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A PUERTO RICAN DIASPORIC STUDY IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2021

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication

in the Nicholson School of Communication & Media

in the College of Sciences

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to explicate the intercultural experiences of Puerto Ricans within the diaspora of Central Florida. Specifically, the navigation of communication behaviors among intergroup and outgroup behaviors as Puerto Rican individuals acculturate into the area. This study utilizes communication accommodation theory as its basis to understand integration into a host culture and the impacts on socio-cultural communication behaviors. Findings show the importance of studying diasporic communities as they develop such as that of the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida because it situates the reality of an individual and groups sense of identity in a new cultural context. This research showcases Puerto Rican diasporic individuals struggling with the bilingual brain and acculturating based on their environment. Communication accommodation behaviors are thus deeply rooted in marginalization and negative treatment of diasporic individuals as the “other” in multicultural scenarios. Intercultural self-identity and intersectionality has therefore been impacted by the dynamic between the home culture and host culture.

*Keywords:* diaspora, Puerto Rico, communication accommodation theory, intercultural, identity, bilingualism, communication behaviors

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the diasporic Puerto Rican individuals in Central Florida who participated in this study by sharing their stories and lived experiences with me. No one is obligated to share their story yet many of you did with openness and vulnerability, and for that I am grateful.

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## **CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION**

Individuals within a diaspora that are navigating entry into new cultural contexts will experience an impact upon their identity and a shift within the vitality of their language, customs, and intercultural communicative practices. Typically, within an intercultural context, individuals claim their identity through collectivism as a mechanism that facilitates integration into the host culture, meaning the region that individuals move to from their home country or area. A collective identity works against deculturization practices when individuals and groups move from their homelands to other regions such as the United States. Through these migration processes, diasporic communities are thus formed, implementing hubs of collectivism in which individuals may preserve their own cultural identity while equipping themselves with the knowledge and skills required for successful integration. This can be through the process of assimilation or isolation depending on the nature of the diasporic community and their own perceptions of a perceived dominant culture within their area.

The number of Puerto Ricans moving to the mainland of the United States surged by 200,000 after 2017 when Hurricane María ravaged the island leaving citizens without access to basic resources including electricity and clean drinking water (Alexander et al., 2019). It is estimated that there are 5.6 million Puerto Ricans living on the mainland of the U.S. due to increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters, subsequent financial challenges, and political strife that have destabilized the economy and increased insecurity for those living on the island. Of the approximate 5.6 million Puerto Ricans who have migrated, 20% reside in Florida (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2017). Central Florida specifically has become its own diasporic community for many Puerto Ricans who have moved to areas such as the so-called “I-4 corridor” that includes Orlando, Kissimmee, Poinciana, Buenaventura Lakes, and Deltona to name a few



locations. Through this, acculturation and the maintaining of ethnic identification have been perceived to remain strong among Puerto Rican individuals and their family members moving to Central Florida.

Central Florida as a region is useful for this study as it is the center to what is known as the Puerto Rican diaspora within Florida. Geographically speaking, Florida is the closest state to the island and during natural disasters, such as Hurricane María and Hurricane Ian, it has been the hub of assistance for many leaving the island in search of asylum. This is also the case in regard to economic pressures taking place in Puerto Rico where individuals will seek out a new home in Florida due to the geographic closeness and tight relation with other family members who may have moved to Central Florida prior. This relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico also carries a long history in which the island's location played a substantial role in the 15th century colonization of Florida during the New World period and served as an important naval port to the United States since the late 19th century. This history and geographic proximity has contributed to the growing amount of diasporic Puerto Ricans relocating to Florida. The diasporic identity of these individuals can be defined as that of a cultural identity built from hardships. This stems from colonization practices that have continued to impede on the island's home identity such as the Act 60 tax incentive code which allows U.S. citizens to move to Puerto Rico and earn an exemption from federal and state income taxes while maintaining their benefits such as Social Security and Medicaid. Though mainland residents of the U.S. get a tax break, Puerto Ricans do not have the same benefits and are one of the most heavily taxed citizens within the United States. Innately, Puerto Ricans have been struggling due to the financial situation on the island alongside natural disasters, the withholding of resources, and political impacts impending upon finances.

As diasporic Puerto Ricans make the move to Central Florida, it impacts the ethnic, cultural, and social makeup of institutions within the area. For example, this region is home to the second largest higher education institution which has been designated a Hispanic-Serving Institution and a Minority Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education. Approximately 27.8% of students at the University of Central Florida (UCF) identify as <sup>1</sup>Latine according to the UCF facts page. Given these demographics it is critical to examine the experiences of the diasporic community members who are navigating the complicated contexts of this location in the continental U.S. The question is then regarding how Puerto Ricans attending higher education institutions in Central Florida are impacted and if there is a pressure of assimilation practices to fit in. Could it be the opposing effect in which Puerto Ricans in Central Florida feel the need to be more prominent in the community in showcasing and sharing their cultural background and practices? The following study aims to understand how the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida are adapting their communication behaviors in the process of acculturation, and what socio-cultural consequences might there be. This study applies the framework of communication accommodation theory which states that individuals adapt their communication behaviors when interacting due to social differences among individuals and groups (Gallois et al., 2005) to these questions.

Overall, it is crucial to study diasporic communities and specifically the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida because there is an active displacement of individuals and groups from their homeland to the United States which ultimately impacts cultural preservation. What may be acceptable in one's country or home space may not be culturally accepted within other spaces. Within diasporic communities, there is a sense of being an outsider and facing

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<sup>1</sup> Latine used as a gender inclusive plural term for Latinos/as.

discriminatory interactions which contribute to social isolation, marginalization, and treatment of diasporic individuals as the “other.” When resources and the conversation of communication accommodation is not acknowledged, there is a causation of disconnect between the home and host culture of an individual and group. Throughout the literature regarding this topic, there was a lack of previous research on communication accommodation behaviors and diasporic community members. This study can then contribute to future research of diasporic communities to understand the historical significance and modern-day impacts that ultimately situates the reality of diasporas in the United States and one's sense of identity.

## **CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many theories seek to explicate the development of diasporic communities and impacts upon individuals and groups communication behaviors and understandings. This literature review will describe the contexts in which socio-cultural processes are impacted by migration into said communities. Much of this is due to preconceived notions about new community members coming from a different background than what is perceived to be the standard and dominant culture within a region. Many individuals will become targets of discrimination if they are cultural performative with acts indicative of community homogeneity (Soto-Vásquez, 2018). It is within Communication Accommodation Theory that the analysis of these communities becomes pertinent in further understanding the processes of acculturation that diasporic community members face. This review will utilize communication accommodation theory to better understand the role of processes such as assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization of individuals and groups in spaces within the United States. Specifically, the examination of the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida will provide insight into ingroup and outgroup forces for diasporic community members and its translation into decision-making processes that result in cultural and social consequences.

### **Communication Accommodation Theory**

Communication accommodation theory (CAT) can be characterized by changes in word choices and language adjustments and accents, during intergroup and interpersonal interactions in cross cultural experiences which may require linguistic adaptation (Elhami, 2020). CAT typically occurs when individuals are experiencing a new environment and cultural context in which this adaptation is perceived as necessary. An example of this may be found in language choices made by an individual whose cultural identity differs than that of a dominant culture. For

example, certain words and phrases may be avoided by an individual due to pronunciation concerns. Within a new cultural context there are outgroup and ingroup perceptions that impact an individual's navigation of their own personal identity. There becomes a need for reaffirmation as a person adapts to a new cultural environment and decides what behaviors they may modify or preserve. This then becomes a situation where behaviors are modified to bridge a cultural acclimatization gap between the new dominant culture and one's original ethnic background. When this occurs, new intercultural dynamics may create a sense of distress as an individual works toward preserving their cultural identity and making sense of it within a new intercultural environment (Sussman, 2000).

