

Cultural Control and Internalized Colonialism  
What Messages Puerto Ricans Internalize about Their Culture?

by

Karishma Kasad

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Cristalís Capielo Rosario, Chair  
James Bludworth  
Nancy Truong

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## ABSTRACT

Multiple psychological frameworks have been developed to conceptualize how people internalize colonial logics about their cultural identity and culture, and how these logics in turn influence their psychological wellbeing. The extant literature has also offered various empirically supported frameworks to understand the role colonialism may have on the cultural identity and psychological wellbeing of Puerto Ricans, a community still enduring colonial oppression. This study analyzes cultural control as a mechanism of internalized colonialism, or more specifically, what messages Puerto Ricans internalize about their culture. The current qualitative research involved individual phone interviews with 12 self-identified Puerto Ricans living in Arizona and Florida. This study used qualitative thematic analysis of the transcripts, and hypothesized that Puerto Rican participants will internalize colonial logics. This study contributes to the foundational understanding of Puerto Ricans' perception of culture, so a more complete framework can be utilized by clinicians who provide therapy to this unique and understudied population.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Los habitantes de Puerto Rico han heredado de los antiguos indígenas su desinterés, conservando al mismo tiempo la afición a los licores fuertes y la vida sedentaria (André Pierre Ledru, *Viaje a la Isla de Puerto Rico*, 1957, p.179).

[The inhabitants of Puerto Rico have inherited their selflessness from the ancient indigenous peoples, while preserving their fondness for strong liquors and a sedentary life (André Pierre Ledru, *Travels to the Island of Puerto Rico*, 1957, p.179)].

Colonialism is the practice of control by one people over others (Fanon, 1965). It is driven by resource exploitation to build up empires and continues to influence countries to this day (Kohn & Reddy, 2017). Colonized people have their language, religion, and cultural beliefs suppressed, distorted, or eradicated in order to prop up the colonizer's ideologies and objectives. Judicial and economic institutions are used as scaffolding to reinforce the occupier's desired system (Chanock, 1985). The colonizer is able to portray the subaltern as underdeveloped, and therefore unworthy of their own resources. This is expanded by exploiting labor of the subaltern, while simultaneously destroying their culture. Exploitation of labor turns to slavery and genocide, which has been connected to generational trauma (Gone & Trimble, 2012). The colonizer then foists cultural hegemony onto the colonized, producing colonial ideologies to sustain and expand colonial subjugation (Grosfoguel, 2003). These ideologies allow the colonizer to appropriate, control, and corrupt the assets of the colonized (e.g., economies,

government, social structures, language, knowledge) with the sole purpose of holding the colonizer up, and oppressing the colonized (Fanon, 1979). These colonial dynamics have sustained colonialism in Puerto Rico for over 500 years, first under Spanish rule and today as a colony of the United States (Capielo Rosario et al., 2019).

Colonial ideologies can effectively rationalize and advance colonial powers by creating a colonial logic of superiority and inferiority, which places the colonizer at the top and the colonized at the bottom (Capielo Rosario et al., in press), or what Walter Mignolo (2002) defined as *colonial difference*. After rendering the colonized as the less human counterpart of the colonizer, an ethic that institutionalizes exploitation and control over the lives, identities, labor, and knowledge of the colonized takes hold (Mignolo, 2005, 2007), what Quijano (2001) called, *coloniality of power*. In other words, the colonizer systematically appropriates land and resources and creates institutions to exert authority over the colonized (e.g., educational, governmental, and legal systems) (Martínez Avilés, 2011; Mignolo, 2005). Controlling and distorting the sexuality, language, culture, knowledge, and subjectivities of the colonized while exploiting their labor and excluding them from political power are manifestations of coloniality of power (Martinot, 2007; Moane, 2003). Later, Maldonado-Torres (2007) expanded the definition of coloniality by arguing that colonialism also leaves an indelible mark on the mind and the lived experiences of the colonized, or *coloniality of being*. The earlier work of Mignolo (2003) provided an initial roadmap for understanding the interconnection between colonial difference to coloniality of power, to coloniality of being.

‘Science’ (knowledge and wisdom) cannot be detached from language; languages are not just ‘cultural’ phenomena in which people find their ‘identity’; they are also the location where knowledge is inscribed. And, since languages are not something human beings have but rather something of what human beings are, coloniality of power and of knowledge engendered the coloniality of being [colonialidad del ser] (p. 669).

How colonialism affects the lived experiences of the colonized must consider how these lived experiences are informed by how the colonized interact with colonial logics. Colonial logics allows colonialism and later, coloniality to thrive. Colonial logics are the ideas and principles that allow colonizers to establish political, economic, and epistemological dominance over the colonized (Capielo Rosario et al., 2023; Grosfoguel, 2003). Within the Puerto Rican context, Capielo Rosario and colleagues (2023) identified two distinct colonial logics, the logic of racialization and the logic of benefaction. The logic of racialization establishes that Puerto Rican are inherently racially and culturally inferior. Hence, they are dependent on external forces for correction and development (logic of benefaction). Although logics of colonialism and coloniality are initially externally produced, these may be later internalized by those under colonial oppression (see Fanon, 1967, 1986; Freire, 1990; Memmi, 2001), a process some scholars have called colonial mentality (Capielo Rosario et al., in press; David, 2008; 2013). In her analysis of coloniality and the internalization of colonial ideologies of difference and coloniality, Geraldine Moane (2003) identified *cultural control* as one of the most effective mechanisms by which oppressed groups internalized logics of coloniality



(colonial mentality). According to Moane (2003) cultural control seeks to distort the traditions, language, history, stories, values, and technologies of the colonized. Provide one or two examples of how cultural control takes place. Cultural control is enforced through institutions (e.g., mass media, education) that frame the colonizer as knowledgeable, and the colonized as ignorant and uncivilized (Moane, 2003; Nandy, 1983). The distortion of the culture of the oppressed group allows the oppressor to advance narratives that fit the ideological, political, and economic goals of the oppressor (Grosfoguel, 2003). For example, narratives of cultural control may present the colonizer as a catalyst for correction and advancement for the colonized group (Capielo Rosario et al., in press; Grosfoguel, 2003; Villanueva, 2019). However, despite claims that colonizers helped “modernize” the countries they occupied, evidence shows how these ideologies create a climate where colonial exploitation can thrive with impunity (Angeles 2007; Doshi & Ranganathan 2017). Moreover, because colonial logics falsely paint the dominant group as superior, the marginalized group members attempt to emulate them (Fanon, 1965; Speight, 2007). In this way, colonialism becomes self-sustaining by co-opting the colonized in promulgating and maintaining colonial logics that serve the economic and political interests of colonial powers (Capielo Rosario et al., in press; Grosfoguel, 2003). In her seminal article on internalized oppression (internalized colonial logics), Speight (2007) argued that one of the most significant psychological consequences of systemic oppression is a, “lack of critical consciousness preventing one from seeing the destructive social context and accept the dominant group’s exploitation” (p. 131). Without an understanding of colonial oppression, the oppressed group

rationalizes injustice by believing that the target group's social and cultural inferiority, not systemic colonialism, is the cause of marginalization (Speight, 2007). This psychological injury deeply in turn impacts how individuals and communities form ideas and associate attributes to their culture and cultural identity (Okazaki et al., 2008).

