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The Role of Cultural and Expressive Arts Therapies in the Puerto Rican Diasporic Identity: A Literature Review

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Expressive Therapies Division
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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor Denise Malis

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The Role of Cultural and Expressive Arts Therapies in the Puerto Rican Diasporic

Identity: A Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 5th 2023

Melissa Clay

Expressive Therapies

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Abstract

Identity for Puerto Rican immigrants is a growing concern with the influx of migration due to numerous natural and human based disasters. This literature review will review Puerto Rico's tumultuous history and the development of identity through history. Including the Taino, the influence of African slaves, The Three Root Model and colonization by Spain and the United States. Accordingly, this review explores culturally specific beliefs and culturally creative arts and how those can be used in healing practices through Expressive Arts Therapies. We will also consider the culturally sensitivities needed in further research on this topic and within current day therapeutic methods.

Keywords: Expressive Arts Therapy, Puerto Rico, diaspora identity, counseling/therapy or psychotherapy or treatment, culture identity or ethnic identity or racial identity

Author Identity Statement: I acknowledge my identity, race and experiences. I am a straight, first generation Puerto Rican American raised in a predominately Caucasian state in Northern New England. I consider myself Puerto Rican and part of the Diaspora.

Note: Disclaimer on terms used: In this review use of the term *Boriqua* (not *Boricua*) stems from the word's origin of *Boriquen*.

The Role of Cultural and Expressive Arts Therapies in the Puerto Rican Diasporic Identity:

A Literature Review

Introduction

Hands, feet, and animal skin coalesced (Cartagena, 2004, p. 16)

“Puerto Rico está bien cabrón, ey está bien cabrón” these are the words to the song *El Apagón* (translated as the shut off or blackout) by Bad Bunny, who is one of the prominent Puerto Rican musical artist currently who personifies what identity is for many Puerto Ricans on the island and for the diaspora in the United States. These lyrics translate two ways, Bad Bunny revealing that Puerto Rico is good and can handle whatever comes their way on their own (for lack of appropriate guidance and assistance from both the United States and Puerto Rican governments) but also that Puerto Rico is in some deep challenging stuff. These words both highlight the deficiency within the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States and more positively the self-empowerment of the Puerto Rican people and culture.

The need to re-examine Puerto Rican cultural identity stems from the many natural disasters, political discourses and resistance movements that have plagued the island in recent years. Residente (a Puerto Rican musical artist) reminisces on the subject of identity during his interview with National Public Radio in 2022 saying that the difficulty with identity lies in the relationship with dual citizenship Puerto Ricans experience between the island and the United States (Rivera, 2022). Specifically, Residente highlights the word American and how it has come to represent one who is of European decent, when in truth it applies to all people living in the Americas (North and South).

Consequently, unable to rely on the United States or their own government, Puerto Rican’s have had to rely on their own self-empowerment and strength of their communities to

help rebuild after hurricane Maria in 2017 and Fiona in 2022. These disasters are nothing new considering Puerto Rico's traumatic history; through colonization, sterilization and eradication of their indigenous populations. The tensions between both the Puerto Rican and United States governments and how that has reshaped the perimeters of culture and identity. How do Puerto Ricans keep connected with their roots and culture through all this turmoil? The importance of belonging, for those who have become displaced physically, through their connection with their Puerto Rican roots and ultimately the impact on their cultural identity.

The growing relevance of this topic in present-day is significant because Puerto Ricans are migrating to the United States at a rapid rate. This is highlighted by Puerto Rican and diasporic artists. Including musicians like Calle 13, Tego Calderón, Residente, Bad Bunny and the *Bombera's*, who continue to carry on the tradition of *bomba* (which is a traditional Afro-Puerto Rican call and response performance between drum and dancer). These artists are influencing and encouraging young and old Puerto Rican populations to hold tight to their Puerto Rican *orgullo* (pride) both for those residing on the island and those of the diaspora. Additionally, they are keeping the younger population in contact with current events and being a voice for the whole population of Puerto Rico.

A rise in migration has been one of the main features of the continued gentrification, which has presented itself as a new form of colonization in Puerto Rico. Wealthy Caucasian populations move to the island intrigued by tax breaks without consideration or intention to carry on or preserve the cultural significance or cultural traditions within Puerto Rico. This has amplified the crumbling economic environment by rising prices for those who can barely afford to continue living on the island (Martin, 2013).

