Life in the Neighborhood

*A Factor Analytic Study of Puerto Rican Males in the New York City Area*

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**Introduction**

The relevant data which is available to an investigation of a bilingual population can be obtained in two ways. Behavior, linguistic and otherwise, can be observed naturalistically using techniques of participant observation. The necessary data can also be elicited by interviews, tests, and the like. These two methods complement each other and provide richer results together than either would alone.

The data utilized in the present study was elicited by an open-ended interview. Demographic data already obtained from a language census of the same population was used to pinpoint Ss to be interviewed. The content of the interview schedule was prepared after several drafts of a language related participant observation based on ethnographic summary had been completed. The ethnographic summary (Hoffman, 1968) was based upon an intensive survey of the relevant literature, in-depth conversations with New York resident Puerto Ricans from many walks of life, and months of participant observation of this life. The current interview study focused upon and sought to clarify those observed behaviors which seemed to most clearly reflect the Puerto Rican and American values of members of the community. Its main purpose was to discover which aspects of their life respondents associated with being Puerto Rican and which they associated with being American and how or whether they attain a modus vivendi between them.

**The interview**

The topics covered by the interview (Fishman, Cooper, Ma, et al., 1968, Appendix B) were as follows: hopes and aspirations; social contacts; language

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1 Data analysis for this study was supported by the College Entrance Examination Board whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Due to space limitations most statistical notes have not been included in this report and may be obtained upon request from the authors.
usage and attitudes; attitudes towards Americans and Puerto Ricans; concept of self as Puerto Rican and as American; ethnic behaviors (lo-culture activities); and attitudes towards children's behaviors. The data obtained consist of self-reported behaviors, attitudes and opinions of 32 adult male respondents about their own daily life, their children's daily life, and their aspiration for their own and their children's future.

The interviews – lasting from one to three hours – were administered in the informal setting of the respondents' homes or in a neighborhood apartment which had been rented for that purpose. The interviewer, as well as his colleagues, were well known and were accepted into the neighborhood by the time the interviews began. Great care was taken to be frank and open with the neighborhood residents concerning the purpose of the project so that the legitimacy of our presence would not be looked upon with suspicion. Entry into the neighborhood was gained through the efforts of a local priest and a neighborhood leader who was also the superintendent of the building which housed the research apartment.

The informality of the interview situation was insured by the absence of note-taking. All interviews were tape-recorded after permission was granted by the respondent. The presence of the microphone was soon forgotten as the interview developed into an informal, relaxed conversation. Although the interviewer was in possession of an interview guide, attempts were made to maintain a conversational format throughout. It was not necessary to maintain any strict order of questioning. It was possible for each person to pursue topics of interest to himself, while the interviewer provided probes and direction in order to cover various predesignated topics. The interpreter who accompanied the interview (in those cases where respondents knew little or no English) was fully familiar with the interview guide, so that for those interviews in which Spanish was used, a conversational rather than a question and answer format was also maintained.

Sample population

The thirty-two male respondents in this study were chosen from among approximately ninety Puerto Rican households living within a two-block area in Jersey City, New Jersey. This was a poor neighborhood composed mainly of Puerto Ricans and a few Negroes. Among the Puerto Ricans there were a number of loose networks within which most people were acquainted. Although the neighborhood was run down and many of the people were employed at low salaried jobs there was generally a stability about this population in terms of employment, neighborhood residence and marriage. A few of the families owned their own homes and were straining towards upward mobility, especially for their children, if not for themselves as well. The sample population interviewed was designed to be a cross-section of this neighborhood in terms of education, occupation, and age.

The decision to interview only males in this attempt to study bilingual-