Giles et al., (2012) applied CAT to explain results of traffic stops by white police officers that showed Latine individuals were pulled over more frequently than non-Latine drivers. In large part, the accent of Latine individuals who were pulled over resulted in more policing compared to those who did not carry as heavy of an accent. Essentially, officers in the study were found to be more willing to communicate with individuals who come from a similar background as them versus those who they perceived as being non-natives to the region. This is important when noting self-disclosure and acculturation strategies by those who move, for example, from Puerto Rico to the mainland. Individuals may choose to speak more English rather than reverting to their primary language of Spanish to reduce the risk of experiencing biased encounters with law enforcement. The struggle between acculturation strategies of separation and integration is evident in a sense of fear that can be associated with adapting to a new cultural environment such as predominantly white communities and a need to assimilate in order to evade stigmatization (Capielo Rosario et al., 2019).

## **Biculturalism and Bilingualism**

Biculturalism describes individuals who identify as and hold distinct and complete knowledge structures of two cultures (Grosjean, 2015). The concept is used to provide an understanding of cultural identity and constructs of social strata within other concepts such as ingroup and outgroup communication behaviors (Toomey et al., 2013). Relating back to CAT, it probes further into the deeper complexities relating to identity struggles of an individual or group's exposure to a new socio-cultural environment. Bilingualism also correlates with an individual's cultural identity and the way specific linguistic choices intercede with decisions regarding the adaptation being made when entering a new cultural environment. Another stereotype of bicultural bilinguals is that they can perfectly balance two different languages (Grosjean, 2015). This provides a very monolithic perspective of individuals who come from a multicultural background. There can be individuals who identify as bicultural who are not bilingual yet maintain other aspects from their native culture.

Diasporic communities must contend with bilingualism and biculturalism through the negotiation of identity and the spectrum of cultural integration and adaptation. This is where the term diaspora has grown in usage because it provides more context regarding a social and cultural consciousness from individuals who adapt to new areas. Diasporas become communities in which groups of individuals attempt to maintain traditions and that sense of belonging connected to their home location within a new homeplace after dispersal from their homeland due to outside forces such as economic displacement, refugee movements, natural disasters, exile, and more, (Joseph, 2014). Homeplace as defined by hooks (1990) is a central community site for individuals that is both a social and political space. For Puerto Ricans in the diaspora of Central Florida, this correlates with potentially curating a similar sense of home through cultural

artifacts and social networks and building a foundation of cultural practices in the Central Florida area. There is also the discussion of post first-generation Puerto Ricans on the mainland that experience the diaspora differently providing another perspective of bilingualism and biculturalism. Monocultural individuals contribute largely to the assumptions and narratives regarding bicultural people (Luna, et al., 2008). This impedes upon the response toward individuals who have two cultural value systems due to a lack of understanding from monocultural individuals and groups. Social cues are then utilized for biculturals who have to shift what is regarded as a mental framework due to the rigid constructs that monocultural norms require (Luna, et al., 2008).

### **Acculturation**

The process of acculturation is defined by the following four unique processes that take place when adjusting to new environments: Assimilation, which is the rejection of one's home culture and adoption of the host culture; separation, the retention of the home culture while rejecting the host culture; integration, which incorporates both home and host culture; and marginalization which rejects both cultures (Ward & Kus, 2012). Puerto Rican's navigate through these processes largely due to the relationship and citizenry framing between the United States as a homeland and Puerto Rico as a commonwealth— an issue that is still being legislated and debated in the United States and the island's legislature. This is largely due to the polarization of Puerto Rico's role in political decision-making processes (Pérez-Chiqués & Rubin, 2022). Due to this, many Puerto Ricans have been born into what is regarded as one of the longest lasting post-World War II diasporas of the Western hemisphere. Characteristically, diasporas within this study include Puerto Rican individuals who moved from the island or were

born in mainland United States, are bilingual, and maintain close ties with Puerto Rican cultural values alongside what is perceived as American values (Capielo et al., 2019).

A part of the acculturation process is the essential role of ethnolinguistic vitality. This advances the idea that the capability to sustain a group's identity is rooted in their ability to maintain and strengthen their cultural durability in new locales (Ehala, 2010). This means collective action will usually take place in order to validate new and previous lived experiences. For example, a recent study found that students coming from border communities were able to validate their own experiences through the use of performance poetry in their education system (Ramirez & Jimenez-Silva, 2015). Concepts of collectivism and interconnectivity influence individuals to feel as though they could take back their identity and be open with their biculturalism and bilingualism. For individuals, acculturation decisions are deemed as easier or more difficult based upon collectivist attitudes and acknowledgement of racism and discrimination (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Within this frame, there are also cultural and social constructs that contribute to individuals carrying a sense of self-identity through rapport in organizational spaces which can carry positive impacts in encouraging acculturation as a process. This is because it provides a sense of identity due to cultural fluency allowing for individuals to engage in satisfaction through commodities and services within a host culture (Adams, 2020).

Overall, there is a set of rules that are perceived by Puerto Rican individuals because whiteness is still considered a standard and a norm that they do not fit into despite being American citizens (Wildman, 1997). Through utilizing multicultural perspectives, more in-depth analysis can be made in regard to acculturation within diasporic communities such as that of the case of Puerto Ricans in the mainland of the United States.



## **Ethnolinguistic Vitality**

Ethnolinguistic vitality consists of biculturalism and bilingualism as an individual adjusts to certain sociocultural contexts through the tactic of code-switching (Torres, 2007).

Ethnolinguistic vitality originated in the 1970s as a way of analyzing intergroup behaviors and what specifically curated the foundational elements of carrying a distinctive identity within certain structures and environments (Harwood et al., 1994). Code-switching is a crucial element that allows individuals to be flexible within their adaptation within a new environment, especially amid any public discourses that may take place. The standard assumption of code-switching is that there is a lack of language proficiency which individuals then seek out other terminology for what they are trying to say. It is essentially viewed from a basic understanding that a person whose primary language is not English is experiencing a language deficiency requiring them to code-switch in order to compensate (Heredia, & Altarriba, 2001). However, code-switching is a concept that elaborates upon deeper communicative affects for individuals to express themselves. It has been found that there is a connection between code-switching and emotional experiences (Williams et al., 2020). When people experience more intense emotions such as the feeling of frustration, anger, exasperation there is more of a likelihood for that individual to express this through their native tongue. This is due to a sense of comfort in one's native language with phrases used and the more sincere or intimate association with their primary tongue (Williams et al., 2020). This expands the preconceived ideologies of migrant experiences because it provides insight into how individuals accommodate linguistically and socially regarding expressiveness within ingroups and outgroups.

Different individuals or groups within certain cultural environments may carry diverse group expressions which then impede how a person is able to assimilate new social and linguistic

cues that help build connections within a new region (Calafell & Delgado, 2004). For example, the slang that takes place within Central Florida with Puerto Ricans and being known for their use of “Spanglish” may cause conflict with other Spanish speaking Latine groups due to the stigmatization that Spanish needs to be spoken “properly and fluidly.” Spanglish as terminology and phrasing is group-specific within its expressions and other groups may not identify with these communication patterns because they do not acknowledge dialectical differences (Calafell & Delgado, 2004). This is where code-switching for Puerto Ricans in Central Florida may impact higher education and career opportunities. Another example may include when Puerto Rican individuals code-switch from the cultural angle in order to adapt to an area and experience because their peers' lack of knowledge may cause disdain for the acculturation process and may guide individuals to isolate away from the dominant culture (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016). One of the main reasons for the development of dialectical variations amid Latine communities is due to Latin American migration in the 1950’s and the linguistic adaptations that members of those migrant groups had to make in order to facilitate acculturation with the dominant culture (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016). This migration continues to play a crucial role in the understanding of modern-day migration patterns among Latine diasporic communities.

The conversation regarding code-switching and assimilation processes dates back to the industrialism era in which urban groups in cities such as New York became heavily marginalized (Rivera, 2007). Due to the otherization of these groups and class differences isolating them from the dominant culture, these immigrants developed a joint identity based on shared values and communication accommodations that characterized their linguistic choices. A defining reason for Caribbean immigrants who established generational identity was the exclusion from social institutions during this era. Cultural expressions from individuals within these communities were

created in the form of music such as the development of salsa and reggaeton tying into the culture within the United States (Rivera, 2007). Through collective group identity in what was becoming of Latine diasporas, there was a form of resistance toward forces implementing a dominant cultural stance in these areas to diminish experiences of people of color. The expressiveness of individuals and development of different ways of understanding the world and performing this based on culture worked to resist cultural imperialism. Through this diasporic communities are able to enact norms for their biculturalism and to allow space for more expansive structures that are inclusive of minoritized communities.