The aforementioned issues give further reason for the significance of identity formation for those in the diaspora. Musical and creative arts artists are leading the way in keeping Puerto Rican's and those in the diaspora connected to their heritage, identity, and culture. This leaves the question: Can the Expressive Arts Therapy community cultivate the methods of these artists in order to help the diaspora connect to Puerto Rican identity and culture while considering how to create a culturally sensitive space?

Literature Review

This literature review will focus on how to incorporate Puerto Rican culturally specific creative arts practices such as bomba and music to better inform identity formation for those of the diaspora. Additionally, this review will focus on how to connect these practices in a way that would be culturally sensitive and ethical.

Historical Context and Identity Formation

To fully understand the changing landscape of identity for those in the Puerto Rican diaspora we need to understand the evolution of Puerto Rican creative arts that have influenced resistance and connection to Puerto Rico. Examining the historical context of Puerto Rico as an entity, how identity has changed throughout history, and how Puerto Rico itself has gone through its own identity crisis.

Cultural history of Puerto Rican Identity

Boriquen was the original name of Puerto Rico when the Taíno, the Indigenous Peoples, prospered before the colonization from Spain. Later being named *Porto Rico* [Rich Port] by the Spanish. The continued existence of the Taíno is a greatly contested topic for Puerto Rican's both on and off the island. For some Puerto Rican's the Taíno are the foundation for what is Puerto Rican thus they continue to practice and pass down Taíno rituals and traditions. Many

who consider themselves direct descendants or are tied to the idea that the Taíno are the true inherent ideology of Puerto Rico are often involved in what Curet (2015) describes as an indigenous revival movement called the Neo-Taíno movement.

Beginning in the 1980's and 1990's members of the Neo-Taíno Movement (NTM) condemned the colonization of Puerto Rico; most claimed to be directly descended from these Indigenous Peoples (Curet, 2015). The NTM look to continue the traditions, rituals and for some extend this reignition to *Arawak*, the indigenous language of the Taíno. The NTM continues the debate about the current day existence versus the extinction of the Taíno by the Spanish.

Colonization and African-ness Cultural Impact on Creativity and Practice

In 1508 Boriquen was conquered and taken for Spain by Ponce de Leon (Curet, 2015). The colonization of Puerto Rico began a break-down of culture and identity through genocide and racial mixing. Furthermore, the Spanish massacres of the Indigenous Peoples led to a shortage of slave labor for the colonizers, leading the Spanish to bring slaves over from Africa (Curet, 2015). This is where the integration of African culture and heritage became imbedded in the cultural identity of Puerto Rico. Curet (2015) would go on to call this *Mestizaje*, which indicates the biological and cultural mixings of two genetic or cultural populations.

The Three-Root Model

The three-root model is used to explain the hereditary lineage of current day Puerto Ricans. This model uses a highly colonized and politicized version of lineage that suggests Puerto Ricans are equally part Taíno, Spanish and African in heritage. The first director of the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriquena*, Ricardo Alegria used these three races as a basis to create a unified Puerto Rican identity (Curet, 2015).

There have been many issues with this model as it belittles the amount of influence from African heritage and connects Puerto Ricans to Spanish heritage as if it were a peaceful pairing, rather than one of conquest and tragedy. This model is one which Puerto Ricans and the diaspora still hold strong to today, its growth in popularity ignores the complexities and experiences that are at the core of Puerto Ricans identity. In Figure 1, you will see an artistic response to the logo of the Puerto Rican Cultural Institute. Within the logo the emphasis is placed on the “cultured” Spanish figure who is pictured fully dressed, with a book in hand. Flanking this individual are the illustrated identities of the African to the right and the Taíno to the left, both shirtless and without shoes and carrying characteristic items of field work and natural resources.

A new form of colonization

In 1898 Puerto Rico was liberated from the Spanish by the United States. However, the liberation turned into another ownership that went wrong. Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States as part of the Treaty of Paris in 1898 (Curet, 2015) and in 1952 became a commonwealth of the United States.

Puerto Rico then became a playground. The United States would gain profits from Puerto Rico’s Sugar industry and ended up owning a majority of the companies. Profits would also come from the multiple factories the United States would place in Puerto Rico such as Pfizer. Puerto Ricans would also have to face the traumas of uninformed medical sterilizations, the placement of cancer in patients as part of medical experiments, two unheeded massacres: 1937 in Ponce and 1935 in Rio Piedras which were connected to the Nationalist movements. (Denis, 2015). The susceptibility of Puerto Ricans was taken advantage of, having been continually used for medical trials and medical treatments in which they had no knowledge.

