

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

REPORT #13

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONS IN HOUSEHOLDS
IN SELECTED NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS**

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This paper reports the results of a research project undertaken under a Joint Statistical Agreement between the Bureau of the Census and Vera Institute of Justice. The purpose of the project was to determine whether reanalysis of existing ethnographic data on two New York City neighborhoods would show that the Census Bureau had undercounted persons in households in those neighborhoods and, if so, to explore motivational and cognitive factors underlying the underreporting of household residents to the Census Bureau.

Two research tasks were undertaken as part of this project. The first task involved comparing Census Bureau household data collected in April of 1980 with ethnographic data collected in October of 1980, in order to determine whether the household composition reported to and observed by ethnographers coincided with that reported to the Census Bureau. The results of that research effort are reported in section I below. The second research task involved reviewing data on household composition collected both in 1980 and for several years thereafter in order to assess motivations and cognitions underlying the reporting of household composition to various official collectors of social statistics. The results of that research effort are reported in section II below.

I. Comparison of Ethnographic and Census Bureau Data for Households in Two Brooklyn Neighborhoods in 1980

In 1979, the Employment and Crime Project at the Vera Institute of Justice began, under my direction, to collect ethnographic data in three low-income neighborhoods of Brooklyn. The focus of that study was on the relationships between employment and crime in the careers of inner-city youth (Sullivan, 1983, 1984, 1989A). We established and maintained contact with a number of youths in those neighborhoods and obtained information from them on their patterns of participation in schooling, crime, and employment.

Although household composition was not a primary focus of that study, we did collect information on household composition as part of our overall holistic, anthropological approach to data gathering. As part of the project reported here, we submitted to the Census Bureau a list of addresses of those households in two of our original neighborhoods for which we had some information about household composition. After being duly sworn in so that we could legally examine Census Bureau data, we received copies of the questionnaires collected by the Census Bureau from these same households during the 1980 decennial Census. This section reports our comparisons of our data with Census Bureau data.

Site Description

The two neighborhoods discussed below are both in Brooklyn, New York. They are referred to pseudonymously here and in

other reports as "La Barriada" and "Projectville." The areas we worked in within these neighborhoods fall within a single census tract in each, although they are parts of natural communities that extend over several tracts and share common physical boundaries and demographic characteristics.

La Barriada is a predominantly Latino, predominantly Puerto Rican area many of whose residents are poor, although the neighborhood does contain other ethnic groups and a number of non-poor residents as well. Our field notes do indicate the presence of a number of non-Puerto Rican immigrants from other parts of Latin America, many of whom were said to be undocumented aliens by our informants. All of our primary informants, however, were Puerto Rican.

Projectville's residents are about 90% black and not of Spanish origin, with the remainder being primarily of Spanish origin. Levels of poverty and receipt of Aid to Families with Dependent Children are high in both areas, over 50% in Projectville, according to the Census Bureau. In La Barriada, these rates are somewhat lower, according to the Census Bureau but over 50% for AFDC receipt according to our informal survey of the block we studied. The next block over was populated mainly by working people, probably lowering the poverty and AFDC rates for the tract as a whole.

Data Collection

Before examining the data, it is necessary to describe how and when we collected our data. Our data collection procedures

were different from those employed by the Census Bureau in a number of ways which may affect the comparability of the two data sets.

We collected household data in three ways. First, when conducting life-history interviews with young males, we routinely began by asking who they lived with and how many siblings they had. We were not always careful to prompt them to distinguish these two categories of information, so that, in some cases, it is not clear from our notes whether all the siblings they listed were currently household members or not. In most cases, however, there is a fairly clear indication of which individuals they were reporting as household members. Second, we visited several (but by no means all) of these households and observed who appeared to live there. Third, we actually conducted an informal survey of all the households in single city block in one of these neighborhoods.