### **Puerto Ricans in the Diaspora**

The discussion of the diasporic self is essential for understanding cultural identities and the pressures of assimilation when navigating entry into a new territory. Diasporas originate from the study of mobility of nomadic societies, refugees, and other migrant communities (Tsagarousianou, 2017). Diasporic individuals and groups are not all characteristically the same—many of the lived experiences for these individuals is based on their reasoning for migrating and whether they felt forced due to insecurity within their homeland. When individuals strongly identify with their home culture, there can be a negative association with entering a new cultural community and environment. Dominant vernacular discourses being one of the main reasons for hesitancy within assimilating for Latine groups. This can then impede upon the assimilation process and therefore may cause individuals to be quick to reject and isolate themselves whether that be from the host or home culture within the separation stage (Bhatia, 2002). Specifically, there are narratives that claim a perspective of Latine groups and their reasons for migrating to the United States. Through this they have been coined as “Latinos

Americanos” to label migrants and their shift beyond cultural borders (Calafell & Delgado, 2004).

There is a unique perception that Puerto Ricans carry as individuals within these diasporic communities due to their access as American citizens yet carrying these ethnic differences. When discussing this from the lens of Florida containing Puerto Rican diasporic communities, it has been referred to as the “Puerto Ricanization” of Florida (Duany & Silver, 2010). Puerto Rican’s migration to different regions within the States is considered a revolving door migration due to the development and hybridity of Puerto Rican communities who have come over (Duany, 2000). One of the main struggles that follows diasporic Puerto Ricans is that of economic disparities when moving to the mainland. Specifically, the pay on the island is quite a bit less than what an individual would be getting paid for a similar profession in the United States. This, alongside discriminatory practices against Puerto Ricans who relocate such as the exclusion from certain professions has heavily allotted itself to the curation of diasporas (Aranda, 2007). Through this there has been a resistance toward the erasure of Puerto Ricans and their lived experiences within their connection to the United States and their native land. Historically, the narratives of Puerto Rican diasporic communities have been told by predominantly white scholars (Martínez-Roldán & Quiñones, 2016). Higher education scholarship is non-inclusive of diasporic communities and is connected with what we see at universities in the Central Florida area. The conversation taking precedent within the Puerto Rican diasporic communities in the United States and specifically in Orlando is that of spearheading resistance against the “whitening” Boricuas and establishing deculturalization methods to combat this (Zavala, 2000).

Overall, Puerto Rican identity within the United States is complex and studying this from the lens of Central Florida is pertinent to understanding more in depth the communication

patterns and discourses associated therein due to migration and the long history that takes place within colonialism in the United States. As the literature describes, diasporic communities are impacted by a variety of external factors which then implicates the purpose of migrating from the commonwealth of Puerto Rico to the States. This can be due to natural disasters, political strife, economic decision making and other reasons as well. There then becomes a collective identity and sense of pride with Puerto Rican diasporic communities due to having to curate a home away from home as has been discussed. The challenges then faced are decision-making processes into whether assimilating and how to do so is pertinent and if there is room to continue practicing socio-cultural practices from one's native land. This analysis will address the question of is the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida adapting their communication behaviors in the process of acculturation and what are the socio-cultural consequences?

### **CHAPTER THREE – METHODS**

The purpose of this study is to contextualize and provide an in-depth analysis of the communication accommodation practices of the Puerto Rican diasporic community in Central Florida. This study primarily investigates the subject of socio-cultural consequences for individuals and members of diasporic groups situating themselves in new regions. Diasporic identities culminate in experiences that intersect among an individual or groups home and host cultures that heavily dictate their relationship with a diasporic community versus the dominant culture's community. To do this, a qualitative methodological approach was used with a semi-structured interview process. Semi-structured interviews are utilized to provide a more open space for the interviewee to share their narrative while also providing flexibility for the primary researcher to follow up on important topics discussed (Brinkmann, 2014). To do this, interview sessions were conducted with individuals who identify as Puerto Ricans in this particular diaspora. Throughout this chapter, I will detail the design of this qualitative study, the research philosophy, explication of communication accommodation theory, sampling strategy alongside the data-collection and analysis methods.

#### **Recruitment and Participants**

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling using a flier that included a QR code for prospective participants to scan and fill out a Google form indicating their interest. Information requested on this form included the participant's full name, pronouns, preferred method of contact, and availability. The flier was shared with Latine organizations at a large Southeastern Hispanic Serving Institution and simple purposive, snowball sampling was utilized throughout this study to recruit a broad range of individuals to participate in the study. Requirements for eligibility in the study were that individuals had to be at least 18 years old and

identify as a Puerto Rican living in Central Florida. Nineteen individuals participated in this study by both filling out the demographic survey and participating in the interview process.

To prepare for the interview processes and analysis, as the primary investigator, I developed an interview consent form and detailed protocol that the Institutional Review Board approved prior to conducting the study. Upon approval, interviews were conducted between February and March of the year 2023. There was a five minute demographic survey (see [Appendix B](#)) participants filled out prior to the interview to gain a better understanding of the participants origins such as what pueblo, or town they come from in Puerto Rico, or what their geographic ties are to the island while living in the diaspora. This survey also engaged questions regarding the participant's location in Central Florida to gauge a more in-depth description of where the diaspora culminates and if it is within a particular locale. Follow-up questions were focused on the professional or educational experiences of the participant throughout their time within the host culture. None of the responses excluded participants from the study and served to provide more contextualization about the characteristics of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Central Florida.

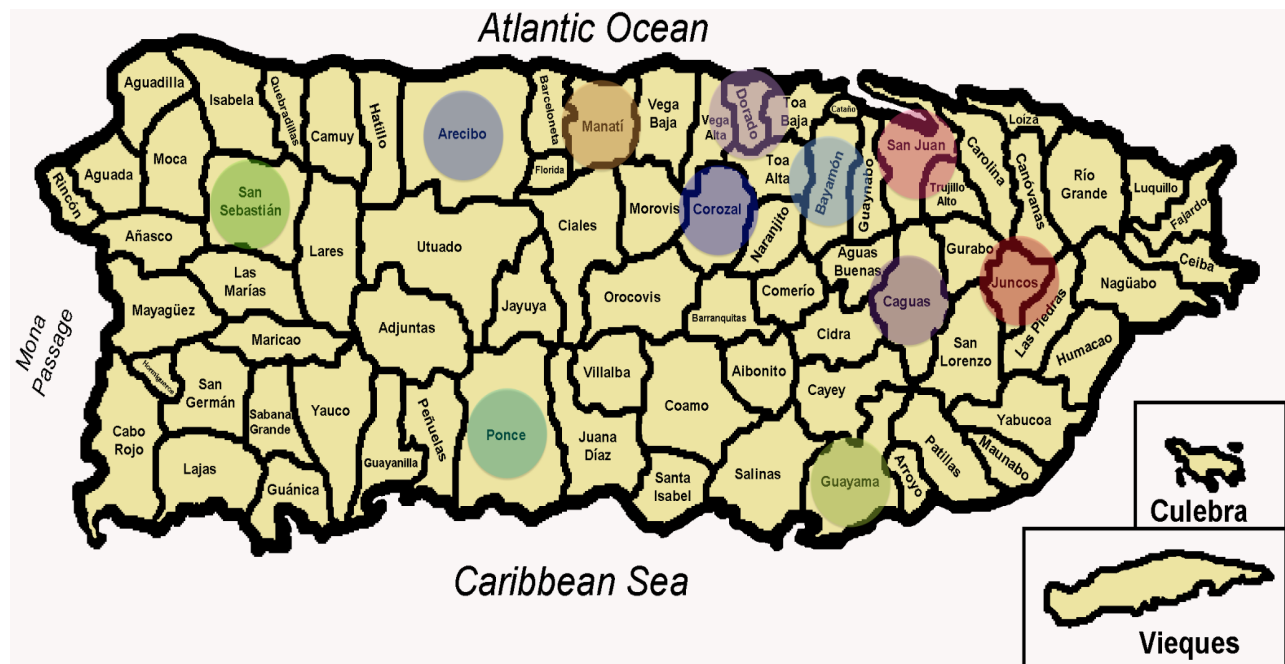
The interview questions detailed the experiences of participants in the area such as intercultural behaviors embedded in the acculturation process. For example, individuals were asked to describe instances in which they have needed to code-switch and what tools have assisted their adaptation process in the area. Specifically, participants detailed any communication behaviors that shifted in particular environments, how often this would occur, and the reasoning behind each of these occurrences. A semi-structured and open-ended interview process contributed to the collection of narrative details about convergence and divergence processes that characterized their communicative interactions where the diaspora culminates and