Since Puerto Ricans came under rule of the Spanish and subsequently the colonization of the United States, they have always been looked down upon as second-class citizens. A small perk to this arrangement is that Puerto Ricans (and those from the United States) gained the right to travel freely to and from the island to the United States and visa-versa. However, as Guzzardo et al (2015) notes this was not always a smooth transition as people migrating back and forth would have to shift through a change in value systems, lifestyle and traditions.

Under the commonwealth rule from the United States, the U.S. Navy used Vieques, one of the outlier islands that are part of Puerto Rico, as a navy posting. Where they did irreparable damage to the shores of the island by using the space as a bombing test sight. Citizens of Puerto Rico banded together and protested and were finally able to run the Navy out of Vieques. To this day the protest posters are still posted on the road toward the Naval base as an impromptu memorial.

After the disasters of Fiona, Irma and Maria, Puerto Rico was placed in an irreversible position. The hurricanes having devastated Puerto Rico's power grid in 2017, brought down the world's largest satellite telescope in 2020, and exacerbated the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States. The U. S. Census calculated that 301,304 people migrated out of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017.

Furthering Puerto Rico's migration is their political and governmental mistrust and economic crisis. The Puerto Rican government's national debt is over \$72 billion. Oddly enough the United States is currently in control of the fiscal board that directs the Puerto Rico Government, including their legislation and budget. Education, healthcare and many other necessities are poorly funded and have created a fragile economic system in Puerto Rico. (Rivera-Santana, 2020)

Puerto Rico, Se Levanta

“Puerto Rico, Rise up” a saying established after Hurricane Maria to represent the strength and self-empowerment of Puerto Rico and how they have had to stand up on their own to fix things. However, this saying and the preceding intricacies of adversity Puerto Rico has had to contend against began long before Maria. An early instance of discord was when African slaves were introduced into Puerto Rico, they used Bomba as a way to express their emotions and protest unbeknownst to their owners. This is comparable to the way art making has created a voice for Puerto Rico to the world.

Puerto Rican Identity today – Displaced identity

Curet (2015) expresses that there are elements of nationalism, racism, and the need for sense of identity within Puerto Rican communities, both on the island and in the United States further owing to the immerging need for research regarding Puerto Rican identity. Puerto Rican identity today has been influenced and has influenced new and continuing racial relations between those in Puerto Rico. Therefore, the search for Puerto Rican identity within the diaspora can be a hard thing to describe or identify.

The diaspora’s search for identity is both complex and ever changing. Whether you grew up on the island or in the United States you know someone who has been part of the history, the struggle, the discord, and who have felt the effects of being second class citizens even in their own home. These are the events that effect the introduction, building and rebuilding of identity.

Imagine coming from a place where *la brega* [the struggle] (Esteves-Wolff, 2020) is your daily experience, however each day you are surrounded by a community of family and friends who are part of *la brega* who understand and support you. Then you move to an individualistic environment such as the United States and there is no longer a support system or a way to

connect to that kind of support system in your new environment. This is just another origin of disparagement that one can end up feeling about their culture and history. Their story is being lost and their connection to culture and identity begins to morph and become distorted.

In the United States, Puerto Ricans aren't considered Caucasian or African therefore they are othered. Racial othering of Puerto Ricans in the United States has produced both separation and space for Puerto Ricans to resist full assimilation. For example, Puerto Ricans who reside in New York are referred to as Nuyoricans (Curet 2015). Cartagena (2004) discovered that the majority of Puerto Rican migrants will defend their culture which aides in the reassurance of *Boriqua* identity for those of the Diaspora.

Along with Puerto Rico's long history of being controlled by outside entities one has to understand the gravity of the decisions being made by these entities and the effect on identity. Internally, we also have to consider the differences in tradition and culture throughout the different regions of Puerto Rico and how that would further effect identity finding processes.

Guzzardo et al (2016) produced a study using three main I statements: I-as-Puerto Rican, I-as-Realist and I-as-Other. Based on these statements the assertion of what identity and what the connection to Puerto Rico means to Puerto Ricans both on and off the island is made. We will revisit Guzzardo's study in the subsequent section.

Diaspora Identity

When considering the diaspora and furthermore their identity we have to consider whether their migration to the United States or other places was done as an act of survival or a personal choice. Did one plan out a move or did a disaster happen and now that person doesn't have a home and has to move to be able to survive?

If moving to the United States for survival, that is something that will forever be entwined into that person's identity. Now that the United States is directly connected to this despondency what is your connection to Puerto Rico about?