It is this third procedure, our 1980 survey, that provides the most interesting source of comparisons to Census Bureau data, since it yielded the largest set of household composition reports. Our data collection procedures, however, were not undertaken for the purpose of providing comparisons with Census Bureau data. They were intended merely to give us an idea of what proportions of households were supported by welfare, Social Security, and/or work. We did not interview someone in each household. We worked with two youths who were our close informants and who claimed to know most of the households on

the block. During the course of an afternoon, we wrote down what they reported about the residents of various households. In some cases, they did not claim to know who lived in a particular household. In those cases, they went and asked other people whom they knew who were hanging out outside and who were known to be acquainted with members of the household in question. This was, of course, an informal approach which may well have been inaccurate. That fact must be born in mind in interpreting the data.

Another qualification of the comparability of the results of our household survey on this block is that we collected these data in October of 1980, several months after the April data collection by the Census Bureau. It is thus possible that there were some people who moved into and out of this area in the intervening time. Since the primary focus of our study was on criminal activity, we were very concerned with assuring informants of the confidentiality of our data. Thus, during our household survey, we did not ask the names of the members of households. We did know the names of our immediate informants and the members of their households. For other households, however, we simply recorded gender and relationship, e.g. mother, father (or common-law husband), child, niece, granddaughter, son-in-law, etc. Since we are unable to compare names for most households, movement into and out of these apartments in the period between April and October cannot be assessed. Altogether, we are able to match by name only six

out of fifty-eight households between our data and the Census Bureau data for this block. The other comparisons are grouped by building. These buildings contained either six or eight apartments each, and some had vacant apartments.

Comparison of Census Bureau and informal survey data

The results of our data comparisons for the block we studied in La Barriada are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, the results of these comparisons are extremely varied by sub-categories. Over all, the Census Bureau counted more people on this block than we did. Yet, those counted by the Census Bureau and not by ethnographers were all children. Both counts found the same number of adult females (defined in both the ethnographic count and in our application of the Census Bureau data not by age but by position in household: as either head of household or wife of eldest male in household). Significantly, the ethnographic count yielded five more adult males than the Census Bureau count, about a 20% difference. This compares favorably to the estimated 23% undercount for Hispanic males calculated by the Census Bureau (Hainer, et al., 1988), although it should be noted that most of these people were Puerto Ricans and thus not subject to the motivations to underreport experienced by non-citizens such as immigrants from other Spanish-speaking places of origin.

One interpretation of these results is that our informal ethnographic count was simply inaccurate, due to the relatively casual manner in which it was conducted. Another is that a lot

of young children moved onto the block between April and October. A third interpretation, difficult to prove but entirely plausible, is that little population change occurred and the ethnographic count was more accurate than the Census Bureau with regards to adult males and less accurate with regard to young children.¹

I think there is considerable justification for the third interpretation, for the following reasons. First, this was a small block and an intimate social world. People did generally seem to know a lot about each other's business. Second, it is plausible that our informants, young males in their late teens, were more familiar with the adults in these households than with the young children. In fact, the ages of most of these children, as reported to the Census Bureau, were very young, younger than school age. Many of them probably remained in the

¹Outside readers' comments on an earlier draft of this paper suggest two further possibilities: one, that children may have returned from Puerto Rico to start school before October, and, two, that children may have been over-reported to the Census Bureau to accord with reports to AFDC officials. I appreciate both of these comments and consider them worthy of consideration. However, I do not see why these factors alone would produce such a large discrepancy. Although we did note considerable circular migration between Puerto Rico and La Barriada during our studies, school was in session in both April and October. Further, while I would certainly think it likely that there exists some misreporting to AFDC officials in this population, I see no reason why "misplaced" children would create a net gain for this particular block. It is relatively easy to say children reside in one place when they actually reside in another. It is much more difficult to invent them when they do not exist. In either of these related cases, circular migration or child residence error, there is no compelling reason to suspect a net gain for this block.

house much or all of the time. Young females, particularly, were often kept indoors by many families. Third, some residents did express to us their fears of revealing the presence of adult males to outsiders. This issue is explored further below, but their basic reason was that they wished to conceal the presence of adult males in households receiving public assistance. Overall, our survey indicated that 26% of these households were primarily supported by wages, 72% received public assistance, and 7% received Social Security. Finally, in the six cases in which we were able to match data exactly by name, we did find that our data matched the Census Bureau data.