if it is within a particular locale. Follow-up questions were focused on the professional or educational experiences of the participant throughout their time within the host culture. None of the responses excluded participants from the study and served to provide more contextualization about the characteristics of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Central Florida. The interview questions detailed the experiences of participants in the area such as intercultural behaviors embedded in the acculturation process. For example, individuals were asked to describe instances in which they have needed to code-switch and what tools have assisted their adaptation process in the area. Specifically, participants detailed any communication behaviors that shifted in particular environments, how often this would occur, and the reasoning behind each of these occurrences. A semi-structured and open-ended interview process contributed to the collection of narrative details about convergence and divergence processes that characterized their communicative interactions in the diaspora.

The age range of participants was between 20 and 80 years old with 13 participants identifying as women and 6 identifying as men.

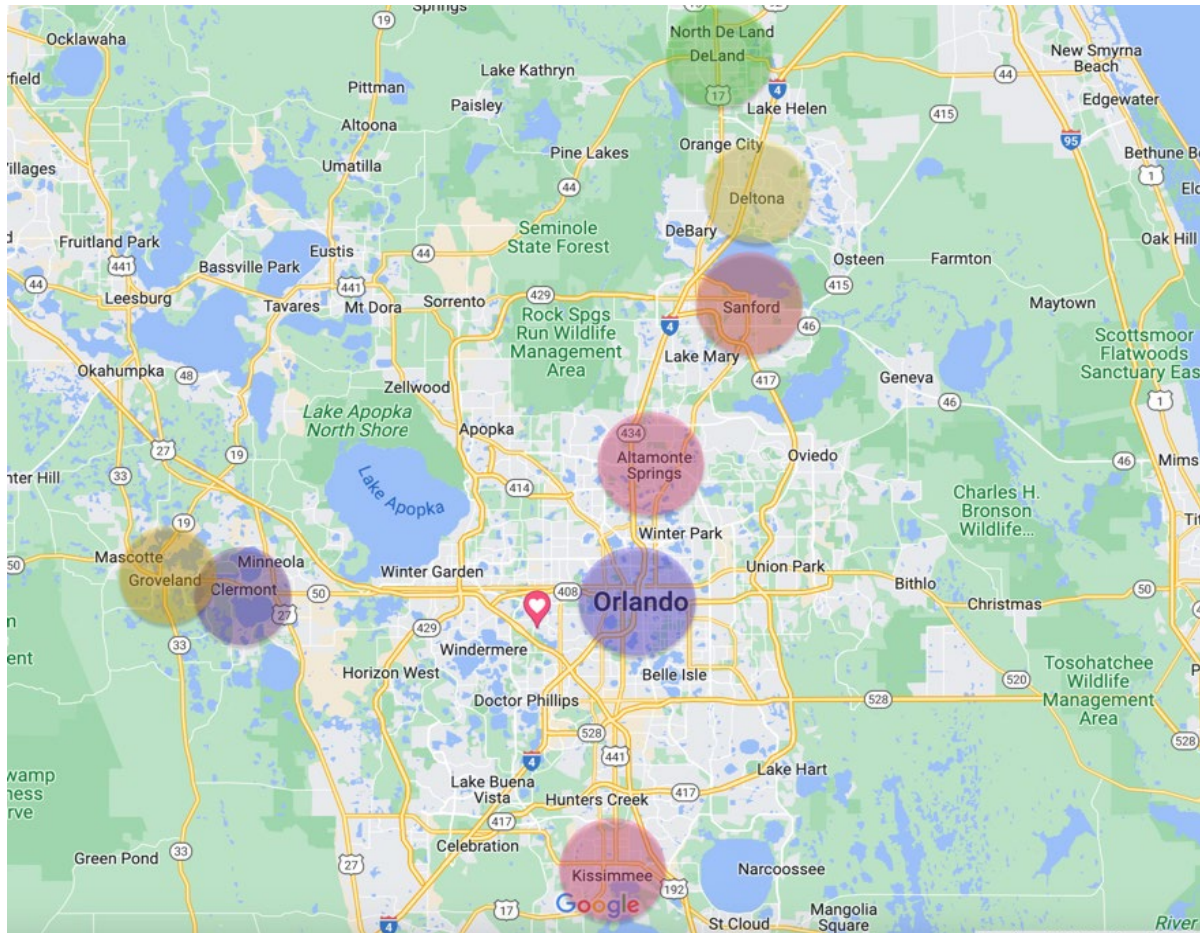
Participants identified the following pueblos as where they come from (Figure 1): Arecibo (1); Arroyo (1); Bayamón (2); Caguas (2); Corozal (1); Dorado (1); Guayama (1); Juncos (2); Manatí (1); Ponce (4); Rio Piedras (1); San Juan (4); San Sebastián (1); and Santurce (1).





**Figure 1: Map of Puerto Rico. Adapted and modified from Map of the 78 Municipalities of Puerto Rico, by Alessandro Cai, 2007.**

Individuals were also asked what region of Central Florida they live in and these were the following listed (Figure 2): Altamonte Springs (1); Clermont (1); DeLand (4); Groveland (1); Kissimmee (1); Lake Mary (2); Orlando (8) and Sanford (1).



**Figure 2: Map of Central Florida. Adapted and modified from Google Maps.**

Results from the demographic survey show that six of the individuals were the first to move from Puerto Rico to the mainland of the United States, while six other individual's parents were the first-generation diasporic Puerto Ricans; four individuals had grandparents as their family's first-generation diasporic Puerto Ricans; two had siblings who made the move down to the mainland for their family first; and then for one individual it was their *títi*. This then showcases a wide range of what it may mean to be a diasporic Puerto Rican for some individuals. The 19 participants were assigned a pseudonym that will be used throughout the results in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The participants' demographics are summarized below.

**Table 1: Demographics of participants in the survey and interview process.**

<b>Participant Demographics</b>					
<b>Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Pueblo</b>	<b>Central Florida Location</b>	<b>Education</b>
A	Woman	20	Caguas	Clermont	Associate's degree
C	Woman	48	Ponce/San Juan	Lake Mary	Associate's degree
D	Woman	38	Río Piedras	Sanford	Bachelor's degree
F	Man	41	Bayamón	Altamonte Springs	Less than high school diploma
I	Woman	72	Guayama	DeLand	Master's degree
JD	Man	48	Corozal	Lake Mary	Some college, no degree
JJ	Man	53	San Juan/Juncos	Orlando	Bachelor's degree
J	Man	81	San Juan	Orlando	Some college, no degree
K	Woman	21	San Sebastián	Kissimmee	Associate's degree
L	Woman	23	Santurce/Manatí	Orlando	Bachelor's degree
M	Man	30	Ponce	DeLand	Associate's degree
N	Woman	20	Dorado	Orlando	Associate's degree
R	Woman	24	Arecibo	Orlando	Doctorate/Professional degree
S	Woman	74	Juncos	Orlando	Less than high school diploma
T	Man	75	Caguas	DeLand	Associate's degree
V	Woman	36	Ponce	Orlando	Bachelor's degree
W	Woman	56	Ponce	DeLand	Bachelor's degree
Y	Woman	46	San Juan	Groveland	Some college, no degree
Z	Woman	22	Bayamón	Orlando	Bachelor's degree

## **Data Collection**

Nine of the interviews were conducted in person at a neutral location of the interviewees choosing to ensure confidentiality and privacy. The other ten interviews were conducted utilizing Zoom, a web and audio-visual communications platform. This choice was important for participants and while there are some known differences in experiences of in person versus virtual interviews the flexibility for this participant group was more valuable than the minor differences of context. Interviews ranged between 15 and 60 minutes and were recorded using Zoom, whether in-person or virtual, for the utilization of the transcription and coding process. Zoom limitations include an inability to translate languages other than English (in this institutional license) and therefore transcriptions had to be manually documented. Another limitation found when using Zoom as an audio and transcription service is that the platform does not pick up on pronunciation variances from what is considered traditional American English. All interviews were saved onto a password-protected folder on Microsoft OneDrive. All transcriptions totaled 369 single-spaced pages and evaluation of the data was studied through the use of thematic analysis in order to identify themes relating to acculturation processes and accommodation behaviors.