We also have to consider the socio-economic level of said migrant as there is a big difference between being able to travel between the island and United States freely and being stuck in the United States because you don't have the means to travel back and forth freely, it's a privilege to do so. This also effects the ability to keep attached to their Puerto Rican identity.

It is clear that there is a disconnect in the cultural identity of Puerto Ricans living on the island versus the diaspora living in the United States. Dow (2015) expresses that 58 percent of Puerto Ricans are part of the diaspora, this shows the power of influence diasporic experiences has in shaping what Puerto Rican identity is. Guzzardo et al (2016) expressed that although there were studies about the movement of the diaspora to and from the island that there has been little acknowledgement toward the influence of diaspora experiences on the Puerto Rican culture following their return to the island. With young adults being the most represented in the migration back to the island (Myrie et al., 2022), what does this mean for identity development? How much of this development is now something else entirely?

The identity development for this population is not only younger but is also mixed in with older Puerto Rican traditions and values and with experiences that transferred over with those moving to Puerto Rico. It should also be noted that because of the gentrification happening in Puerto Rico via rich Caucasian populations from the United States, we have to consider how this has influenced Puerto Rico and how it will affect the young adult population that is still discovering their identity. Will those who never lived in Puerto Rico be confused or will they take what they see as who they are supposed to be?

Guzzardo found three distinct I positions: I-as-Puerto Rican, I-as-Realist, and I-as-other. These three I positions flow with each other. I-as-Puerto Rican relates to “emotional connection and love for the island and the national identity, and a longing to return.” (Guzzardo et al., 2016). A conflict and transitional effect happens when an I position begins to conflict with another I Position. The person begins to have a hybridized vision of themselves which can make one feel lost when living between two significantly different cultures or environments. I-as-Realist relates to the lived experiences and realities of Puerto Rico, separate from the romanticized visions, this includes being aware of the governmental corruptions and crumbling economic system. I-as-other gives the interviewee a chance to voice what it means to be racial othered. What does this mean for them and how does it interact with the growing diaspora population and their meaning making of identity.

The diaspora: Puerto Rico to the United States

Many internal conflicts transpire when moving from one culture to another this is no less true for those migrating from Puerto Rico to the United States. There are issues of shame surrounding the thought that one is not upholding their Puerto Rican pride or ‘*puertorriquenidad*’ [Puerto Rican-ness] (Guzzardo et al, 2016). The diaspora is now also faced with assimilating into this culture in order to be heard, as long as they can play and look the part. Most in the diaspora do not want to assimilate to the ‘American’ cultural identity, this includes those in the diaspora who didn’t necessarily want to move back to Puerto Rico, they also felt as though they belonged to some other identity entirely.

Being in the Diaspora puts one within a struggle with their values and beliefs, these being quite different depending on which location, Puerto Rico or the United States, you consider your connection to. Being constantly questioned and in contemplation with those values and beliefs,

what works and doesn't work, what am I not willing to give up and how does that fit into my value systems and my life in this new environment.

Diaspora populations who once lived on the island when faced with a decision to move back to the island or not are confronted with the corrupt politics, second class citizenship, natural disasters, and inadequate healthcare. How do you choose, if you have the privilege to do so, one over the other? Guzzardo et al's (2016) study focused partly on where Puerto Ricans considered home to be and where they felt most happy. This is a big distinction in the search for identity and where those who migrated decide the best fit for their identity is at a particular time.

The diaspora: born in the United States

Language acquisition is something that has been a hotly debated aspect of Puerto Rican identity, therefore making it hard or in some cases impossible for those born in the United States to connect with those in Puerto Rico. How can one truly connect if they can speak no or very little Spanish? How does this hinder the ability for the diaspora to fully connect to their heritage and their identity if those in the diaspora consider their identity to be strongly Puerto Rican?

This aspect of identity development has the diaspora fighting through their identity with themselves and the United States but also with those who are living on the island. Duany (2015) introduces us to the concept of "Neo-Ricans" which is a new term used by some to refer to the diaspora. Recently, more in the diaspora have wanted to move back to the island. The issue with this is that for those born in Puerto Rico it could be a misconception of what they would be going back to? Will it be the same as when they left? For those who were born in the United States a consideration has to be made about the motivation of that move. Could the reasoning be tied to a romanticized version of Puerto Rico for this population?