Table 2 presents our comparisons of data from field sources and Census Bureau records for five households in Projectville. These were all households in which our primary informants lived and with which we maintained intensive contact for several months around the time of the 1980 Census. We counted two more people than did the Census Bureau. One of these persons was a female aged 27 who was the daughter of the head of the household but was not reported along with her younger siblings. It is not possible to tell who the other person is, since we received from the Census Bureau only the summary form giving the total number of persons in the household. However, it is probable that this person was a teenage male nephew of the female head of household who was "staying with" the family at this time.

Overall, our count was much closer to that of the Census Bureau for this small number of households in Projectville, probably because we had direct contact with each of these households. The two missing people were not adult males in these cases. We did in fact hear from two of the female heads of households that they had "boyfriends" but neither they nor their children reported these men as residing in their households.

II. Cognitive and Motivational Factors

The second task we undertook was to review our field notes on these neighborhoods for indications of cognitive and motivational factors which appear to influence the accuracy of reports of household composition to the Census Bureau and other public agencies. The data we examined in order to probe for these cognitive and motivational factors included both the data, discussed above, collected around the time of the 1980 Census, as well as data collected during the mid-1980's. These later data cannot be compared directly to decennial Census Bureau data, but they do reveal some things about cognitions and attitudes regarding the conception and reporting of residence.

In reviewing our data, we began with two hypotheses which we wished to test and refine. First, we speculated that the vicissitudes of poverty might be associated with coping pat-

terns that could lead to legitimate confusion over the meaning of attachment to a residence as defined and conveyed by the Census Bureau and other official record keepers. Second, we thought that the accurate reporting of household composition might be impeded by a generalized fear of official record-keepers, specifically the fear that such reports might be used to curtail eligibility for Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

These hypotheses were based on our own experience in the field as well as the literature of urban ethnography² and previous ethnographic work sponsored by the Census Bureau³. We found some evidence in our data to support both these hypotheses, although motivational factors appear to be far more significant than cognitive factors in inhibiting accurate reporting, as will be seen.

Cognitive factors. Some of the field data on the cognitions of the meaning of attachment to a particular residence suggest that definitions of residence are not always as clear-cut among these populations as among the middle-class. Two sources of confusion on this issue are illustrated below, one related to uncertainties caused by frequent changes of residence and the other related to the fact that the concept of

²Hannerz, 1969; Rainwater, 1970; Stack, 1974.

³Hainer, 1985; Long, 1987; Parra, 1987; Vigil, 1987; Valentine and Valentine, 1971.

"residence" actually refers to a package of behaviors which are assumed to go together but which can be and sometimes are separated.

Cognitive uncertainties about residence among poor people can grow out of their actual experiences of being unable to control where they live or when they move from place to place or their rights to remain where they are at a given time. Two cases from our field data, one from Projectville and one from La Barriada illustrate these uncertainties.

One extended family in La Barriada whom we studied in 1980 had extremely complicated living patterns. They will be referred to here as the "Acostas."⁴ The locus of their residence at this time was two different apartments on the same block, yet it was not easy at any one time to say just who lived where. Our primary informant from this family was a young male, "Julian," who was then 19 years of age, married, and the father of two children. When asked where he lived, he was unable to give a simple answer, since both he and other members of his extended family alternated between two core households and other households as well. One of these households could be described as that of his parents, although, as will be seen, even that was not an entirely adequate definition. At various times, this household had included him, his mother, his father, three sisters, and two brothers. Presumab-

⁴All names used in this paper are pseudonymous.

ly, they had all lived there together for some time or times in the past, although we did not try to disentangle the entire past residential history. His father had been employed as a foreman in a nearby factory, one of the better jobs held by anyone on this block.

At the time we met Julian, however, he had married and fathered two children; one of his sisters had two children; and his father had been kicked out of the house because he had begun drinking heavily and lost his job. At that time, the household sometimes consisted of nine people: Julian's mother, himself, his wife, his two children, his sister, her two children, and his younger brother. At other times, however, Julian, his wife, and his children did not stay in that household and moved over to another household headed by another sister and including her two children and, sometimes, the father of those children, to whom she was married but who was not always present.