Multiple psychological frameworks have been developed to conceptualize how formerly colonized people internalize colonial logics about their cultural identity and culture and how these logics in turn influence their psychological wellbeing. These include: *The Internalized Racialism Framework for African Americans* (Cokley, 2002), *The Internalized Racism Framework* (Speight, 2007), the *Post-colonial Traumatic Stress Disorder Model* (Comas-Diaz, 2007), and *The Colonial Mentality Model of Depression for Filipino-Americans* (David, 2008). These frameworks describe how internalized colonial ideologies affect the psychological wellbeing and cultural identity of oppressed groups. Together, these paradigms assert that as a result of colonization, oppressed groups internalize racialized negative attitudes about their ethnic and racial group (Choi et al., 2017; Nunning, 2015). For example, a Black person believing that other members of their racial group are more likely to commit crimes than White people, exemplifies the internalization of racialized colonial logics (Speight, 2007). Even when the individual internalizes what are seemingly positive attributes about their racial or ethnic group, these characterizations are often informed by colonality. For example, African Americans may view themselves as inherently lazy but athletic. These frameworks also contend that as a result of the internalization of oppressive colonial logics, these groups may experience

depression, have low levels of collective and self-esteem, and within group conflict (Cokley, 2002; Speight, 2007; Comas-Díaz, 2007; David, 2008; Capielo Rosario, 2019).

The extant literature has also offered various empirically supported frameworks to understand the role colonialism may have on the cultural identity and psychological wellbeing of Puerto Ricans, a community still enduring colonial oppression. These include *The Colonial Mentality Model of Depression for Puerto Ricans* (Capielo Rosario, 2019) and *The Puerto Rican Personality Framework* (Rivera Ramos, 1998). Scholars have also provided evidence of how internalized colonial logics influence the cultural identity of Puerto Rican youth (Varas-Díaz & Serrano-García, 2003) and can sustain colonial oppression by co-opting Puerto Ricans into justifying colonial oppression (Capielo Rosario et al., in press; Rivera Pichardo et al., 2020). Although this scholarship provides important insights into how coloniality negatively impacts the cultural identity and wellbeing of Puerto Rican communities, an expansion of this literature is warranted.

While multicultural counseling models are an important departure from traditional Eurocentric psychology, they do not factor in the sociopolitical context of individuals, including colonialism. Current models neglect histories of minority clients, yet it is critical for counselors to know how colonialism impacts racial and cultural identity. Specifically, it is important for clinicians to understand how language of colonial oppression may be embedded in the cultural identity of oppressed groups. In other words, we need to consider how colonialism forms language that the oppressed take on, and how that language becomes part of their cultural identity. Once counselors are able to

understand Puerto Rican cultural identity, it will help to disentangle language that promotes white supremacy and oppression (Goodman & Gorski, 2014).

An important extension relates to identifying how colonial logics are embedded in the ways that Puerto Ricans define and describe their culture. For example, while studies on the relationship between internalized colonial logics and Puerto Rican cultural identity show how Puerto Ricans generally describe Puerto Rican culture as inferior to White American culture (e.g., Capielo Rosario et al., 2019; Varas-Díaz & Serrano-García, 2003), little information is available about what are the specific attributes Puerto Ricans assign to Puerto Rican culture. Accordingly, the present study analyzes how participants describe Puerto Rican culture and other members of their cultural group.

### **Study Objectives**

Informed by the literature, the current paper purports to expand our understanding of internalized colonial logic about Puerto Rican culture by investigating how Puerto Ricans view themselves and others. An inductive approach to qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) was used to understand participants' descriptions. Data for this study was collected by Cristalís Capielo Rosario in 2019 as part of a larger project that sought to examine how Puerto Ricans describe their lived experiences within the context of the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. The data for this project was divided by Capielo Rosario across multiple manuscripts to preserve the richness of the data, as suggested by Levitt et al. (2018). For this paper, I will analyze participants' responses to the following interview questions: (a) Thinking of your identity as a Puerto Rican, how would you describe yourself?, (b) How would you describe other Puerto Ricans?, and (c) How would you describe Puerto Rican culture?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Culture and Cultural Identity**

The word culture has elicited over 200 definitions since the 1950s, and its definition continues to evolve (Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017). In the current study, I use the definition provided by Vontress (2003), which describes culture as the collection of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are shared within a group and are taught across generations. Elements of culture might include traditions, rituals, values, objects, tools, arts, food, knowledge, and numerous other factors. A concept closely associated with culture is cultural identity, or the cognitive and affective connection someone may have towards their culture and other members of the same cultural group (Vedder, 2017). In order to develop a cultural identity, individuals delve into their cultural heritage and explore the different traditions and beliefs that are passed down through the generations (Vedder, 2017). Vedder and Umaña-Taylor (2014) further argue that those with strong ties to their cultural identity feel connected to their group and its members. Researchers have persistently identified cultural identity as an important correlate of psychological wellbeing. During adolescence, cultural identity can become a source of pride and support (Ruble et al., 2004). Cultural identity can also serve as a protective factor against fears and threats associated with experiences of discrimination. For example, in a study by Alvarado & Ricard (2013) which surveyed 130 Hispanic student participants (grades 6-12) across South Texas, results showed that positive identification with their ethnic group was associated with thriving. Another study

that included 1,062 Mexican-origin adolescents found significant positive relationships between ethnic identity and self-esteem among adolescents (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

These outcomes demonstrate

the importance of cultural identity on the lived experiences of individuals.

Because of the implications culture and cultural identity have on individuals' daily functioning and the prominent role these constructs now have in the field of psychology, psychologists have increasingly called attention to the need to critically analyze culture and cultural identity (Gorski & Goodwin, 2014). To illustrate, scholars have argued that culture itself is a creation of colonization (e.g., Okazaki et al., 2008). According to this critique, coloniality of power and being create the conditions where the oppressed group was only believed to be able to produce culture and incapable of generating knowledge, development, or technologies (Fals-Borda, 1970; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Okazaki et al., 2008). Others have focused on the need to examine how culture and cultural identity have been distorted and altered by colonialism (e.g., Shin, 2014). For example, in their book *Cultural Foundations and Interventions in Latino/a Mental Health: History, Theory and within Group Differences (Explorations in Mental Health)*, Adames and Chavez-Dueñas (2017) detail how pre-colonial Latin American civilizations and cultures, including Puerto Rico's, were radically altered by the enslavement and genocide brought on by colonialism. These historical events continue to deeply influence the psychology of Puerto Ricans. Therefore, it is critical that psychologists and other mental health practitioners understand how the colonization of

Puerto Rico continues to influence their present day understanding of Puerto Rican culture.

### **Colonialism, Coloniality, and Culture**

Culture, and its close ally colonize, have been powerful organizing influences in producing and reproducing a dominant worldview among Europeans. In other words, the process of colonization was clearly linked to the production and reproduction of a particular culture. Its ethnological origin appears to describe a process of expressing European power through colonization, domination, subjugation, and diaspora.... Eurocentric ideologies were formulated to cultivate not just crops and animals, but other humans. This was culture representing itself as civilization (Moodley & Curling, 2006, p. 129).