Cultural Arts, the Uprising, and its Connection to Diasporic Identity

After reviewing the history of cultural arts in Puerto Rico it is discernable that the arts are engrained in the way of living for Puerto Ricans and those in the Diaspora. It has also become a way to connect to culture and identity and allowed space for resistance through the arts for the continuing injustice experienced for those living on the island and abroad. Examining the use of cultural arts and how it connects with therapeutic healing for the diaspora and Puerto Ricans furthers the discussion of identity. Including, considering the diasporic identity as its own concept within a dual identity scope.

Cultural Arts

The use of the cultural arts has been a pillar in Puerto Rican history and healing. Used as a way to address the less romanticized issues that complement the Puerto Rican identity, such as racism which has many facets such as being Puerto Rican enough or the differences in skin color within the Puerto Rican culture. Cultural arts have been used in many different expressions including dance, music and visual art.

Bomba

Bomba is based on the influence of African slaves, who practiced *Bailes de Bomba* as a way to plot their escapes (Cartagena, 2004), entrenched in the Puerto Rican arts landscape and therefore has a long history of influence and healing for the Puerto Rican population and the diaspora. The practice of *Bomba* has been reignited through current day youth who connect with this performative and musical practice because of its ties to rebellion and resistance.

Artists such as Tito Cepeda, Roberto Cepeda, Rafael Cepeda, Castor Ayala and Rafael Cortijo are *Bomberos*, artists that practice *Bomba*. Both musically and in performance, these artists practiced *Bomba* as the diaspora in New York. In the 1950's and 1960's Rafael Cortijo and Ismael Rivera became Puerto Rico's first ambassadors of Afro-Caribbean music (Cartagena, 2004). Wanting to make the practice accessible for those wanting to connect with their culture.

Bomba is “part of who we are” (Gonzalez, 2018) and an integral component in the explanation of Puerto Rican identity. Bomba links Puerto Ricans and the diaspora to their African and Taíno roots through a spiritual and environmental connection (Cartagena, 2004). This is emphasized by Gonzalez (2018) who considers the idea that drumming is medicine and therefore capable of healing.

When first experienced by Eurocentric populations, Bomba has been reflected upon as a vulgar and a “delicious dance” performed in the “filthy wilderness”. Once again owing to the irrevocable racial tensions between populations living within Puerto Rico and those outside of the island. (Cartegena, 2004).

Contemporary Dance

Viveca Vázquez, Karen Langevin and Las Nietas de Nonó, Lydela and Michelle Rodriguez, are contemporary dancers who exude the expressive freedoms of dance in facing issues of racism in Puerto Rico and pushing against the distress of being Puerto Rican enough. In comparison to Bomba, has existed within the community and within the higher privilege environments has given way to paid lessons to learn the appropriate way to dance Bomba. Contemporary dance has tended to hold space for a higher privilege class who can afford to buy tickets in order to experience it and hasn't always been accessible to those in the community in which some of it speaks for. In comparison, Bomba has had a dual existence within the community and within higher privilege environments as some believe there are appropriate ways to dance Bomba and will pay in order to learn.

An example of this break in conformity was a political performance created by Viveca Vazquez to condemn the murder of Adolfinia Villanueva (Guzzardo et al, 2015). This has guaranteed a great amount of freedom in the work but has also caused greater distance between

artists of the diaspora, and the work's status in Puerto Rico, where there may be other notions of Puerto Rican identification practices, as those practiced necessarily by people who are forced or choose to migrate (Guzzardo et al, 2015).

Music and Song

Oral traditions have had long histories in many cultures. Oral traditions such as stories, song and music have the potential to connect oneself to “self and society, the individual and collective, and the present and historical” (Myrie et al., 2022) and ultimately to a sense of self and identity development.

Within components of music, space is held for identity formation including deeper work as music is metaphysically a connection to memory and feeling. When someone is having a certain emotion and asked about their musical preferences at that time, they will likely describe a particular musical genre or song. This is the same for music and identity as it is a means of self-love and helps one locate themselves within space and within personal and collective identity.

Writing music can lead to exploring and discovering identities and learning new ways to connect to cultural roots and the generational memories that create their cultural identity. Listening to music can find one connecting with identity and culture through an embodied experience and can be filled with emotion. It can also free people of the constraints of their bodies which is especially liberating for those with racialized bodies (Myrie et al., 2022), particularly when it is music from their own culture.

Music is a transferable mode of art making. It has the ability to travel within a home country and travel outside of it with the diaspora. It allows one to keep connected to their heritage and allows space for sharing that cultural influence within a new environment. “Music

can literally give voice to the powerless” (Myrie et al., 2022) making music a powerful conduit of change, resistance and collective action.

