivist approach. The findings noted that community and advocacy at the micro level is a facilitator for mitigating the adverse effects of poverty. Additionally, findings regarding the barriers to reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey were similar to those that affect a broad range of low-income communities throughout the state. These barriers included limited access to equitable public school educational opportunities beginning as early as primary school, restricted access to healthcare, and limited access to healthcare information. Research participants asserted that many of the barriers faced were a result of structural and institutional discriminatory practices that have led to systemic oppression and exclusion. The research findings also suggest that the polarities of democracy is a viable framework for democratic governance and inclusivity.

While there is no such thing as a utopian society, the realities of governance do require a framework that acknowledges the complexities of ill-structured problems and polarities. The polarities of democracy model, developed by Benet (2006, 2012, 2013), builds upon Johnson's (1992) foundational theory of polarity thinking. To effectively address the barriers to and/or facilitators of mitigating poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey as well as those impacted by systemic poverty and marginalization throughout New Jersey, this analysis advocates for operationalizing democratic values

that support sustainable solutions that promote long-term resilience and socioeconomic inclusivity.

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Appendix A: Participants Letter of Introduction to Study

Initial Introduction by Interviewer

Good day, my name is Karen Acevedo-Quintana, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. First and foremost, thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this interview. This interview is part of my research study in fulfillment of my dissertation. This research study is seeking to better understand what advocates supporting the improvement of socioeconomic conditions amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey believe are the barriers to and/or facilitators of reducing poverty amongst this community. Your responses will help others gain a better understanding of your lived experiences as an advocate and be a part of a generic qualitative study.

You were asked to participate in this study because of your years working as an advocate in one or more communities where there is a high population of Puerto Ricans in poverty. Additionally, you have identified yourself as someone who has worked with an agency either as a volunteer or for pay advocating for Puerto Ricans in the state of NEW JERSEY for at least five years. Your lived experiences and opinions regarding some of the things that may have or not have impacted poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey is key to gaining a better understanding of some of the factors that may be helpful to reducing poverty amongst their community and in understanding actions or things that may be harmful to reducing poverty amongst this community.

Throughout the interview session, I will ask questions about your experiences as an advocate. The questions I ask may facilitate a conversation about things those you serve may have experienced in their lives that they shared with you over the years. As an example, if a question was related to employment, you may have an experience regarding something that someone you served did to help them get the job they were seeking or perhaps know about something they shared with you that they believe caused them to not get the job. I would like to hear both the positive and negative experiences shared with you and lived by you when advocating for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. My hope is that you will feel comfortable speaking freely and honestly about the experiences you share because identifying those things that are both barriers and facilitators of reducing poverty will enable me to assess what works well when trying to help Puerto Ricans in New Jersey rise above poverty and what may be hindering them.

Finally, as a reminder the interview will be audio recorded (and video recorded, as applicable). I will also be taking notes so that I can adequately capture your comments and mannerism during our discussion. Your comments during this interview will remain confidential and you will remain anonymous in all my final reports. If during the course of this interview you want or need to take a break, please let me know and if you are able to stop the interview at any time if you no longer care to proceed. Finally, if necessary, I too can stop the interview and dismiss you without giving a reason. This ensures that we

are both comfortable and willing to proceed throughout the entire interview process.
Before we begin, are there any questions?

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Opening script.

“Good day and thank you again for your willingness to participate in this research study. I have compiled a series of questions to ask you so that I may better understand your perspective as an advocate who helps Puerto Ricans in New Jersey overcome oppression. I anticipate that our interview will take about 45 minutes, however if you need more time to respond to each question, I am able to continue for as long as you need. As a reminder, this is a voluntary interview, and you are serving as a research participant. I already have your signed consent form where you have acknowledged your willingness to participate in this study. I am recording this interview for transcription and will give you a copy in the near future for your review. Once I give you the transcription if you feel your responses need to be modified you will be able to clarify or expound upon any answer you gave.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Alright, I will begin asking questions specific to this study now. As a friendly reminder I ask that you answer these questions specifically as they pertain to the Puerto Ricans in New Jersey that you advocate for. I share this reminder with you because I recognize that your advocacy efforts may expound beyond that of the Puerto Ricans in your community.

1. How long have you been serving as an advocate for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey?
2. Can you describe your role as an advocate?

Next questions will focus on the lived experiences of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey based on the participants perception.

3. What socioeconomic factors do you believe are impacting poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey? *(Possible Probes: Healthcare accessibility, affordable housing, and educational opportunities)*
4. Have you ever witnessed or been told by Puerto Ricans you advocate for that stereotypes have impeded their ability to progress socioeconomically? *(Possible Probes: when seeking employment, housing, or any other opportunity)*

If participant responds with yes, then

- a. Can you please describe this experience and your opinion on the matter?

5. When someone of Hispanic origin migrate to New Jersey from a foreign country do you believe the aid provided by the government is different for them when compared to migrants coming from Puerto Rico?

Whether yes or no, then

a. Can you please provide me with an example to support your response?

6. Are you aware of any differences regarding how government addresses concerns of first-generation Hispanics immigrants oppose to first-generation Puerto Rican migrants?

7. Have you ever witnessed or been told by those you advocate for that discrimination has impacted their ability to do something that would alleviate their socioeconomic status? (*Possible Probes: when seeking employment, housing, or any other opportunity*)

If participant responds with yes, then

a. Can you please share that experience with me?

b. What do you believe can be done to prevent acts like the one you described from occurring in the future?

8. Have you ever witnessed or observed classism impacting the socioeconomic conditions amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey? (*Possible Probes: housing, cost*)

If participant responds with yes, then

a. Can you please share that experience with me?

b. What do you believe can be done to prevent acts like the one you described from occurring in the future?

9. Are you aware of any policies that have assisted with reducing poverty amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey?

If participant responds with yes, then

a. What are those policies?

10. Are you aware of any policies that create barriers amongst Puerto Ricans in New Jersey trying to escape poverty?

If participant responds with yes, then

b. What are those policies?

11. Do you have any final thoughts or remarks that you would like to share before we conclude?

Closing script.

“Thank you for taking the time out of your day to be a participant in this research study. Once I have the transcription from this interview, I will send you a copy for your review. I will also be sure to provide you with a copy of the final study once it is approved for release. Finally, as noted on the informed consent form, your participation in this study is confidential and your name will not be made public at any point throughout this study. Thank you again for your willingness to support this study. At this time, I will stop the recording.