When asked where he "lived," Julian himself expressed some confusion and decided that the only way to answer our question was to describe this whole situation, explaining that it got very crowded at either place so that they had to move back and forth.

The residential status of Julian's father also changed from time to time. The father had been stably employed and also a lay minister in a local pentecostal church for a number of years before he began drinking. He had to leave the

household in which his own wife lived after that happened and he began an affair with his son Julian's wife's mother, who lived across the street. After a period of a few months, however, he abruptly quit drinking, resumed his religious activities, and eventually returned to his wife in the original household. Unfortunately, both the buildings containing the apartments lived in by these people had burned down before April, 1980, and they had moved to another part of the neighborhood. Therefore, we are unable to compare our field data to what they reported to the Census Bureau.

Another case in Projectville illustrated this same kind of uncertainty about residence. The Singleton family lived in building B1 reported above. We first interviewed two brothers from this family in the fall of 1980 and they reported that they lived with their mother and older brother. We visited their apartment four months later, in early 1981, and were introduced to those present in the apartment, including their mother and older brother and, in addition, a sister and her child. While talking with their mother, we asked her if her daughter and grandchild were living there. She replied, "No, they just stay here sometimes." We asked how long she had been there, and she replied, "Oh, a few months this time. She comes and goes."

We were able to check this household against Census Bureau data, and we found that the sister and her child were reported along with the others in this case, despite the fact that she

was not described to us as "living there." There did not seem to be any conscious concealment of her presence in the apartment from us. Indeed, it was hardly possible when we visited. Rather, it appears that there was some actual cognitive ambiguity involved, albeit an ambiguity that seems to have been successfully resolved by the Census Bureau interviewer in this case.

These two cases both involved the frequent and uncertain residential transitions of subfamilies into, out of, and among residences associated with their extended families. Several other cases in our data which also indicate cognitive ambiguity concerning residence involve the residential patterns of young males. These cases illustrate the unpacking of the different behavioral elements that constitute "residence." The living patterns of two males from La Barriada in their late teens and one male from Projectville in his early twenties are discussed below.

As they reach their late teens, many males in poor urban neighborhoods exist in a kind of limbo as regards their residential status. No longer of school age, not attending college, and jobless or working irregularly, their attachment to the households in which they have grown up weakens but does not dissolve entirely. They are not ready financially or emotionally to establish their own households, yet they have begun to form quasi-conjugal relationships with women and to become biological and social fathers. In this situation, they remain

partly attached to their households of origin but spend much of their time - days, weeks, or months - in other households. In these situations, their household of residence may be ambiguous or contested in the views of themselves and others in these households.

The first example concerns an individual from La Barriada whom we call "Octavio Del Rio." He was twenty years old in 1980. We had frequent contact with him from the fall of 1979 through the winter of 1980. During this period, he was attached both to his mother's household and also to that of a young woman who lived in a neighboring building. In fact, he spent by far the greater part of his time with the young woman. He slept in her apartment and was otherwise there during most of his waking hours when he was not either working or hanging out with his friends in the street. The young woman had a child by another man, and Octavio's presence in the household was so regular that the child began to refer to him as "Papi" (meaning "father") after a few months. Octavio kept most of his clothing and possessions there. Each day, however, Octavio ate his evening meal in his mother's apartment.

This case can be compared directly to Census Bureau data, since we received copies of the Census Bureau questionnaires on both these households. In the Census Bureau data, Octavio is reported as residing in his mother's apartment but not in that of his girlfriend, despite the fact that by most criteria of the meaning of residence, he was in fact residing with his

girlfriend. The questionnaires in this case were filled out by his mother for the one household and by his girlfriend for the other.