Visual Art

The use of the arts is another conduit of expression that supports resistance and collective action. Rivera-Santana expresses that art reflects the unpleasant reality in a way that makes it palatable and can create the energy needed for communities to stand together in the face of injustice.

The following examples show the variability within art making that can create the same or quite similar feelings depending on the generation and the issue being address. The first piece by Carlos Raquel Rivera in 1955 named ‘Huracan del Norte’ [Hurricane of the North]. Raquel Rivera uses the imagery of a common destructive force to Puerto Rico and relates this force to that of the United States. Essentially, calling out the United States for the oppressive and destructive burdens it has put on the Puerto Rico and the population.

This second example is a more recent example of art that exerts its powerful voice. It is a mural by the stencilnetwork called “*Un Chullo*”. In this mural it symbolizes the deceitfulness of politicians and the government in both Puerto Rico and the United States by showing a large powerful male figure dressed in business attire, hiding underneath a black mask and giving a thumbs up.

These exhibitions further the conversation and viewability of the continued disintegration of Puerto Rico culture and identity. However, with the explosion of art-based responses to Hurricane Maria, the art is criticized as being of a de-colonization anti-United States nature rather than being a response to the trauma experienced by the community as a whole. Leaving

space for critics to push against and defraud both the art and the population, stripping the power and words straight from the diaspora and Puerto Ricans living on the island.

Mental Health, Belief Systems and Expressive Art Therapies

[The] island was associated with the peace and tranquility of a rural area, freedom to go outside because of the warm climate, the ease of communication through a common language, the warmth of the people, the ease of being in touch with one's surroundings or a connection to nature, and the steady support of family (Guzzardo et al., 2016)

The picture that Guzzardo (2016) paints is one many people may only dream of. A place of ease, communication, connection and support. However, after reviewing the history of Puerto Rico and its population it is evident how extreme trauma and injustice has contributed to collective and generational trauma. These traumas trickling into or traveling across oceans along with the diaspora redefining identity within their movement.

Belief Systems

Historically, strong stereotypes for what Puerto Rican is and who Puerto Ricans are have led to significant reservations for those contemplating identity in the diaspora which can lead to difficult family dynamics, considering the shared values and belief systems in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rican values and belief systems are quite distinctive from those in the United States. The differences in collectivist culture vs the individualistic culture of the United States, differences of matriarchal society versus patriarchal in the United States, and respect being of great matter for Puerto Ricans especially respect for older generations. This respect includes the use of *Usted*, the formal form of you in Spanish, and the process by which one is greeted with a kiss on the cheek when entering a gathering.

For those in the diaspora being separated from family in Puerto Rico can further one's descent into depression, anxiety, and the uncertainty of identity. Romero-Ramirez (2015) defines the value of family as "Familism" which is used to express male and female roles in the family circle. It emphasizes that women should consider the needs of others beyond their own. With younger members of the family learning what will be expected of them and their role within the family. Social interactions intertwined within that family are important aspects to the culture of Puerto Rico. Many traditions having connections to Indigenous influences through oral history and a multitude of generational experiences.

Mental Health

Mental health accessibility and general trust of medical professionals for Puerto Ricans has been a deeply seated issue for generations. This with the value of respect for older generations and traditions causes the cycle of generational trauma to possibly never see an end.

Gaztambide (2019) expressed that experiencing interpersonal, systematic and cultural trauma continually it can lead to a misunderstanding of emotional experiences for minority populations. Furthermore, adding to the struggle of migration is the influence of colonial mentality (Gaztambide, 2019) and acculturation creating an environment where migrants become susceptible to mental health difficulties. This is where a common language, cultural competency, socioeconomic understanding, and an understanding on inequality helps to shape the needs within a clinical setting.

We also have to keep in mind if the decision to migrate was for survival and how that refocuses the view of the United States. Also focusing on the yearning of some to return to Puerto Rico, and what the origin of this yearning is. Is there a connection with Puerto Rico for a generation to return to what they left, is it because of the impossibility in assimilating to the

culture of the United States? With a need to connect to their heritage perhaps it is an unconscious understanding about the need to be connected to your heritage and culture in order to build a foundation of identity.

Expressive Arts Therapy and Diasporic Identity Exploration

The cultural and creative arts have proven useful and even healing to those of Puerto Rico and the diaspora post hurricane Maria. It has also been proven that the cultural and creative arts combined within a therapeutic lens can be powerful and if wielded with sensitivity can heal and bring cultural communities together, this is the power that Expressive Arts Therapy (EXAT) has.