In this critique, Moodley and Curling (2006) capture how culture should be understood as a phenomenon that is heavily informed by colonization. First, the colonizer is able to hijack the resources of the colonized people by labeling them as primitive. In addition to seizing the subaltern's resources, they themselves are exploited by the colonizers. Using institutions (e.g., media, education systems) and policies (e.g., political exclusion) the colonizer has placed themselves at the top of the hierarchy. Within these conditions, the colonizer controls the tools, power, and resources to distort the history, knowledge, reality, value, and sense of self of the colonized and sets the stage for an ethic of exploitation and oppression against the subjugated.

This perversion of the reality of the oppressed and the injustices that emerge as a consequence of this distortion has been described as coloniality (Friere, 1921). It is

important to distinguish between coloniality and colonialism. While Kohn and Reddy defined colonialism as “a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another” (2017, p.1), coloniality is the long-standing pattern of power that emerges as a result of colonialism (Quijano, 1991). This colonial power has political, social, and economic power over the colonized group (Torres-Maldonado, 2007). This pattern of power or *coloniality of power* (Quijano, 1990, p.31) across institutions and structures is based on the ideology of colonial difference. The narrative of colonial difference characterizes those who are different from White, wealthy, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian men as fundamentally and inherently inferior (O’Neill, 1992; Mignolo, 2002; Miller, 1986; D’Augelli, 2019). Policies—such as laws, institutions, and hegemony—are developed from this ideology (Martín-Baró, 1996). Moane (2003) further conceptualized colonial power as taking six different manifestations: violence (e.g., genocide, police brutality against Communities of Color), political exclusion (e.g., no voting rights), economic exploitation (e.g., poor working conditions), control of sexuality (e.g., enforced pregnancy), cultural control (e.g., control of education and distortion of history), and fragmentation (e.g., creation of within group conflicts). Through these mechanisms the colonizer tries to maintain power by disempowering the colonized and thus keeping them in a subordinate state.

Later, Torres-Maldonado (2007) extended the definition of coloniality by asserting that coloniality not only affected the dynamics of power between the colonizer and the colonized but also the being of the colonizer and the colonized. By being, Maldonado-Torres (2007) referred to the lived experiences of oppressed peoples and the



language that reinforces their inferiority. Therefore, coloniality of being also reflects the ways in which colonial ideologies and language is used to sustain and expand colonial exploitation and oppression. According to Torres-Maldonado (2007), colonial ideologies and language that affect the lived experiences of the colonized,

[are] maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience (p. 5).

Because the subjugated are embedded in a social and institutional context based on the ideology of colonial difference, this narrative, although it is initially externally produced, can eventually become the individual's subjective reality through a process of internalization (Carlson & Bailey, 1997). As Torres-Maldonado illustrates, culture is influenced by coloniality. Ultimately, the pieces that make up culture do not reflect the values of the marginalized, but instead display the colonizers' values. This in turn affects perceptions of cultural identity.

Coloniality of being rests on the idea that the colonized, as the less human counterpart of the colonizer, are incapable of formulating language, knowledge, or structures to express or organize their own experience. This in turn provides a rationale for the colonizer to take control over all these systems by imposing their own language, knowledge, and structures on the colonized. In other words, the colonized are only allowed to describe and understand their experience through the language, knowledge, and structures of the colonized. This is why Maldonado-Torres specifically describes coloniality as not only being concerned with the mentality (thoughts, beliefs) of the

colonized but with the language, knowledge, and structures of non-existence. David (2008) states that colonial mentality, on the other hand, is a term that actually deals with thoughts- particularly about being colonized. David additionally defined colonial mentality as a type of internalized racial oppression where a colonized group deems the colonizer's culture and ethnicity superior to their own (2008). This manifests in the way that the subaltern thinks and feels towards the colonizer. For example, the colonized may feel as though they owe a debt to the colonizer for civilizing them, taking on what is known as colonial debt (Capielo Rosario et al., 2019; David, 2008; Zambrana, 2021). Other forms of oppression, such as racism, differ from colonial mentality in that the oppressed do not feel indebted to their oppressors: for example, Native Americans do not feel indebted to white colonizers. In regards to colonial mentality, the oppressed view themselves similarly to how the oppressors view them. As such, the oppressed "looks up" to the oppressor, and attempts to align themselves to resemble the colonizers as much as possible. While coloniality of being and colonial mentality are distinct terms, they are related. Both are consequences of colonialism. How you think is related to who you are, and conversely, who you are is related to how you think. The following section briefly summarizes Puerto Rico's colonization and how colonization and how these may impact Puerto Ricans' language about their culture and cultural identity.

### **Puerto Rican Culture and Cultural Identity**

Puerto Rico has been described as "a nation in search of itself" (Comas-Diaz, 1998, p. 14). This comes from the long history of colonialism, which shaped the identity of the island and its people. The people of Puerto Rico have been force-fed a narrative of

inferiority by colonizers. Acknowledging, parsing, and understanding the roots of their Taíno, African, and Spanish lineage— all while being bound by the restrictive hierarchy colonialism creates— has generated what Comas-Diaz refers to as an ‘identity crisis’ (Comas-Diaz et al., 1998). The three groups: Spanish colonizers, Taino natives, and enslaved African all contribute to current Puerto Rican culture. To this day, Puerto Rico has been under some form of colonial rule. Therefore, it’s important to understand the contextual history behind the culture of this still-colonized island.

Given this colonial context, it is critical to evaluate how colonial ideologies and language are embedded in the way Puerto Ricans describe their culture and cultural lived experiences. This is evidenced by the radical difference in culture between pre-colonization and post-colonization Puerto Rico. Prior to European contact, the Taíno people were an incredibly developed civilization in the Caribbean that coexisted with other peoples, such as the Carib and Ciboney. The Tainos subscribed to a matrilineal descent system, which determined rank through female lineage. Their society was comprised of kingdoms- *caciquats*, *yucayeque*, or *cacigazo*— ruled by chiefs— *cacique* (Keegan, 1997). One year after the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, the Taíno population in the Caribbean was at least 60,000, with some estimates as high as 8 million. By 1548, the number of Taínos was less than 500. Spanish people brought smallpox, influenza, and other microorganisms that decimated the natives (Pringle, 2015). In 1513, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade allowed Spaniards to bring Africans to the Bahamas to endure the same fate as the native population (Landers, 2018). “[The Tíinos]...were being brutalized, murdered, raped and enslaved by Spaniards whom they, the Taínos, had

treated with great kindness, civility and generosity” (Carew, 2006 p. 5). The Taínos and Africans were enslaved to grow crops and mine precious metals. Puerto Rico was first colonized by Spain, and then by the United States after the Spanish-American War. To this day, it is viewed as a territory. On July 4th, 1950, President Harry D. Truman signed Public Act 600, allowing Puerto Rico to draft its own constitution, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico was made. However, Puerto Rico was still relegated to its territory status. Despite having a Resident Commissioner in the House of Representatives, Puerto Rico has no voting representation in congress, no right to vote in presidential elections, and no state rights. As a benefit of granting Puerto Rico its Commonwealth status, the United States is no longer required to report the island’s status to the UN Decolonization Committee.