Motivational factors related to the welfare system may explain this situation. Both Octavio's mother and his girlfriend were receiving AFDC at this time, his mother for herself and Octavio's younger sister and Octavio's girlfriend for herself and her child. Octavio was no longer "on the budget" at his mother's house because he was too old. Nevertheless, his official presence in his girlfriend's household may well have been considered threatening to her budget more so than to his mother's budget. He was intermittently employed, and his income might have been considered household support if he had been officially residing with a woman who might have been considered his common-law wife. In fact, he came to refer to himself as her common-law husband increasingly as this relationship continued over time.

A second case on this same block was somewhat similar. During this same period of time, a friend of Octavio's, whom we call "Arturo Morales," was also dividing his time between his parents' apartment and that of a young woman with a child. Arturo was nineteen years old at this time. The young woman was four years older and lived nearby with her five year old child. In this case, Arturo did not even eat meals with his parents for weeks at a time. Nevertheless, the relationship between him and the young woman was stormy, and, when they

quarreled, he would return to his parents' apartment. His parents strongly disapproved of his relationship with her and constantly tried to persuade him to leave her. In this case, also, the young woman's child began to refer to Arturo as his father or stepfather.

In Arturo's case, we cannot check both residences against Census Bureau data, since his parents' building had burned down by the time the 1980 Census was taken and they had moved to another block, to a location we did not record. Arturo's girlfriend's household was included in the Census Bureau data we received, however, and he appears to have been reported, albeit with some distortion. The questionnaire information was reported by his girlfriend. A male is listed in this household along with the young woman and her child. The young woman is listed as the head of the household, and the male is classified as a "friend." The age and the last name are the same as Arturo's, but a different first name is reported, not the same as Arturo's first or two middle names. It appears that, despite acknowledging Arturo's presence, the head of the household attempted to disguise his identity slightly. She was also a welfare recipient and may have done this so that Arturo's occasional wages would not threaten her budget.

Although the motivations for acknowledging the existence of these young men and assigning to them to various households are not known, exactly, other data discussed below do suggest that residents of this neighborhood were highly sensitive to

the issue of whether Census Bureau information would affect their welfare budgets.

It should also be noted that the Census Bureau data from this block include a number of cases in which a female head of household reports the presence of an adult male near her own age whom she classifies as "friend" or "common-law husband." Several of these are households which our informants said were receiving AFDC. These cases suggest that the concealment of adult males from the Census Bureau is by no means universal.

A third case, from Projectville, further illustrates the often ambiguous residential statuses of young males. "Sky Wilson" was twenty-two years old when we first contacted him in 1980, after the time of the 1980 Census. We maintained close contact with him for nearly a year, during which time we kept detailed records of his residences, his income, and his personal relationships. He was a full-time drug dealer, and, when asked where he lived, at first responded, "I keep things in a few places," referring to his clothing, jewelry, and contraband merchandise. It was the ambiguity of this response that prompted us to track his residences over the following months. In fact, he did not reveal to us the exact addresses of these places, since he was very careful to conceal identifying information because of his illegal profession. Nonetheless, he was quite punctual in his dealings with us for many months, never missing an appointment. In addition, his accounts of his activities during this time were quite consistent and would

constitute a remarkable piece of fabrication if they were all invented. For this reason, we feel that his reports were essentially truthful, even though they could not all be confirmed by direct observation.

We devised a code for keeping track of his residences. He at first reported dividing his time among three households, all headed by young women with whom he had sexual/romantic relationships. He said they all knew what he did for a living and did not expect him to keep regular hours. Over the course of our contacts, he terminated one of these relationships and began one new ongoing relationship, in addition to many briefer relationships. At one point, he reported that he had grown tired of female companionship and was sleeping in an apartment for which he shared rent with three other young males, all of them also in the drug business. He usually did not spend much time there however. We do not know to whom the apartment was officially rented. Indeed, it is not at all certain that the name on the lease belonged to a real person at all, since Wilson described to us many ruses used by drug dealers to rent apartments and set up telephone and utility accounts under false names.