EXAT is a dynamic form of therapy in which one interacts with the arts through many different mediums. Sometimes traveling through many mediums and sometimes just one. These mediums include dance and movement, writing, music, drama, the visual arts and many other creative avenues. According to Estrella (2023) “Arts embody multiplicity. Focusing on creativity, aesthetics, sensory-based, embodied expressions, and the power of the imagination, expressive arts therapy strove to ground itself... in the capacity of the arts to respond to human suffering.” making it the perfect companion for those who have suffered an individual or shared community trauma. (p. 2)

Community Based

Puerto Rico is naturally a collectivist culture therefore community based EXAT could be an ideal catalyst for community identity building, considering the apprehension and lack of accessibility to mental health care for Puerto Ricans and the diaspora. Offering community-based group Expressive Arts Therapy could be a productive course in forming and redefining identity for those in the Puerto Rican diaspora. The validation that can follow when all members are

exploring the same theme and able to discuss and redefine identity for themselves within the group setting. Clarification of where each member of the group is at in their process would be a key factor in helping the individuals within the group create their own paths and timelines for their identity exploration.

Ethics of Cultural Arts in the Practice of EXAT

Cultural creative arts being those methods and mediums in which products are made within and for a certain culture. The practices of clinical mental health (CMH) and Expressive Arts Therapies (EXAT) were created in the shadow of Eurocentric and Western cultures. These cultures lack in sensitivity and comprehension of other cultures. They have written the knowledge we present to all cultures so being aware of this when understanding cultural competency and when considering future research.

Issues, Discrimination, and Racism

Second class status, through racialization practices has been a way of life for Puerto Ricans since being under the control of the United States. The inequality experienced for those that have moved to the United States has proven to further deteriorate the mental health of the diaspora. Gaztambide (2019) refers to the changes that happen for the diaspora as overt dominance or submission, an increase in social and political differences and issues, positional issues within their new demographic that eventually leads to a loss of empathy and a break in trust stemming from inequality. Especially with the inequalities linked to mental health services.

The diaspora is connected to Puerto Rico through the shared discrimination against the Puerto Rican population in the United States. Being treated as an inferior populace which comes with limitations such as financial barriers, racism, accessibility and underrepresentation issues (for research, mental and physical health), limited economic and educational opportunities,

(Dow, 2015) and lack of social inclusion within their new environment. Rosario-Ramos, et al, (2017) Lack of social inclusion is created through the lack of transference of language, cultural conflicts and issues relating to Caucasian counterparts. Rosario-Ramos et al (2017) connects these issues to the extent of the time lived in the United States with an increase in depression and connection to social exclusion.

With the diaspora experiencing a higher risk and higher needs within mental health it is our moral obligation (Dow, 2015) to address the need for adequate and equal representation in mental health. To do this we must make it a point to have inclusive research with the diaspora at the forefront and create best clinical practices for the intricate needs of those of the diaspora.

Best Practice for Clinical Mental Health Counseling for the Diaspora

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency is a pillar to building a strong relationship with the diaspora and being able to build trust in order to walk with them on their identity journey. To be culturally competent one has to understand the point of view, beliefs, and the importance of identity formation for this demographic. Furthermore, a culturally competent session would allow for the client to be empowered and feel understood (Gaztambide, 2019).

It is important to note that “Culture informs clients’ perceptions of their illness, their symptom presentation, their help-seeking expectations and behaviors.” (Rosario-Ramos et al., 2017). Summing up the necessity for culturally competent services and how these services can better serve the diaspora as they face the challenge of dual identities.

Social Roles within Therapeutic Approaches

In connection with the culturally competency factors, we must understand social roles of Puerto Ricans in order to understand the redefined social role structures of the diaspora. Rosario-

Ramos (2017) discusses gender specific social roles, pointing out that women are forever expected to serve. When writing about men Rosario-Ramos highlights the concerns for men seeking mental health services, including their shared feeling of machismo which would be negatively impacted by seeking out help.

In consideration for identity formation for those in the diaspora these social roles can cause a cultural conflict issue as not only are the diaspora exposed to the social roles of the United States but also face the challenge of traditional versus contemporary women. This includes roles within families as new generations grow with differences in contemporary society and with social media and technology being so readily available.

Method

The approach to searching for literature for this review was to use terminology in many ways in order to find the combination of terms that generated the results I needed to better inform my review and topic. The challenge was that the topics chosen for this thesis, Identity and Puerto Rico, are all encompassing and can lead to many other topics that closely relate and inform the main subjects. Organizing the terms and information was critical in keeping this literature review on topic and appropriately informed. Having conversations with those of Puerto Rican descent helped to inform the search and informed some of the terminology used within this literature review.