Puerto Ricans are both overtly and subtly instructed to revere and idolize their oppressors (Martín-Baró, 1994; Wilson, 1993). The narrative of the colonizers is that White men discovered the ‘new world,’ gave the island economic value, and saved the natives from their own ‘savagery’ by converting them to Christianity. The story also continues with White men putting Africans to work (via slavery), and that the Taíno people were ‘wiped out’. While Spain introduced Puerto Rico to fundamentalism, it was the United States that established Evangelicalism— which has gripped the island’s government to this day.

Puerto Ricans represent their culture through their strong values: strengths such as determination, esperanza (hope), adaptability, strong work ethic, connectedness to others, collective emotional expression, and resistance. These are referred to as The Seven

Psychological Strengths of Latinos/as (Adames & Chavez-Duenas, 2017). These strengths serve as a source of pride. It's also important to see how these strengths come into play when surviving legacies of colonialism, enslavement, and genocide.

Identity extends beyond race and includes factors such as economic wealth. A recent cultural perception of Puerto Rico comes from its debt. It's important to note that the colonizers—specifically, the United States of America— entrenched Puerto Rico into economic peril through policies such as unfair taxes and laws, and by extracting wealth and resources without providing mutual aid (Serrano-Garcia, 2020) . Since the beginning of the U.S. colonial enterprise in Puerto Rico, the narrative is that the island is literally indebted to the U.S. and would not be able to survive if it were an independent entity (Pantojas, 2016; Torres, 2016). The island's history of colonialism is inextricably tied to Puerto Rican culture.

In this research paper, I will analyze cultural control as a mechanism of internalized colonialism, or more specifically, what messages Puerto Ricans internalize about their culture. The notorious legacy of colonization affects the everyday functioning of all people, yet it is not part of the everyday conversation of psychology. These findings are crucial to the study of liberation psychology, and those who wish to work with a diverse population.

### **Present Study**

In the following section, potential frameworks for understanding the impact of coloniality on culture will be ascribed to Puerto Ricans and evaluated based on their relevance and limitations vis a vis the Puerto Rican context.

## **Frameworks for Understanding the Impact of Coloniality on Culture**

### **The Internalized Racism Framework**

The internalized racism framework (Speight, 2007) argues that psychological injury related to racism does not only result from lived experiences of racism. According to this model, the most insidious consequence of racism is the internalization of racist ideas, beliefs, and attitudes by those who are targeted by racism (Speight, 2007). Speight (2007) also notes that racism is not only interpersonal but ingrained in culture and institutions. Internalized racism can manifest as self-devaluation and collective devaluation. According to this conceptualization, people of color, for example, may view themselves as less intelligent, less hard-working, and less deserving than White people. There is a wealth of literature that provides evidence for how internalized racism manifests across different populations, such as Filipino, Latinx, and African American populations. To illustrate, in a meta-analysis analyzing internalized racial oppression and health outcomes, the results indicate that people of color who report more internalized racism also report significantly higher rates of negative physical and mental health outcomes (Gale et al., 2020).

While this framework is helpful to explain the internalization or adoption of racist colonial logics, it is insufficient in explaining how part of this internalization could also lead individuals to accept positive attributes or stereotypes about their group or how even positive stereotypes may also be informed by coloniality. For example, David (2019) argued that colonized individuals may adopt colonial logics and language to their advantage or as a way to navigate their colonial context. These are exemplified by David

(2019) as “looking presentable”, “looking professional”, and “assimilation”.

Additionally, many scholars argue that the term “internalized” is a misnomer, as the oppression the individual faces is systemic, and not the fault or responsibility of the person experiencing it (Banks & Stevens, 2018; Campon & Carter, 2015; Tappan, 2006). Therefore, “appropriated racial oppression” is viewed as a more accurate conceptualization (David et al., 2019, p. 10). Additionally, there is no information on how this dynamic may take place in Puerto Ricans. For example, it is possible that Puerto Ricans could use both positive and negative characterizations to describe their culture, cultural identity, and lived experiences as members of this cultural group. Therefore, this is important to examine the messages Puerto Ricans internalize about their culture.

### **The Internalized Racialism Framework**

To account for how oppressed groups not only adopt negative aspects of racialized colonial narratives but also positive essentialized aspects and characterizations of their group, Cokley (2002), created a clear distinction between internalized racism and internalized racialism in his Internalized Racialism (IR) framework. According to Cokley (2002), while internalized racism is the internalization of *only* negative stereotypes of one’s ethnic group, internalized racialism consists of identifying with *any* stereotype about one’s racial group—both positive and negative (Cokley, 2002). The extant literature provides support for Cokley’s concept of internalized racialism. To illustrate, in a study by Maxwell et al. (2015) results showed a negative correlation between internalized racialism and skin color satisfaction in a sample of African American college students. Meanwhile, Bryant (2011) noted that internalized racialism was a significant

predictor of aggressive behavior among African American male youth. Although internalized racialism has typically been applied to college-aged African American students, there is available data to support how internalized racialism, particularly stereotypes associated with being a model minority, affects Asian Americans. For example, Gupta et al. (2011) showed that less internalized racialism was associated with higher levels of psychological distress

The IR model provides a needed extension to the internalized racism framework, the model has limitations. Specifically, Ponterroto (2007) argued that while African Americans, AfroCaribbeans, and other groups of African descent share Black identity and ancestry, the context of oppression that Black groups face outside of the United States varies significantly from the experiences of Blacks in the United States. Therefore the stereotypes each group internalizes about their racial group could also vary significantly across these groups. Although the IR model proposed by Cockley (2002) may provide a fuller explanation for why Puerto Ricans may accept many aspects of colonial ideologies or language to describe their culture (Barreto, 2016; Varas-Diaz & Serrano-Garcia, 2003), the literature has not yet evaluated the utility of the IR framework in Puerto Rican populations. Additionally, because the IR model was conceptualized to only capture the experiences of Black Americans, what we see in the Puerto Rican population as it relates to their characterizations of Puerto Rican culture and cultural groups may go beyond this framework. Lastly, given the little information available describing the language Puerto Ricans may use to describe their culture and cultural group, it is important to first conduct this qualitative study. By capturing the words of the



participants through qualitative means, we can create an accurate theory that describes what messages Puerto Ricans internalize about their culture.

### **Post-colonial Traumatic Stress Disorder Model**

In this framework, Comas-Díaz (1998) takes an ethnopolitical approach to analyze the effects of colonization on individuals, groups, and societies. Colonization breeds *Racismo* (or racism), where los blanquitos (White people) are afforded class and ethnopolitical privileges denied to Black and mulatto Puerto Ricans (Comas-Díaz, 1998). She goes on to explain how in Puerto Rico, class and racism are inextricably linked. “Regardless of color, the higher the person's social class, the whiter the person is perceived to be, and thus, the less the person is subjected to racism.” (Comas-Díaz, 1998, p. 787). All of which culminate into what Comas-Díaz terms “an identity crisis”. This identity crisis in turn creates internalized inferiority, negative self-definition, and negative self-esteem for many Puerto Ricans (Bird, 1982; Comas-Díaz, 1998). Comas-Díaz (1998) also elaborates on interventions necessary to resist colonial oppression, such as critical consciousness and bearing witness. Part of bearing witness is understanding the oppression that is taking place. Accordingly, an important step in bearing witness in Puerto Rican populations is understanding the colonial languages Puerto Ricans may internalize about their culture as a result of centuries of colonization.