At one point, in describing his residential patterns, Sky explained his behavior in the following terms: "You know what they say, 'A rat who has only one hole to crawl into is in trouble.'" He then elaborated on the practical significance of this bit of street lore by pointing out that he was protecting

himself from both the police and violent competitors in the drug business by dividing his time among these various residences in this way. Not only was he hard to locate, and thus able to control whom he saw and when, he also protected his property. His method of accumulating wealth was to buy gold jewelry, some of which he kept in each of these locations. He also stored the drugs he was dealing in different places in the same manner. In that way, should one of these places be raided by the police or burglarized, he would not lose everything. He did in fact abandon some of his jewelry when he terminated one of his sexual/romantic relationships. He referred to this ironically as a "divorce settlement."

Although we do not have 1980 Census Bureau data on any of these locations, it seems highly unlikely that Sky Wilson would have been reported in any of them, both for cognitive and motivational reasons. He did not really live in any one place in any conventional sense, and he had strong motivations for concealing his identity.

Two kinds of situations involving cognitive ambiguity about residence have been described so far. The first involves volatile shifts in residence by sub-families among households within their extended family networks. The second involves young men who are not firmly attached exclusively to one household and who move among households headed by their parents and young women with whom they form sexual/romantic relationships. Although it seems plausible to guess that these

situations are far more widespread among poor people in the inner cities than in other kinds of communities, the implications for understanding the Census Bureau undercount are not all clear.

Looking at these situations solely from the point of view of reporting errors based on cognitive ambiguity, there is no logical reason to conclude that the result should be an undercount. It is just as plausible to suppose that these processes might lead to an overcount, or, more likely, that the various errors would wash out, leaving no net effect. If people are simply not sure how to attribute the residential status of various individuals, a given individual might just as easily be reported in two residences as in one or in none.

For this reason, though our ethnographic data do suggest sources of cognitive ambiguity about residence rooted in the patterns of life in the inner cities, it seems more likely that motivational rather than cognitive factors are responsible for the undercount. This section has suggested some of those factors; the following section addresses this issue in more detail.

Motivational factors. Our working hypothesis as we began our review of our data was that accurate reporting to the Census Bureau in these neighborhoods is impeded by a generalized fear of official record-keepers, and specifically by the fear that the 1980 Census would be cross-checked with welfare records. That working hypothesis was suggested both by our own

experience as well as by other ethnographic work sponsored by the Census Bureau.⁵ The discussion of cognitive factors above has already noted several instances in our data which appear to confirm this hypothesis, although these were not confirmed by direct statements from research subjects as recorded in our field notes, since we were not directly studying the 1980 Census at the time. This section examines other, more direct evidence of such attitudes and then goes on to suggest more specific ways in which official policies affect reporting behavior as well as differences among sub-populations in their responses to these constraints of official policies and procedures.

Although we did not specifically ask throughout our fieldwork since 1979 whether the people we studied would make accurate reports of household composition to the Census Bureau, there have been many instances in which we have encountered a generalized resistance to giving accurate reports to official record-keepers, especially when these reports concerned adult males. The most common reason given for this resistance has been fear that the presence of adult males in households could interfere with various welfare benefits if officially reported. We have heard this assumption voiced explicitly and often. Some examples are as follows:

⁵Hainer, 1985; Long, 1987; Parra, 1987; Vigil, 1987; Valentine and Valentine, 1971.

During our informal survey of the block in La Barriada, reported in the first part of this paper, we worked with the young men from the neighborhood who were our primary informants to assess household composition. Some households were assessed on the basis of the young men's direct knowledge of these households, whether of their own households or of those of their kin and of neighbors with whom they were personally acquainted. In other cases, however, they did not claim adequate prior knowledge. In these cases, they went around the block asking other people whom they knew, with the result that assessments of some households were based on second- and third-hand hearsay. During that process, the young men cautioned us explicitly that they might be undercounting men in some of these households, and that the reason would be that those they were asking might be afraid of this information reaching welfare officials. We recorded these cautions at the bottom of the charts we drew up that day. Thus, even though we counted several more adult men than did the Census Bureau in this case, there remains the suggestion that we, too, may still have undercounted some men.

