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Sample Paper in Latin America & Latin Studies

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SAMPLE PAPER
Challenging the "The Culture of Poverty" with Resilience and Cultural Capital

Introduction

Throughout history, scholars have offered different explanations of why poverty exists. The Culture of Poverty (COP) is a controversial topic in social science literature. Discourses like the Culture of Poverty shift the blame from society to the individual and their culture. Between the 1940s and 1960s, almost one million Puerto Ricans immigrated to New York to work in the garment industry. Automation triggered the internal migration of African Americans from the southern to the northern part of New York City. In 1965, Senator Patrick Moynihan and anthropologist Oscar Lewis proposed a Culture of Poverty thesis that attempted to explain poverty among Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the U.S. and the social unrest they witnessed as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. In 1965, Oscar Lewis published his book La Vida that popularized his egregious Culture of Poverty thesis. He "identified some 70 traits that characterize the culture of poverty [some of which include] the relationship between the subculture and the larger society; the nature of the slum community; the nature of the family, and the attitudes, values and character structure of the individual" ("The Culture of Poverty," 19). In contrast, concepts such as cultural capital and resilience may be used to challenge the COP hypothesis. Even though resilience and cultural capital may sound similar, they are not synonymous: resilience stems from psychological fortitude whereas cultural capital consists of family skills passed down from one generation to the next. **This paper will show how** cultural capital and resilience challenge the accuracy of the Culture of Poverty theory**; the analysis will focus on refuting two traits of the** Culture of Poverty **outlined by Lewis, namely a** lack of goals **and** the pervasiveness of female-headed households**.**

arguments *thesis* →
claim

Background
explains the
relevance of the
subject

The implications of the COP are overreaching and consequential. Even though the COP thesis was strongly criticized prompting Lewis to write a disclaimer that read that COP only applied to a subculture of the Black and Puerto Rican communities, these concepts were generalized to all poor Latinos/as and continue to be used in the 21st century as explanations of why these populations are poor. Moreover, Lewis' research method has also been scrutinized as he conducted the research for his book in the poorest slum in Puerto Rico, where he selected only deviant families that consisted of prostitutes, pimps, and drug addicts. Therefore, refuting the COP discourse is necessary to destigmatize the contemporary issues of poverty in disadvantaged Latino communities.

Persuasive
paragraph 1

topic sentence →

evidence

analysis

concluding
sentence →

One of the COP traits Lewis devised is a **lack of goals**. He pointed out that "for men who have no steady jobs, no property and no prospect of wealth to pass on to their children, who live in the present without expectations of the future, who want to avoid the expense and legal difficulties involved in marriage and divorce, a free union or consensual marriage makes good sense" **(Lewis, 23)**. The author stated that Puerto Ricans were poor because they lived in the present and could not save their money and such characterization regarding the lack of goals applies to Puerto Ricans in both Puerto Rico and New York **(Lewis, 23)**. **Lewis' claim is dubious because** he fails to acknowledge the resilience of that ethnic group disclosed in the fact that Puerto Ricans immigrated to New York City to find jobs and have a better way of life for themselves. This psychological fortitude demonstrates that Puerto Ricans, like other immigrants, set goals and act upon them.

Persuasive paragraph 2

topic sentence → According to Lewis, another factor indicative of the COP is a **large number of female-headed households**. "One of every five households in the slum was headed by a female, usually widowed or separated from her husband" (Lewis, xxxvi). He continued that "[t]he

evidence percentage of couples living in free union increased in New York, compared to the Puerto Rican slums, as did the number of women who were divorced, separated, or abandoned" (**Lewis, xxxix**). Lewis further emphasized an "a predisposition towards authoritarianism" in family life and "sibling rivalry as a result of scarce motherly affection (**Lewis, xlvii**).

analysis **It appears that** the nature of Lewis' argument follows a sexist argument that the lack of a male breadwinner and a traditional white nuclear family structure exacerbates poverty. Thus, the

concluding sentence → logic of equating the notions of separation, abandonment, divorce, and authoritarianism with poverty appears fundamentally flawed.

Persuasive paragraph 3

topic sentence → Moreover, **to further rebut Lewis' argument** about female-headed households, anthropologist Iris Lopez demonstrates in a **twenty-five-year intergenerational study** that she conducted in Brooklyn, York City, the Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood she worked in developing a broad cultural network of reciprocity that guaranteed the well-being of children and the family. Lopez asserts that daughters who lived in proximity to their mothers and grandmothers frequently in the same neighborhood helped devise strong, mutually advantageous family relationships between female-headed families; most mothers took care of their grandchildren while their daughters worked, mostly in the garment industry, providing for the family (**Lopez 1993**). According to Lopez, most

evidence mothers took care of their grandchildren while their daughters worked, providing for the family (**Lopez 1993**) and the grandmothers took care of their grandchildren and daughters. When their mother's aged daughters and grandmothers shared a household. The issue of balancing work and childcare among Puerto Rican females resulted in forging relationships for emotional and financial support. Mothers, daughters, and fathers were attentive and affectionate with their children. The women in these families demonstrate that Puerto Rican female-headed households are not isolated. In addition to the immediate family, Puerto Rican women planned for the future by developing an extensive network of emotional and financial support for their children through the Godparent system. Through this system, a child may have a formal set of godparents through the Catholic Church and numerous informal godparents, which provides children with an additional safety net if something happens to their parents (**Lopez 1993**). **Lopez's examples challenge Lewis' assertions**

analysis about female-headed households questioning his authority. The argument that female-headed households reiterated the COP is, thus unfounded as females took on the role of a

concluding sentence → breadwinner relying on their extended family/godparents for childcare.

Conclusion In concussion, Lewis' arguments that the Culture of Poverty has distinguishable traits, such as a lack of goals and the prevalence of female-headed households are problematic. Discussing a lack of goals, Lewis failed to acknowledge the inherent resilience amongst immigrant Puerto Rican population. He also overlooked the fact that Puerto Rican women developed a strong system of cultural capital to assure the well-being of their children.

Works Cited

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Thesis statement

A thesis statement:
- Presents your educated opinion [claim] on a subject and lists your arguments[developed in the body of your essay] to support your claim.
- Justifies discussion
- Is located at the end of introductory paragraph

A thesis statement should never contain the following: *in my opinion, I think, I believe*, etc. The entire thesis represents what you believe. In addition, it should not be in the form of a question.

Persuasive paragraph

A persuasive paragraph is a block of sentences that develops only one idea.

A TOPIC SENTENCE clearly communicates the main idea of the paragraph. EVIDENCE refers to factual basis f your argument; it must be cited. ANALYSIS explains why the above-mentioned evidence is relevant in the context of your thesis. A CONCLUDING SENTENCE states your point about the idea you are developing in the paragraph and connects it to the thesis.

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2. Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source.
3. Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the source.
4. Failing to acknowledge collaborators on homework and laboratory assignments.
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[1]"Academic Integrity Policy," CUNY, accessed June 9, 2018, http://www2.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-procedures/academic-integrity-policy/