### **The Colonial Mentality Model of Depression for Filipino-Americans**

More recently, David (2006, 2008) proposed the concept of colonial mentality (CM) to describe how Filipinos experience a form of internalized racial oppression where a colonized group deems their ethnicity and culture to be inferior to that of their

colonizers as a consequence of the colonization Filipinos experienced first at the hand of Spain and later the United States (David, 2008). Filipinos differ from other groups of Asian Americans because they were the only ones to be directly colonized by the United States. The effects of this are two fold, in that the predominant religion practiced is Catholicism and they have high English proficiency (Nadal, 2004). The development of this model comes in response to the lack of consideration to the impact of historical events such as colonization on previously colonized populations (Okazaki et al., 2008).

According to David (2006), CM manifests along five different domains: within-group discrimination, physical characteristics, colonial debt, cultural shame and embarrassment, and internalized cultural and ethnic inferiority. The CMS scale David (2006) created contains five factors. Factor 1 items describe the tendency to discriminate against less-Americanized Filipinos (Within-Group Discrimination), items in factor 2 describe the tendency to perceive Filipino physical traits as inferior to White physical traits (Physical Characteristics). Meanwhile, items in factor 3 describe the tendency to feel fortunate for having been colonized and to feel indebted toward one's past colonizers (Colonial Debt), whereas factor 4 assesses feelings of shame and embarrassment toward Filipino culture (Cultural Shame and Embarrassment). Finally, items in factor 5 purport to measure feelings of inferiority toward one's ethnicity and culture (Internalized Cultural/Ethnic Inferiority).

Multiple studies have provided empirical evidence for the utility of the colonial mentality framework. Research by David (2008) with 248 Filipino Americans showed that conceptual models that factor in colonial mentality do a better job of explaining

depression symptoms in this population. Capielo Rosario (2019) used a modified Colonial Mentality Scale with 352 mainland Puerto Ricans. The subscales of Cultural Shame, the Internalized Cultural/Ethnic Inferiority, and the Within-Group Discrimination subscales loaded onto a single factor called Puerto Rican Inferiority and American Superiority. Physical Characteristics and Colonial Debt were the remaining 2 factors. Puerto Ricans had an increased risk of experiencing depression symptoms due to colonial mentality when they felt acculturative stress. The pressure of maintaining ties to Puerto Rico's culture and society and being rejected by American society are some of the ways participants felt acculturative stress. Utsey (2015) utilized a modified Colonial Mentality scale for Ghanians containing four factors. After sampling 431 young adults, it was found that colonial mentality items like Physical Characteristics and Colonial Debt were rated higher than Within-Group Discrimination and Internalized Shame and Inferiority. Feelings of Colonial Debt were significantly higher in men than women. Nikalje & Çiftçi (2021) adapted the Colonial Mentality Scale to American Indians. The CMS-AI scale has 24-items and 4 subscales: Cultural Shame and Internalized Inferiority, Colonial Debt, Physical Characteristics, and Within-Group Discrimination. 32 percent of the sample were significantly impacted by colonial mentality. The significant variance in racism-related stress and frequency of depression symptoms were also attributed to colonial mentality in Indian Americans.

Despite the contributions David's (2006) CM model provides to help understand the psychological impact of colonization on formerly and currently colonized populations, the model has important limitations. CM only assesses the impact of

colonization on the mind. Coloniality of being focused on this and how language becomes culture and identity.

### **The Puerto Rican Personality Framework**

The Puerto Rican Personality Framework shows the attitudes of Puerto Rican women and children on the island. According to Ramos' findings (1998), Puerto Rican women tend to rate themselves as harder-workers than other Puerto Rican women. In addition to themselves, Puerto Rican women also describe White Americans positively (with attributes such as hardworking and smart) but describe other Puerto Ricans negatively (describing them as devious and unintelligent). When this framework was used with Puerto Rican youths, participants usually described U.S. society as clean and orderly, while describing Puerto Rico as unclean and unruly (Varas-Díaz & Serrano-García, 2003). The main limitation that comes with this framework is the fact that it has only been applied to Puerto Rican women and children. At this time, there is no research that incorporates the viewpoint of Puerto Rican men on the island.

When the women of this study identify themselves as Puerto Rican, there is a sense of pride for some aspects of the culture (ie. the flag), but not to Puerto Rican society (Ramos, 1998). This is directly tied to coloniality. Colonizers describe Puerto Ricans as lazy, degenerated, and having inferior values. Puerto Ricans have internalized this narrative, and are now using the transcript of the colonizer when referring to each other. Ultimately, the discrepancy of this framework is not so much how people feel as Puerto Ricans, but how they feel about *other* Puerto Ricans.

All the previous frameworks discussed have merit, but are incomplete when describing the Puerto Rican colonial experience. For Internalized Racism Framework, the theory is that people of color internalize racist ideas. However, it does not mention the internalization of positive stereotypes. Also, the name doesn't address the systemic nature of racism. The Internalized Racialism Framework talks about the internalization of both positive and negative stereotypes. However, there are many subgroups of self-identified Black people (such as Afro Caribbean, African American, etc.) that their experiences are not universal. The Post-colonial Traumatic Stress Disorder discusses internalized inferiority, negative self-definition, and negative self-esteem for many Puerto Ricans. The reported solution to this is Resistance to colonial oppression. Yet, there needs to be a recognition of oppression in order to combat it.

The Colonial Mentality Model of Depression for Filipino-Americans (David, 2008) defines colonial mentality as internalized racial oppression where the colonized views the colonizer's ethnicity and culture to be superior to that of their own because of colonization. CM fails to incorporate how language transforms into identity and culture. The Puerto Rican Personality Framework (Ramos, 1998) demonstrates how Puerto Rican women describe themselves and white Americans positively, while describing other Puerto Rican women negatively. Puerto Rican youth describes the US more favorably than Puerto Rico. This framework has no data on Puerto Rican men's viewpoint. Given the deficits in existing frameworks, this study is important because it will provide a comprehensive framework through which we can see how colonialism informs the lived experiences of Puerto Ricans.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Data Analysis Plan**

As part of a large, multidimensional investigation on the lived experiences of Puerto Ricans living in the United States within the context of colonialism, the current qualitative research involved individual phone interviews with 19 self-identified Puerto Ricans living in Arizona and Florida. Given the rich data yielded from the individual interviews and consistent with Levitt and colleagues' (2018) recommendations for dividing rich qualitative data into multiple manuscripts, it is important to understand participants' descriptions of their lived experiences as distinct from the other evidence produced in the dataset (e.g., Puerto Ricans' understanding of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States).