Interviewees were asked about their experiences in Central Florida and its impact on their cultural identity utilizing communication accommodation as a basis. The semi-structured interview consisted of 10 questions (see [Appendix C](#)) that explored how they adapted to the region for both those who migrated here and those who were born and raised in Central Florida. Questions were constructed to understand the reasons participants and their family members moved to the mainland of the United States and its impact on communication nuances. The conversations were intended to center individuals' understanding of their own cultural identity as

a result of acculturation processes. Due to the semi-structured interview style, follow-up questions on exemplars were asked based upon the responses of participants. An example of this dialogic exchange is evident when participants shared stories about times in which they have faced discrimination and needed to code-switch. In turn, as the principal investigator, I would ask participants to elaborate on how they would need to code-switch and to be more descriptive about their experiences. Following the interview processes, ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis program, was utilized in order to define codes that identify overlapping experiences for interviewees that connect with communication accommodation and to set specific themes that supported the data during the coding phase which will then be discussed in the findings section.

### **Discourse Analysis**

To examine the participant interviews a discourse analysis approach was applied. Taylor (2013) defines discourse analysis as an approach to researching language material, such as individuals speaking to one another, and the study of discourse as a phenomena outside of an individual person. Within this study, discourse analysis provides a deeper understanding of the cross-cultural contexts in which Puerto Ricans in the diaspora have faced a sense of otherness or otherization practices from a perceived dominant community. In this case, linguistic and socio-linguistic practices were taken into consideration when analyzing interviewees' depiction of conversations they have had with other individuals both within and outside of their cultural background.

Discourse analysis as a method is a form of engagement with interactional and everyday conversation alongside the intercultural perspective and viewing it as a way to understand cultural ways of approaching speech and conversing (Van Dijk, T. A., 2007). An example of this is an opening or closing phrase, some that can be perceived as disclaimers when speaking that

therefore impact the context in which it is spoken. This is then viewed as a perspective within the discipline of discourse analysis. In the case of this study, much of the interaction participants have had with individuals from their same background has impacted their own perception of self-identity and can be seen as discourse about what it means to truly be considered Puerto Rican enough or Latine enough. Discourse analysis was also referenced in order to gauge relationships Puerto Rican individuals have had interacting with those outside of their cultural background, which then oversees the discourse subdisciplines of race relations and social domination.

Fairclough (2007) notes that social change should be analyzed from a broader perspective within discourse analysis because of how an individual and group's perception of the social world shifts throughout each social interaction. When analyzing the findings of this study, this lens assisted in the deeper understanding of socio-cultural norms developed among Puerto Ricans who self-identify differently due to these interactions. Essentially, what is viewed utilizing the lens of discourse analysis provides the larger context in which communication accommodations play for not just the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida but also in other locales and for other diasporic community members as well.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns among participant responses. Owen (1984) defines thematic interpretation as communication episodes in current relationships. Essentially, it identifies behaviors, attitudes, and language used to connect individual narratives within a community. In this study, thematic analysis was used to analyze any recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness expressed from interviews— both inductive and deductive analysis methods were used (Owen, 1984). Initially, there were preliminary codes developed during the open coding phase to identify potential data items from the interviewees. For example, phrases,

wording, and sentiments from participants that resonated with communication accommodation theory were attributed to that particular code. Then, an additional close reading and secondary coding resulted in themes derived from interviewees if there were any cross-connections among concepts that then curated specific themes. The coded data was then reviewed to ensure themes were relevant with enough supporting data. With this, themes were solidified and accompanied by a narrative description and definition. The relevance of each theme to the research question was also justified and sub-themes were also defined. Findings were then included overall discussing the theoretical framework, original research question, and the relevancy in Central Florida.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

Lived experiences serve as the basis for many qualitative research methods to gauge a deeper understanding of phenomena experienced by individuals themselves (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). There is an allowance of expressiveness among individuals which is powerful to further understand the type of experience being analyzed. There is also a trustworthiness built between the researcher and interviewee due to the commonality of lived experience. As a diasporic Puerto Rican myself, I have the capacity of empathizing and understanding narratives among other diasporic Puerto Ricans in the area. It is part of my personal identity and my own lived experiences which translates to the research question in this study regarding the socio-cultural consequences of diasporic Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. Narrative inquiry is also crucial when understanding an individuals' lived experiences and developing that relationship because it seeks to, "walk in the midst of stories," meaning developing a narrative relationship with participants (Clandinin, 2006). Diasporic individuals' narratives are intertwined within a larger institutional, social, and political space which translates to their lived experiences. Through this

there is a greater understanding of how lived experience perspectives contribute to identify patterns and gaps in certain spaces. For this study in particular, lived experience and narratives generated a better understanding of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora of Central Florida, and how this experience is cultivated in an individual or groups' daily life.



## **CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS**

The findings of this study showcase that Puerto Ricans within Central Florida come from a variety of demographic backgrounds. Some individuals were born in Puerto Rico and moved to the Central Florida area recently. Others spent half of their life on the island and half in the mainland, while yet other generations were born and raised in the U.S. mainland or raised here after being born in Puerto Rico. Each of these carries their own communication impacts and therefore defines each individual's cultural identity differently. Each theme identified as a result of the interviews will be outlined and regard the experience of language as a key to culture, the experience of otherization, alongside rejection and reclamation of one's home culture. Each of these themes take into consideration the research questions and follow-up questions participants responded to. Beginning here, pseudonyms will be used when notating any phrases by participants which have not been altered and are presented as stated during their respective interviews.

### **Non-English Speaking Equals Non-Citizen**

Throughout the explication of individuals' experiences in the diaspora, nearly every participant experienced otherization. For some, it came from the host culture in which individuals were treated as non-citizens despite Puerto Rico being a commonwealth of the United States. Many of the participants stated that they were regarded as an outside group or most notably mentioned were referred to as Mexicans (as a stand-in, all-encompassing category for Hispanic/Latine people). One participant, JJ, shared,

I recall neighbors and the kids in our neighborhood, kids in my school call me things like, 'Hey, Mexican, go back to your country,' or 'Get back on the boat, go back where you came from.' So, speaking Spanish would further identify me as a Latin

American. Then, I was being told things like, ‘Stop speaking Mexican around my kids,’ from one of my neighbors. I’ll never forget her saying that when me and my brother would be speaking Spanish.

With this, interviewees showcased that dialectical choices and a suppression of language and culture were made in avoidance of being treated as though they were not American citizens. For some, this meant speaking Spanish less and reverting to English only in order to appease English-speakers who thought they were being spoken about. As a result, this was viewed as a defense mechanism for participants who feel as though they have to fight to show that they belong here. Participant S stated, “If I’m going to a doctor and there’s something that I don’t like that he’s suggesting— you know about a medicine or algo— I know how to defend myself.” This is in light of how many individuals faced communication barriers that hindered their ability to express consent or their perspectives when first moving away from Puerto Rico in organizational spaces. Participant S shared that oftentimes her speaking had been referred to as “blabbing.” Another example of this for many other participants was the generalization that their first language was Spanish and not English. Participant C told the story of an experience like this that took place when she was in high school:

During high school, I was learning, you know, Spanish-English, because I spent so much time in Puerto Rico as well. I kind of got confused and felt like I didn’t fully grasp English as well, like my grammar, was horrible, so I remember one time my high school teacher gave me a report back, and she said, ‘Is English your second language?’, and I was so embarrassed that I said yes, so it’s kind of growing up with just confusion. A lot of confusion, but nothing that really made me feel like, you know I couldn’t speak.