A cultural issue that presented itself was that some of the articles allowed space for untranslated Spanish. The concern being how to translate and if translated, these words would be beneficial. Would the translations appropriately express what the words are actually trying to convey and how this has the opportunity to cross over into an ethics or culturally insensitive

space. In these instances, the choice was made to not use this information within the review in the off-chance information was misrepresented.

The criteria used to consolidate the information was both examining the relevance of the information and focusing on the age of the articles. At some points the use of some older articles was relevant because they conveyed facts that are still truth in today's society and still relevant to this topic. Keeping track of the search terms helped to visualize whether the topic was informing or disrupting the research. Keeping a culturally sensitive lens was also helpful, including understanding who the authors were in the articles. This literature review looked at many different information providing methods such as National Public Radio (NPR) episodes, books, and journal articles.

Discussion

What we have learned in this literature review is that not only are Puerto Ricans and the Diaspora a strong culture and population, but also that they are proud of their culture and heritage. However, the complexities of the diaspora connecting with a place of origin has proven to be a challenge and has created within it a new idea about the hybridity of identity formation for this population. This hybridity leading, for some, into a place of not feeling a part of any. Within this exploration into diaspora identity formation, it has been clear that the contributions and struggles of the diaspora, whether born on the island or in the United States have largely gone unexplored and unintegrated into what it means to be Puerto Rican.

The intersection of the growing diaspora and their growing influence on identity tied to the gentrification of Puerto Rico has caused a rift in the cohesion of these two worlds. It is as though those who have left the island have turned their backs on Puerto Rico and are therefore othered in the eyes of their own kin. This rift includes language acquisition and the shade of your

skin. “People are putting me in a category that I don’t belong in, just because of their assumptions” (Dow, 2015, p. 143).

However, through all this strife it seems that the self-empowerment of Puerto Ricans and the determination of those in the Diaspora to go back to the island and to stand up to the injustices whether they be past, or present is great. The Diaspora is encouraging the continuation of the cultural arts from beyond the borders of the island and educating their young ones to follow suit. This resurrects what Puerto Rican identity means, being able to connect with the old but bringing in the new and empowered energy back to Puerto Rico, whether they live on the island or not.

Through this research there are many potential contributions to the clinical practice of EXAT. The connection of the cultural arts and healing that the people of Puerto Rico and the diaspora have described as contributing to. The idea that the expression of their realities can be expressed and listened to through their music and dance have direct connections to the melding of healing and expression. EXAT has a dynamic that can reach people where they are and requires no direct formal training or artistic expertise on behalf of clients and can directly meet people’s needs through expression including those who want to participate indirectly or observe. The way art can move, educate and give voice is imperative to both identity formation and connections to one’s culture.

The EXAT can also lessen the distance between the identification practices of artists in the diaspora and those in Puerto Rico and help to converge those experiences. These experiences then have the ability to bring together communities in the fight against present day oppression but also the complex and deep generational trauma that has haunted many and rebuild identity formation through this healing.

Healing through EXAT can help to rebuild strong social relationships, positive identity conceptions, a self-awareness, confidence and a sense of community and self-empowerment (Myrie et al., 2022). This empowerment can flow through clients as easily as through EXAT therapists through advocacy, social justice and change within the systems (Gaztambide, 2019).

For the continuation of research on this subject there has to be a recognition toward the growing need for identity exploration for young adults in the diaspora. These are the next generation of Puerto Ricans for many families, and we need to also recognize the connection that these individuals desire, and the change and power that can be brought forth from their experiences off the island. Furthermore, Guzzardo et al. (2016) concludes that “Location becomes part of the practice, and wherever we see the work, be it here or there, our imagination will map the itinerary of our own particular Puerto Rican experiences.”

We should be looking into what Lazaro (2016) considers *disidentification* in order to understand the conflict within the self of these diasporic youth and how we can unify this idea with that of Puerto Rican identity.

We need to consider all of the constraints and differences that have shaped the identity formats on the island and off. This includes any socio-political situations, a colonialism point of view, a decolonization point of view and extend “the concept of a “Puerto Rican nation” by including Puerto Ricans who had experienced life outside the island” (Dow, 2015, p. 134). Furthermore, we need to be cognizant of location and how that location can dilute or express the viewpoints of the diaspora and those on the island and how that leads into our practices with these populations.

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