Thematic analysis is a research method for qualitative data that seeks to establish themes or patterns in the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thematic analysis is the most suitable approach given the objective of the study which was to identify potential patterns in the messages Puerto Ricans have internalized about their culture, and examine whether or not these internalized messages are reflective of colonial mentality. The approaches for this can be divided into two methods: top-down (known as a-priori) and bottom up. Top-down (*a-priori*) approach utilizes pre-established themes that the researchers are interested in prior to analyzing the data. For example, themes within our research questions: how Puerto Ricans describe themselves, other Puerto Ricans, and their culture. The bottom-up approach (inductive coding), creates themes as the data is analyzed. I will

be utilizing the bottom up approach to make more informed decisions regarding data interpretation.

The data analysis included coding, dialogic engagement, and listening strategies (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984). As the sole coder, I kept a journal to record thoughts and feelings. First, the transcripts were translated from Spanish to English via Google translator. To the accuracy of the translation, I shared the translations with Dr. Capielo Rosario who is a native Spanish speaker and as a Puerto Rican herself, versed in Puerto Rican Spanish. Specifically, she compared the translations against the original data. Then, the transcripts were reviewed and lines of dialogue were tagged under various themes that applied to them. The coder utilized Microsoft Word for tagging. Over 36 themes were uncovered, but the writer utilized a “25% rule”: this study discusses themes which appeared in at least 3 of the 12 transcripts. Dr. Capielo Rosario would have served as an advisor if uncertainty regarding the data/translations occurred. As a sole coder, trustworthiness is extremely important. I attempted to reduce my bias by looking at the data through a decolonized lens. I also conferred with peers in the lab and Dr. Capielo Rosario, who were able to provide cultural context to the data. Utilizing the bottom-up approach of thematic analysis allowed the researchers to find key saliencies/themes in our data.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the extent to which a study’s interpretation, methods, and quality can be ensured and bias reduced (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are the four criteria for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was displayed during interviews, where Dr. Capielo Rosario

reflected what the interviewee said to ensure clarity. She also asked follow-up statements to further understand the meaning of the participant's words, along with asking for examples and avoid interpretation or making assumptions about what the participants meaning when responding to her questions. Dependability and confirmability were displayed when I used research memos and debriefings with Dr. Capielo Rosario about my interpretation and organization of the data and the emerging themes. As an additional step of confirmability, I integrated theoretical triangulation. In other words, I compared the emerging themes against extant theory on the psychological consequences of colonization and coloniality among Puerto Ricans. Finally, transferability can be seen in the descriptions of each of the themes I identified supported by the inclusion of exemplars from the data (Amankwaa, 2016).

### **Positionality**

As a second-generation queer, female, wheat-skinned, middle-class Indian American, I understand the complicated feelings of deconstructing the effects of colonialism as a member of a formerly colonized people. I am currently seeking a doctoral degree in counseling psychology and I am cognizant that institutions of higher learning were not created to facilitate success for women of color, compared to my White peers. As a queer, feminist of color, I find that my motivations often clash with the current systems run by Anglo-Saxon, cis-heterosexual men. My counseling psychology theoretical framework focuses on liberation psychology and decolonization. As such, I need to be aware of power dynamics, privilege, and White supremacy so that I can fight to dismantle these unjust hierarchies. This also translates to research and coding, as I



must be cautious not to perpetuate harmful or oppressive narratives. While my Indian heritage has taught me about the colonization of India by the British, I entered this research only having a cursory understanding of Puerto Rican politics and history. I recognize that by virtue of being educated in the United States of America, I have a colonized mind through which I may filter the data through. For example, I may unconsciously compare Puerto Rican culture to main-stream American culture, because my upbringing as a citizen of the U.S. has set White culture as ‘the gold standard’. Caution must be taken when analyzing colonialism experienced by Puerto Ricans, as it will not be perfectly aligned to the experiences I have perceived about the Indian experience. This can result in certain ‘blind spots’ when reviewing the data. For instance, my religious upbringing differs from many Puerto Ricans, who have grown up with Christian teachings. There could also be cultural customs that I am not familiar with. However, my identity as a queer woman allows me to be sensitive to issues such as internalized homophobia and sexism. While these participant accounts will be different from mine, I still want to understand how colonialism continues to impact the cultural perception Puerto Ricans have.

### **Procedures**

Participants were eligible to participate in the research study if they: (a) self-identified as Puerto Ricans, (b) migrated from the island of Puerto Rico to the US as an adult, and (c) age ranged between 18– 60 years. Dr. Cristalis Capielo Rosario shared the approved flyer electronically with Puerto Rican organizations and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook) serving Puerto Ricans in Florida and Arizona and asked potential

participants to contact Dr. Cristalis Capielo Rosario via phone to schedule an interview. Upon contacting Dr. Cristalis Capielo Rosario, participants completed an eligibility questionnaire to confirm the participant met inclusion criteria. Eligible participants were given the option to respond in English, Spanish, or a combination of English and Spanish. All participants chose to complete the data forms and participate in the phone interview in Spanish. Before completing the phone interview, participants gave verbal informed consent and verbally completed a demographic questionnaire where they answered questions related to their age at the time of migration, chronological age, gender, the geographical area where they lived in Puerto Rico before migration, level of income both pre-and post-migration, employment status pre-and post-migration, political affiliation pre-and post-migration, and the primary reason for migrating to the United States. All participants in the study were interviewed on the phone by Dr. Cristalis Capielo Rosario. Given the sensitive nature of the interview protocol (e.g., perceptions of Puerto Rican society, culture, the association between Puerto Rico and the US) she used individual phone interviews as the methodology for data collection. Phone interviews can result “in more honest data” than other methodologies (e.g., virtual video meetings, focus group interviews) when the interview protocol addresses difficult conversations (Trier-Bieniek, 2012, p. 630), as was the case in the current study. The duration of phone interviews ranged between 60 to 85 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded using a password and encryption protected digital recorder. The original data received approval from the Arizona State University IRB.

## **Participants**

The average age of the 12 participants was 41.08 years (range = 20 to 52;  $SD = 8.85$ ), with a median income of \$30,000, and a majority identifying as female (83.33%,  $n = 10$ ; males 16.67%,  $n = 2$ ). Participants' average age of migration was 32.5 ( $SD = 9.62$ ). Table 1 provides full participant demographic information regarding gender identity, educational level, relationship status, and political affiliation in Puerto Rico.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

After analyzing the data from the twelve individual interviews, 4 themes and 9 subthemes depicting Puerto Ricans' shared beliefs and attitudes about other Puerto Ricans and themselves were generated (see Table 2). The four themes were: Racial Mixing, Puerto Rican Government is Corrupt, Puerto Ricans' Positive Traits, and Puerto Ricans' Negative Traits. Some participant responses reflect more than one theme at a time.

#### ***“The Puerto Rican is mixed”*: Racial Mixing**

Half of the participants spoke directly about Puerto Ricans being a fusion of different races and cultures. For example, participant A2 stated “...*we are Taínos, Spaniards, and Africans who are the ones who came to the island in the beginning.*” Racial mixing extended beyond race, with participants detailing how different cultures combine to make Puerto Rican food, dance, music, and religion exceptional to the region. This sentiment was shared by participant B4 in the statement below:

We also bring different cultures when we the Spanish [inhabited Puerto Rico], like African food. In dance, we have *la bomba*, which has African roots, and *salsa* has its root basically because of different things. I also find religion on the island is mostly Catholic, but that comes from Europe, from Spain. The Protestant religion, we know it comes from the United States, and it has adapted here and remains here in Puerto Rico.