She described how quickly non-Latine individuals would make assumptions about an individual's capability at language learning and their own performance. For one individual who moved down from Puerto Rico in 1955, he stated he “did not know a lick of English ” and for this reason was put back into the first grade for a week despite being 13 years old. Participant J expressed that from there they placed him in second grade for three weeks and then in third grade for the remainder of the time until the school could hire a teacher to teach the Latine kids English. Participant J shared that at that time, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) was not yet offered to students and this was a process schools would use for Latine individuals to pick up on basic words. Another participant, S, explained that she similarly did not speak English when first moving from the island, but it was too late for her because she was 15 when the teachers at her school told her parents to remove her since she would not learn anything. Because of this, her father took her out of school when she turned 16.

For other individuals within the study, ESOL became a solace and they shared it provided solid friendships and a sense of community. Though Participant K expressed her hesitancy initially in the assumption she would need ESOL, once moving from Puerto Rico in high school, she later described the program as a way for her to, “click easily and find a shelter and community within the same people.” In many other cases participants shared that outside of the educational landscape they had also faced communication barriers with local law-enforcement. Two participants shared that the situations had been life-threatening, racially, and ethnically motivated, but due to the communicative barriers, they had barely been released from the situation due to being a Latine individual. These are just a few of the personal accounts of the treatment individuals in this study received as though they were non-citizens.

## **Non-Verbal Code-Switching**

Communication behaviors are not just verbal acts but can also be defined through non-verbal communicative behaviors. For example, what an individual wears, their expressions, proxemics, gestures, and artifacts all contribute to a person's non-verbal communication behaviors. Several individuals indicated their hair has played a crucial role in what they are communicating toward others. Many stated they had to straighten or slick back their hair in order to feel more comfortable in certain spaces and to assimilate. Participant D shared an example of this:

A school that my son used to go to was private, and there were a lot more white people there and I would feel like even my hair—I felt more accepted when my hair was straightened, and I know that sounds stupid but yeah, that's an example.

She shared that of course she knows Puerto Ricans are Americans, but the culture is drastically different and impacts an individual's experiences. Participant D stated she has always felt torn living here because she speaks Spanish and cooks Puerto Rican food. Part of this, she said, has been impacted by regional differences in Central Florida where in Sanford she is not surrounded by a Puerto Rican or Latine diaspora versus how it feels being in Orlando. This then implicates an individual's sense of self, as some participants indicated, based upon how they communicate non-verbally in certain spaces and why. Similarly, participants noted that non-verbal strategy has implicated their self-identity. Participant N shared that she is treated differently within organizational spaces due to her identity as an Afro-Latina and that becomes the center of the conversation which has impacted the way she communicates utilizing non-verbal strategy. She explained,

I think that whenever I do go into certain settings, everyone's always like, 'oh, where are you from?' Or like 'what's your ethnicity,' or 'you're so beautiful,' or you know 'you have really beautiful hair' or these kinds of things, and I'm like I appreciate that. You know that's a compliment, yes, but I'm here to show you my professional capabilities, and I've had to kind of be put in, I guess it's a little bit uncomfortable of a situation trying to-I don't want to say I'm a model minority, right? I'm sure you have heard that term before, and so I like to avoid that because I myself don't identify with being like, you know, a pretty girl who is, you know, exotic or things like that. I identify with being a very strong, opinionated person who is there to get the work done if that makes sense.

Participant N said that though she did not have to make any extreme changes since she grew up in Orlando, the cultural differences are still prominent. This discussion of hair as a non-verbal communicator is indicative of a larger conversation of cultural preservation in the workplace. The CROWN Act, as defined by the CROWN Coalition (2019), is a law prohibiting race-based hair discrimination in organizational environments. In Florida, this has only been enacted in Broward County and Miami Beach, which can contribute to the discourses participants have found themselves a part of and how legislative priorities are impacting this. For most participants when it comes to non-verbal strategies, it has provided a basis for being open regarding their cultural background rather than hiding it.

### **Reclaiming Identity Through Cultural Artifacts**

"Going back to my roots" is how Participant J explained his reclamation of his identity. He explained that he had changed his name to a more "American sounding name" in order to receive more benefits such as better job opportunities, and overtime it stuck. However, he expressed that it was time for him to reclaim it since to him, he will always be Puerto Rican

despite living most of his life on the mainland now. For other participants, a reclamation of culture was found through Puerto Rico's athletes on a global stage. Participant L shared this anecdote:

Senior year of high school, Puerto Rico won a gold medal for tennis and it was one of our rally spirit days, and it's like 'dress like your country.' I dressed like Puerto Rico and this girl tried to bash me for it saying, 'Puerto Rico doesn't compete in the Olympics,' and I remember I snapped around to her, and I was so prideful of my culture for a minute. And I was like, 'Actually, we won gold, okay?' and just because I got to educate one person, I was super happy, but it was like slowly, just falling more in love with my culture.

From that moment, Participant L shared her journey of learning more about her Puerto Rican culture despite growing up not speaking Spanish and feeling embarrassed for it. She said some individuals would say, "You're speaking Spanish like a white girl." Now, she says she seeks practicing in what she referred to as "unbiased situations" such as speaking with cashiers and individuals at restaurants. She feels that, "language is key to unlock a lot" regarding your ethnicity and culture. At the end of the day, participants who shared similar backgrounds of not being fluent in Spanish stated they found other ways to show their pride of being Puerto Rican and still valuing their identity. Many said this meant being more open about being Puerto Rican by reconnecting in similar ways with the culture, primarily through food. Participant A shared that she feels Puerto Rican cooking is a staple of the culture and growing up it was not something big in her household despite visiting Puerto Rico often and being immersed in the culture. She said:

I live with my aunt now; it's only Puerto Rican food all the time. So it's like here, I'm going to teach you how to make sofrito without having to buy it from the Goya boxes at

the grocery store, or it's like here I'm going to teach you how to make arroz con gandules the right way. I'm taking it up slowly, but it's like a big side effect.

In this way, cooking was mentioned by many participants as a form of nonverbal communication. For example, some participants stated they shared Puerto Rican cooking with neighbors in an effort to communicate despite the language barrier. From the many backgrounds of diasporic Puerto Ricans, there has been some form of communication, whether verbal or non-verbal, that has assisted the acculturation process.

### **Language as Culture**

“I would shun or put away my accent even further as a Puerto Rican,” JJ shared regarding not just being around English-only speakers but other Spanish speakers as well. He stated that Puerto Rican specific jargon, though establishing a more interpersonal connection, is viewed as less educated. In the workplace, he said he would listen and try to learn from other Latine coworkers to avoid being looked down upon as he’d experienced it before. The diasporic Puerto Ricans within this study shared the sense of difficulty in being viewed as others not just from English-only speakers, but also from those who also spoke their home language. This is where a majority of participants throughout this study have found that they either speak “broken English” or “broken Spanish” at a point in time and have tried to adapt to each through a variety of forms. These communication accommodations are made in part due to the landscape of Florida in which many individuals have come from South American countries, such as that of Colombia and Venezuela.

According to the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute website, in 2019, Cubans made up the largest portion of a Latine group in Florida with 28%, Puerto Ricans came in second with 21% of the Latine population, and South Americans made up 18% of the Latine population

in Florida. Therefore because of the varying dynamics of Latine groups in the region, individuals have shared they have attempted to better what they have referred to as their “broken Spanish.” Individuals have also stated that they have tried to work on their “broken English” rather than solely speaking Spanish in the household through watching or listening to media such as television in the opposite language, stepping out of their comfort zone by speaking more when out in public, and practicing with family members and neighbors. Participant K shared,

I grew up speaking both of them, so it was hard because having a bilingual brain is hard in itself. I mean, you often forget words, and you're like, oh my gosh, what am I saying? I feel like I can be more myself with my Spanish speaking friends, because I feel like with my English speaking friends it comes off diluted, I guess, like my personality is diluted just because Spanish is my native language and so it just comes off more authentic.