Participants believed that rather than being comprised of separate parts of different cultures, Puerto Ricans are uniformly blended into one singular group. For example, Participant A9 stated *“I believe that we are united, that we behave quite the same no matter the ‘background’ of the races that we have.”*

Participants also spoke about how their own racial mixing helps explain why Puerto Ricans are kind to others. To illustrate, participant A1 noted, *“[We are] accepting of people from different cultures because we are from another side and the Puerto Rican is mixed. We have many different cultures, and we accept a little more.”* However, not all participants shared this sentiment. For example, participant A9 said, *“we are a little exclusive with other people of other nationalities.”*

### ***“The government is obviously the problem”*: Puerto Rican Government is Corrupt**

A significant portion of participants described the Puerto Rican government as corrupt. Comparisons between Puerto Rico’s and the United States’ government were used by participants to speak about Puerto Rico’s corruption. Participant A3 noted, *“[In the United States] they charge us some taxes and they give you a breakdown in the ‘bills’ and tell you for what they’re using that money. They really use that money”*.

Participant B16 exemplified their perception of Puerto Rico’s corruption *“Money never reaches where it has to go, it is diverted, it is not known how and it was lost.”*

Overall, participants believed that Puerto Rican politicians do not serve the people of Puerto Rico but work to make themselves rich. This was best exemplified by participant

B10 when they commented *“These affiliated politicians have already proven that their political parties work for their interest.”*

***“I always identify myself as being Puerto Rican and I am very proud to be Puerto Rican...”*: Positive traits of Puerto Ricans**

Participants discussed many positive Puerto Rican attributes. Five attributes in particular were recurrent sub themes. These subthemes were: Hardworking, Hospitable, Pride, Resilient, and Positive Loud.

***“An honest, hard-working person”*: Hardworking.** The vast majority of participants ( $n = 10$ ; 83.33%) labeled themselves as hardworking. For instance, Participant A8 described this when they stated, *“A Puerto Rican is [by nature] is a go-getter....”* Participants also talked about how this attribute is an admirable trait when it comes to work performance. For example, participant A7 noted, *“They [Puerto Ricans] are cooperative, they go the extra mile at work and they are approachable people.”*

***“We are also helpful, so you will see that the Puerto Rican helps”*: Hospitable.** Most participants ( $n = 10$ ; 83.33%) described Puerto Ricans as hospitable. Participant A2 described this as *“Wherever you are, if you have a flat tire they will help you, if you are hungry they will give you food and there are many who are still like that.”* Hospitality was seen as important when relating to other Puerto Ricans. For example, participant A5 said, *“Usually when we find each other it's to help one another.”* Participant A8 spoke about how empathy influences their hospitality. *“...as a Puerto Rican, I consider myself a hospitable person. Hospitable, as Puerto Ricans we are [ultimately] people sensitive to human pain... I am a person who appears to be tough of character, but I am sensitive.”*

***“I am proud to be completely Puerto Rican”*: Pride.** Three quarters ( $n = 9$ ; 75%) of the participants identified Pride as a positive trait Puerto Ricans possess. When asked to describe themselves in terms of their identity as a Puerto Rican, Participant B10 responded that they were *“super proud to be ‘Boriqua.’”* Having patriotism towards Puerto Rico was also mentioned explicitly in terms of describing oneself: *“very patriotic”* (Participant B14) and having *“love of patriotism”* (Participant B17).

***“[We] adapted and adopted”*: Resilient.** Five participants (41.67%) spoke about reliance when it comes to Puerto Ricans. *“The Puerto Rican has been so resilient and has moved forward”* (Participant B10). Both Participants A1 and A7 spoke about how *“moving forward”* was a positive attribute and tied to their people’s resilience. This resilience was also associated with Puerto Ricans who have migrated to the United States. When speaking about this, participant A7 described migration as a *“time to learn, acclimatize.”*

***“They like a lot of commotion”*: Positive Loud.** Another common Puerto Rican trait identified by participants ( $n=3$ ; 25%) was *“loud.”* Being loud in a social context provided by the participants was seen as a positive. For example, when describing Puerto Ricans as loud, participants referenced being fun and lively, particularly in reference to celebrating. Participant B16 notes, *“we play music, we make this a big party, we invite a lot of people, a lot of family, and dance.”* Participant A3 stated *“We are more rowdy than a lemon, we make a lemonade, we make a joke or we criticize something we always do that is the law of life.”*

***“PR is more disorganized than the U.S.”: Negative traits of Puerto Ricans.***

11 participants (91.67%) discussed their perceived negative traits of Puerto Ricans. Four sub themes represent the most common negative attributes identified by participants: Maintained, Lazy, Disorderly, and Negative Loud.

***“They think that coming here they have to maintain... I have to live from what the government gives me”*: Maintained.** All but one participant mentioned being maintained ( $n = 11$ ; 91.67%) as a Puerto Rican trait. This refers to the idea that Puerto Ricans utilize government assistance such as welfare programs and food stamps. Participant B14 stated that half of the Puerto Rican people on the island *“want to be maintained and have the aid of the government.”*

***“[We] are bums”*: Lazy.** A majority of participants attributed being lazy ( $n= 8$ ; 66.67%) to Puerto Ricans. *“Puerto Ricans don’t like to work.”* (Participant B16). One participant spoke about what her husband sees: *“in his visits to Puerto Rico he sometimes says that things do not work so well they are slower. People don’t want to work.”* (Participant A1)

***“Disorderly as we are...”*: Disorderly.** Another significant part of the sample ( $n= 8$ , 66.67%) also identified being disorderly as a common Puerto Rican trait. Participant B14 stated *“there is no order”* when speaking about Puerto Rico, *“We do it our way and we think that’s fine and in reality, it is not fine. We don’t go by the book and [Americans] do it by the book and [Americans] have their lives more organized.”*

***“We are very Loud”*: Negative Loud.** The last subtheme identified is ‘negative loud’ ( $n= 8$ , 66.67%). This descriptor has a connotation synonymous with inconsiderate



or rude. Participant B14 spoke about how most Puerto Ricans possess this trait: *“I think it’s a small part of [Puerto Rican] society that isn’t a partier.”* Participant A5 described Puerto Ricans in the following way: *“We keep playing music loudly, screaming in the streets, running stop signs. Those type of things are typically seen.”* One participant spoke about how Puerto Ricans frequently cause *“...a ruckus, talking loudly, not knowing how to talk, only yelling.”* (Participant 17).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to investigate how the language of coloniality is embedded in the shared beliefs and attitudes Puerto Ricans have about their culture. By doing so, we could further clarify the internalized colonial logic participants hold about Puerto Rican culture. This study was crucial to conduct because Puerto Rico's history of colonization affects the specific language the colonized use to describe themselves as well as fellow Puerto Ricans.