She expressed that she can feel more herself with her Spanish-speaking friends compared to her friends who are English-only speakers and also shared that this bilingualism has caused a sort of personality crisis, but being surrounded by individuals and a part of organizations, such as the Puerto Rican Student Association at UCF, has helped in adapting and providing comfort for her. Several participants indicated the troubles within intertwining bilingualism into their daily vocabulary. Participant D shared that she moved from Puerto Rico in the first grade and recalled trying to answer a question, but was referred to as stupid because she was not yet fluent in English. She shared that she tried to tell the teacher’s aid, “me estan molestando,” but the aid knew very little Spanish and did not understand. Participant D said that this was one of her core memories when it came to having to assimilate, and stated it took her a while to feel accepted. Participant N shared that she is not fluent in Spanish, though she has a Puerto Rican accent when speaking. She expressed that she was mostly taught simple vocabulary terms such as jugo and



agua for juice and water or family members' names. Participant N said, “My vocabulary still isn't the best. I can't really speak formally. I kind of sound a little bit like the <sup>2</sup>Cardi B quote, my Spanish is a little ratatata.”

She stated she has taken Spanish courses in school and continues to try to bridge the gap between her bilingualism. Many participants described their relationship with code-switching linguistically, having shared similar experiences, and referred to it as the “bilingual brain.”

### **Sacrifices of Acculturation**

A variety of processes define acculturation and several participants found that within each of these is a deeply rooted social order of Puerto Ricans. This is where the conversation of being Puerto Rican enough becomes indicative of diasporic Puerto Rican experiences. All participants shared the main reason for moving to the mainland was due to the economic crisis that continues in Puerto Rico with a culmination of other issues such as the natural disasters. Participant V shared that she moved down following hurricane María, though she had already been thinking of it prior due to the economic crisis. She said it looked as though bombs were dropped all over the island, and there was no way for her to get anywhere from where she lived and this pushed her decision to move to Orlando. She expressed that one of the biggest impacts of moving is being away from her home but witnessing gentrification when she goes back to visit the island. Participant V said:

Obviamente somos colonia pero si, lo que dicen en la prensa que están los Americanos en cada esquina bueno- yo fui a un chinchorro en Santurce y literal el bartender era una white guy, Americano, non-Spanish speaker y yo le dije, ‘yo quiero un bartender

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<sup>2</sup> Cardi B is a Dominican-American rapper who coined the phrase “ratatata” to describe herself speaking Spanish.

Boricua,' por que yo dijo donde yo vivo okay, porque pues ni modo, pero aquí no. Esas cosas si las vi y pues obviamente te destrozan el corazón.

She explained that it was a cultural shock moving to the mainland from the island and that she would not be here if it were more sustainable to live there. Participant V shared that Central Florida seemed to be a location where she could find community and express herself by speaking the language and maintaining her culture in every corner despite being away from home and that is why she chose it. Diasporic Puerto Ricans from the study have discussed facing difficulty with how to communicate one's self-identity and cultural preservation through their communicative behaviors. Participant N shared that she finds, "advocating for my country stateside," plays a high importance because she feels as a diasporic Puerto Rican it is her responsibility to share what is going on in Puerto Rico. She shared this is a huge importance in her life now as before she was unsure what lines to cross as a Puerto Rican born and raised in the States. She shared:

Hurricane María had hit when I was in high school, so there was a huge influx of Puerto Rican students who came to my school as refugees from the hurricane and it was nice to see a lot of people who were Puerto Rican like myself, you know, moving to my school. But the difference was that it almost felt like there was a divide, if that makes sense, between kids who came directly from Puerto Rico and the kids who were Puerto Rican in the diaspora. So even though we were from the same place we still didn't really relate to each other as much as we would have liked to.

Participant M shared that the clashing of different cultures is prominent and that Americans on the mainland have a certain type of intercultural mentality. This therefore contributes to certain attitudes from the host group and implicates the experiences and assimilation processes Puerto Ricans face. For some participants, they shared being treated as less than in reference to their

Latine side because they now live on the mainland. A few participants spoke about being labeled, “la gringa” by family members still living in Puerto Rico. These interactions have then impacted the way in which Puerto Rican diaspora individuals have acculturated themselves within Central Florida and in the mainland of the United States. As stated by Participant Z, she has learned not to minimize herself within particular spaces and said, “I don’t need to swallow myself or make my name easier,” after encountering microaggressions due to her name. She shared that her name, speaking Spanish and the food are all a part of her identity and always have been. A majority of participants therefore found the largest sacrifice with living in the diaspora has been acknowledging one's self-identity and defining it through socio-cultural communication interactions and behaviors. Participant W stated that when she moved from Puerto Rico, she had a fear of speaking English, especially in the workplace where she was made to believe she was not as fluent as she thought she had been. She said she immersed herself in English by maintaining socio-cultural relationships with neighbors who were also Puerto Rican. Despite the difficulty communicating with members of the host culture initially in English, she says she continues to be proud and open about where she comes from and that is who she always will be. Participant W stated, “Soy Boricua pa'que tu lo sepas.”

## **CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION AND FUTURE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the communicative behaviors of the Puerto Rican diasporic community in Central Florida using communication accommodation theory as the lens of analysis. By collecting the narratives of those in this specific region I was able to explore segments of the socio-cultural characteristics of the interviewees discourse when acculturating into the diaspora. Overall, I sought to understand this particular diaspora's culture in the context of the host group, and what the impacts are when it comes to individuals' communicative behaviors whether verbal or non-verbal. Throughout this final section, there will be a discussion regarding the implications of the study, future considerations, and limitations of the study. This qualitative approach of interviewing Puerto Ricans in the Central Florida area, builds upon the narratives that further explicate communication accommodation in diasporic communities.

The goal of the study was to better understand the diversity of ways this population may claim their identity when accommodating to a new region and its lifestyle. Specifically answering the research question of how the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida are adapting their communication behaviors in the process of acculturation, and what socio-cultural consequences might there be. Typically, individuals will self-identify based on what culture they perceive to be exposed and rooted in most, and it will be impacted through a sense of collectivism and belonging within their area. This could mean the preservation of one's home culture or the inclination to adapt into the host culture. In the case of this study, different processes of acculturation were chosen by participants depending on what they were currently experiencing in a particular period of their life. As mentioned previously, approximately 5.6 million Puerto Ricans have migrated to the United States and we see approximately 20% residing

in Florida, primarily in Central Florida (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2017). This provided a landscape to understand the geographical influence for Puerto Ricans who have moved, and the exact relationship with locations in Central Florida, such as Orlando. Much of what Puerto Ricans have faced is displacement due to a variety of crises. Namely, the impact of Hurricane Maria and the economic crisis of Puerto Rico as well as gentrification by wealthy mainlanders looking for tax breaks. Communication accommodation theory played a role in the understanding of linguistic choices participants described making to code-switch depending upon their environment, and what they deemed to be safe spaces in the area. Code-switching in this sense has been defined as taking place within cross-cultural experiences within intergroup, outgroup, and overall interpersonal contexts (Elhami, 2020). As all participants within the study shared, there have been a multitude of cross-cultural experiences where adaptation has been required of them. Several participants within the study expressed they were able to find a larger community within Central Florida finding other Puerto Ricans and Latine individuals and groups as well.

## **Conclusion**

Common themes found throughout the study are as follows: being treated as a non-citizen, non-verbal code-switching, reclamation of identity through cultural artifacts, language as a key to culture, and acculturation sacrifices. The findings of the study show that diasporic Puerto Ricans all self-identify in similar ways, yet share how lived experiences construct unique boundaries among their community members. This indicated all participants were trying to bridge the gap between being Puerto Rican and being a part of the diaspora through communicative strategies. For participants moving to the mainland prior to the influx of the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida, being treated as a non-citizen was a prominent experience. This was rooted deeply within interactions with law enforcement and the education

system. Several participants also shared experiences of otherization despite English being their first language or having been raised in the area their entire lives. Within these spaces, individuals shared the need to nonverbally code-switch through clothing choices, flat-ironing hair, and decisions whether they would wear Puerto Rico gear, such as clothing and jewelry with the flag on it out in public. The discussion of non-verbal code-switching within this study was primarily impactful for participants who identify as women and also as Afro-Latina. This is indicative of how these female participants experienced stereotyping or microaggressions in organizational spaces in based on ethnicity without regard for their actual professional capabilities. For participants who primarily grew up in the diaspora, they sought to reconnect with their roots through cultural artifacts such as cooking Puerto Rican dishes and representing their community through non-verbal communication behaviors such as that of wearing a Puerto Rico jersey out in public spaces.