A review of the results shows how participants' representations of their own culture was heavily through their description of other Puerto Ricans, Puerto Rican attributes and behaviors. The findings from the data analysis were complex: while colonial mentality does inform Puerto Rican's perceptions of themselves and other Puerto Ricans, there are also instances where Puerto Ricans resist language of coloniality. Analysis of the data shows how coloniality of being is reflected on the language and perceptions they have about themselves and other Puerto Ricans. This partially reaffirms Cokely's (2002) model of internalized racialism. For example, two of the subthemes that comprised the theme *Puerto Rican's Positive Traits* were *Hardworking* and *Hospitable*. These positive traits that Puerto Ricans associate with themselves are the same traits that colonizers exploit and benefit from. For instance, a colonizer would want those they have colonized to be hardworking, and exalt this as a virtue. Results also provide further evidence for the dynamics identified in the work by Rivera Ramos (1998). This is most evident in the theme *Puerto Rican Government Is Corrupt*. Specifically, this theme

showed that a majority of participants viewed other Puerto Ricans in government as untrustworthy and deviant. In her work with island Puerto Ricans, Rivera Ramos also observed that deviance was one of Puerto Ricans' most significant attributes. Additionally, Rivera Ramos (1998) also documented that Puerto Ricans viewed their current colonizers, the United States, in higher regard to themselves. This view is also seen in the subthemes within *Puerto Rican's Negative Traits: Lazy, Negative Loud, Disorganized, and Maintained*. Taking on the label of laziness makes Puerto Ricans inherently inferior to their colonizers. Such narratives benefit the oppressor and reinforce the fabricated hierarchy that places people of color at the bottom and white people on top. These findings also align with the conceptual and empirical scholarship on internalized oppression discussed in Chapter 2. For instance, the results showed that Puerto Ricans often adopt language that mirrors the language Puerto Rican colonizers have used to rationalize the colonization of Puerto Rico. It is important to note that this is not an inherent condition, but rather, the consequence of living under the oppressive conditions of colonization (Capielo Rosario et al., 2023).

The theme of *Racial Mixing* is supported by the work of Comas-Diaz (1998) and her proposed Post-colonial Traumatic Stress Disorder Model. As mentioned previously, Puerto Rico has a long history of colonization and creates confusion in regards to identity. This was shown in the variable attitudes that came about with the topic of racial mixing. For example, some participants use it as a way to say that all Puerto Ricans are equal, or at the very least, share the same heritage. However, a separate participant spoke about how despite the mixing of Spaniards, Africans, and Taínos, exclusionary attitudes

still exist. This is akin to their colonizer, the United States, which uses the phrase “We’re all Americans” in order to blanket relevant issues such as racism and classism. It’s also important to note that none of the participants addressed colonization as the origin of race-mixing: an example of how coloniality of being informs language, or in this case, a lack-there-of.

### **Research Implications**

The results of this study show the significance of coloniality of being on currently and previously colonized individuals, in addition to resistance of those narratives. Researchers can also use these findings to highlight how Puerto Ricans perceive themselves: both positively and negatively. The results also highlight the importance of adapting the previously mentioned cultural and ethnic identity models as they relate to the Puerto Rican community. For instance, Cokely states that black Americans internalize both positive and negative aspects, which all originate from the colonizer. In our study, we see that Puerto Ricans have purely positive traits that contradict the language of the colonizer, particularly in the sub themes of *Positive Loud* and *Pride*. These themes go beyond the concept of internalized racialism, and need to be accounted for.

### **Clinical Implications**

Given the complicated nature in which colonial logics are impacted or resisted by Puerto Rican clients, clinicians should be competent in how to deconstruct colonial narratives in order to address them with clients. Clinical practitioners can also gain a

deeper understanding towards their Puerto Rican clients based on the results of this study. For example, it is critical for clinicians to understand the significant impact colonization has had in Puerto Rican cultural identity and how this may internally influence their psychological wellbeing. For example, scholars have observed an association between the internalization of colonial mentality and depression symptoms and cultural stress among Puerto Ricans living in the United States (Capielo Rosario et al., 2019). Therefore, clinicians should be able to identify internalized colonial logics and assist the client in finding ways to reaffirm Puerto Rican cultural strengths. This can in turn, challenge and externalize these colonial ideas. . This can be done using current evidence-based treatments, such as motivational interviewing or narrative therapy. For example, if a Puerto Rican client is struggling financially and believes that they are not working hard enough (a narrative given by colonizers), the practitioner can use narrative therapy to redirect focus from a colonizer narrative to that of the client, thus resisting colonial narratives. Puerto Rican clients may also withhold information that may validate negative traits given to them by the colonizer, such as *Lazy* or *Disorderly*, so as not to validate these stereotypes about themselves or their people. At this juncture, therapists should explore cognitive distortions with the client to help them discern colonial narratives from personal narratives, and actual challenges the client may want to discuss during sessions.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The current study has a few important limitations. First, the sample was taken from a heterosexual, cisgender population. Future researchers may wish to solicit a study

focusing on those with more diverse sexual and gender identities, as the results may not be the same. Another important limitation is that the current study cannot produce a new Puerto Rican identity model. Researchers may wish to use the data gathered as a stepping stone to find the relationship between language used by Puerto Ricans and self-perception. Those interested in the field may also be inclined to dig deeper into the internalization of colonial logics for Puerto Rican individuals.

The study was conducted to see if/how colonial mentality informs Puerto Rican's perceptions of themselves and others. We found this to *somewhat* be the case, and that Puerto Ricans view their negative traits, culture, and government through the eyes of their colonizers, while their positive traits can resist colonial narratives. Therefore, it should be a priority for researchers and clinicians alike to properly understand the social, cultural, and historical contexts ascribed to Puerto Ricans, in addition to developing a complete cultural identity model to better serve this unique population.

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APPENDIX A

TABLES

**Table 1***Participant Demographic Table*

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Gender Identity		
Woman	10	83.33%
Man	2	16.67%
Education Level		
High School	1	8.33%
Associate degree	1	8.33%
Some College	1	8.33%
Bachelor's degree	5	41.67%
Master's degree	3	25.00%
Doctoral degree	1	8.33%
Relationship Status		
Married	8	66.67%
Single	2	16.67%
Common Union	2	16.67%
Political Affiliation in Puerto Rico		
Puerto Rican Independence Party (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño)	2	16.67%
New Progressive Party (Partido Nuevo Progresista)	5	41.67%
Popular Democratic Party (Partido Popular Democrático)	2	16.67%
Unaffiliated	3	25.00%

Age at Interview

Range: 20 - 52; Mean = 41.08; Standard Deviation = 8.65

Age at Migration

Range: 18 - 42; Mean = 32.5; Standard Deviation = 9.62

**Table 2***Results Table*

Themes	Subthemes	% of sample
Racial Mixing		50% ( <i>n</i> = 6)
Puerto Rican Government is Corrupt		41.67% ( <i>n</i> = 5)
Puerto Rican's Positive Traits		
	Hardworking	83.33% ( <i>n</i> = 10)
	Hospitable	83.33% ( <i>n</i> = 10)
	Pride	75% ( <i>n</i> = 9)

	Resilient	41.67% (n= 5)
	Positive Loud	25% (n= 3)
Puerto Ricans' Negative Traits		
	Maintained	91.67% (n = 11)
	Lazy	66.67% (n = 8)
	Disorderly	66.67% (n = 8)
	Negative Loud	25% (n=3)