Of particular interest is the discussions participants had about language as a key to culture. Participants who moved from Puerto Rico to the mainland found that they held a desire to learn English in order to assimilate into the dominant culture with ease. Comparatively, participants who were primarily raised on the mainland of the United States have chosen to learn Spanish and try to become more immersed in their culture to bridge the gap of what many referred to as not being Puerto Rican enough. The findings of the study showcase a complexity with the intersectionality and cultural experiences of participants. A portion of participants were born in Puerto Rico, but came to the mainland at a young age, learned English, and have grown up in the area. Many of these participants shared they still felt Boricua despite having left the island at a young age, yet they are told they are not Puerto Rican because they were not raised on the island or, as a few participants stated, lost their Spanish. Several other participants shared

they are newer to the Central Florida region, and stated a greater understanding of diasporic Puerto Ricans living on the mainland as it has become a decision based on living conditions and survivability. A majority of participants have overall described the diasporic experience as having to adapt and battle with the bilingual brain.

Another major finding is the variation in acculturation phases in different points of life. Participants shared that they had acculturated differently depending upon the environment around them and what time in their life they were in. A majority of participants expressed that at a younger age, they felt more of a necessity to assimilate, typically through the ages of six years old to 18 years old. Individuals rejected their home culture and stated they sought to adopt the host culture's communication behaviors to avoid discrimination and otherization practices. These communication behaviors are rooted in collectivist attitudes that surrounded the participants during this particular time and were crucial in providing protection from racial and ethnic discrimination similarly described by Torres and Hernandez (2007). As individuals reached a certain point in their transition from adolescence to adulthood, they began to acculturate through the process of integration in order to incorporate both their Puerto Rican background and elements of what they described to be the American culture. For other participants, separation was chosen at some point within the transitory period between assimilation and integration in order to reconnect with that individual's Puerto Rican heritage. Maintaining the home culture and rejection of the host culture was a communication behavior from some participants in order to evoke a closer relation with family, friends, and their community (Ward & Kus, 2012).

Each participant identifies as Puerto Rican in a similar manner, despite differences across age, gender, education, locale in Central Florida, and pueblo in Puerto Rico with an acknowledgement that each individual's lived experiences are defined differently being stateside,

but their roots are all similar. It is in this context that we come to see how a diasporic Puerto Rican then has to navigate ethnolinguistic vitality, cultural communication nuances, and overall communicative practices within the social makeup of the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida as well as on the island. Communication accommodations therefore are made explicitly to adapt to particular community members expectations and provide a sense of collectivism despite differences within the variety of socio-cultural environments. The findings of the study show that Puerto Ricans in the diaspora have become acclimated to code-switching behaviors verbally and non-verbally in order to fit into the cultural environment. One of the major findings is this split between participants language practices. Some are seeking to embed more slang and Puerto Rican nuances when learning Spanish or speaking it more often, while the other half of participants are trying to embed more Americanized nuances and the language into their daily lives. Despite each individual trying to fuse communicative elements of the different cultures and languages, they all shared that they still identify as Puerto Rican first and foremost, and that their cultural behaviors will not shift drastically despite having prioritized English in order to adapt to the dominant culture within the region.

### **Limitations and Future Study**

There are several limitations inherent in the design of this study. Primarily, while 19 participants was enough to reach saturation in the responses it is a small sample of the larger population of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora. Different diasporas of Puerto Ricans, such as those in Chicago and New York, carry their own social makeup and history. There is also the issue of causality in which different individuals carry varying narratives regarding the “why” to migrating. Though all participants stated economics or finances being at the root of migration, other personal factors also impacted the decision to make the move to Central Florida. Lived



experiences are complex and nuanced and may thus develop differently on a generational basis despite all participant experiences being similar in sentiment and perspective at this moment.

The findings of the study showcase reasons for further studies about diasporic communities and communication accommodations when migrating. A replication of the study on a larger scale may provide a more in-depth look into the diasporic culture within Central Florida and provide further analysis into relations between diasporic community members from Puerto Rico and other diasporic individuals from other cultures as well. This includes identifying more specific intercultural communicative behaviors and the socio-cultural environments impacts on self-identity of an individual and a group.

This research contributes to the discourse about diaspora in the United States and also provides an outline and basis for similar research regarding diasporic community members from other cultural backgrounds. Though this study specifically focuses on communication accommodation theory, other theories may be useful and provide insight and another perspective. It is also important to note that at the time of the study, the State of Florida has enacted several policies and bills (e.g., CS/HB 7, HB 999, Executive Order Number 23-03) that have cultivated a growing anti-immigration sentiment against migrants and people of color that furthers otherization of minoritized communities such as Latin Americans. Though Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States, they continue to experience backlash from such policies, as has been expressed by participants throughout the study.

## **APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER**



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

**Institutional Review Board**  
FWA00000351  
IRB00001138, IRB00012110  
Office of Research  
12201 Research Parkway  
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

**EXEMPTION DETERMINATION**

February 13, 2023

Dear Chelsea Velez:

On 2/13/2023, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Initial Study
Title:	A Puerto Rican Diasporic Study in Central Florida
Investigator:	Chelsea Velez
IRB ID:	STUDY00005027
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HRP-251-FORM, Category: Faculty Research Approval;</li><li>• Demographic Survey, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</li><li>• Email, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• HRP-254-FORM, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• HRP-255-FORM, Category: IRB Protocol;</li><li>• Interview Questions, Category: Interview / Focus Questions;</li><li>• PR Diaspora Study Preferred Contact Form, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Recruitment Flyer, Category: Recruitment Materials</li></ul>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu). Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Coker  
Designated Reviewer

## **APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY**



What is your name?

---

What is your gender?

Man

Woman

Non-binary

Genderqueer

---

What age are you?

---

What Pueblo in Puerto Rico are you from?

---

Who was the first-generation diaspora Puerto Rican in your family?

---

Where are you located in Central Florida?

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

Less than a high school diploma

High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)

Some college, no degree

Associate degree (e.g. AA, AS)

Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)

Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)

Doctorate or professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, PhD)

---

Please write your pseudonym here to use for this study:

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PARTICIPANTS**

## **Introduction**

Thank you so much for participating in this study. I'm Chelsea Vélez, a graduate student in the communication program at UCF.

I will be asking you a number of questions about your communication experiences as a Puerto Rican in Central Florida. This data will be utilized to contribute to the conversation of diasporic communities and their communication adjustments. To explain, a diasporic community is when a group of people have migrated from their homeland to another region and culminate that population in a new area away from its original geographic locale.

Please feel free to skip any question(s) you prefer not to answer and you may withdraw from the interview at any time.

The consent form and demographic survey were sent to you with your confirmation appointment, did you receive and complete it?

This interview will be audio-recorded – is this ok with you?

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Okay, great – thank you – I have begun the audio recording.

1. What would you say was the catalyst in you/your family moving away from the island?
2. How would you describe your cultural identity?
3. Could you please describe your contact and interactions with your family remaining in Puerto Rico?
4. What changes have you made in your communication in order to get things done or fit in better in mainland American society? (i.e., code-switching).
5. How open are you with others regarding your cultural background? (i.e., ask about communication accommodation in potential places individuals mention).
6. This study regards the conversation of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida, how would you describe the term diaspora?
  - a. What does it mean for you to identify as a Puerto Rican in the diaspora?



(Follow-up to Q6).

7. Was there anything that helped assist your transition into the diaspora? (Ex. involvement in the community with a group or organization etc.).

8. Tell me a story about a time where you had to adapt your communication due to barriers or discrimination?

a. Do one of these instances stick out most to you and could you elaborate on why?

(Follow-up to Q8).

9. Is there anything you want to talk about that I haven't asked about?

10. Do you have any questions for me?

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