Another incident from our field notes at the time of the 1980 Census confirms direct hostility toward the Census. One of our informants, Arturo Morales, whose household arrangements were discussed previously, actually worked as a Census Bureau interviewer. He was nineteen years old at the time and had gotten the job through a local social worker. He quit the job

after two weeks, explaining to us that, "I didn't like getting doors slammed in my face."

Since that time, we have conducted many life-history interviews with young males, both in our study of employment and crime (Sullivan 1983, 1984, 1989A) and in our study of young fathers (Sullivan 1985, 1989B). We routinely begin these interviews by asking "whom do you live with." We frequently encounter hesitation about citing the presence of adult males, despite the fact that we take a number of precautions to assure our informants about the confidentiality of our information. Our assurances go far beyond those offered by the Census Bureau in a number of ways. First, we assure them that we will not record their correct names. We choose pseudonyms with them and use only those pseudonyms while speaking in front of a tape recorder or while recording notes by hand in front of them. Second, we do not begin these interviews until we have had a number of informal contacts first. We are careful to point out that we have maintained prior research relationships of this kind with people they know, often over a period of years. Yet, we encounter uneasiness about our recording the presence of males.

In one example, we were speaking with a young woman from the block in La Barriada about her household and the young male who was the father of her child. They were unmarried, yet he lived with her, the child, her mother, and her two brothers. Her mother received a welfare budget for herself and the two

younger brothers. She received a separate budget for herself and her child. She knew that we knew the young man, because he had introduced us to her. Yet, when asked who lived in her house, she first included him and then became very nervous when she realized we were going to record the information. She said, "Are you going to write that down? We told the welfare he doesn't live here."

Another case, this one in Projectville, illustrates some of the complexities of this situation and the detailed awareness of the implications of household composition for receiving benefits. This case involved a young couple whom we call "Lucky" and "Sheryl." Sheryl had one child from a previous relationship and one by Lucky. They had gotten legally married, which was considered quite unusual in this neighborhood for a couple so young. They were both under the age of twenty and Lucky had just returned from prison. Marriage rates for young people are very low in this neighborhood, especially for young men who are not well established in the labor market, as Lucky certainly was not.

Lucky was employed at first but then lost his job. They then received AFDC payments under the AFDC-U program in New York State which makes payments to households including an unemployed male. His subsequent employment was irregular, and Sheryl eventually found work of her own. She and Lucky began to fight over his failure to provide steady income and growing involvement with drugs. Sheryl was forced to give up AFDC pay-

ments because she was employed. She did not mind this but wanted to retain her Medicaid eligibility for the sake of her young children's health. At this point, she began to claim that Lucky no longer lived with her, since his intermittent employment threatened her Medicaid eligibility. Her concealment of his presence in the household thus occurred despite the fact that they were legally married and had previously been enrolled for AFDC as a family unit.

It is my opinion from these experiences and from reviewing other papers commissioned by the Census Bureau⁶ that fear that Census Bureau information will be cross-checked with welfare records is probably the single largest source of error in counting young adult males who are black and non-Latino or who are Puerto Rican. Some other incidents from our field data, however, suggest some further complexities of motivations for underreporting which imply that the specific fear of endangering welfare benefits may be embedded in a more general fear that accurate reporting of household composition will have deleterious consequences.

Fear of endangering welfare budgets is not the only reason for manipulating reporting of household composition. Poor people find themselves in a variety of situations where both entitlements and penalties are tied to their officially estab-

⁶Hainer, 1985; Long, 1987; Parra, 1987; Vigil, 1987; Valentine and Valentine, 1971.

lished living arrangements. Some people, like Sky Wilson, the drug dealer described earlier, are involved in illegal activities and do not want to maintain official identities which would allow their whereabouts to be traced.

The residents of public housing also have other reasons to manipulate the reporting of household composition, as illustrated in a case from Projectville. An individual whom we call Tommy Singleton grew up there in a subsidized apartment. As he reached the age of eighteen, his mother's eligibility for a housing subsidy changed. Unless he remained in school, she would be forced either to pay a higher rent, which she could not afford, or to move to a smaller apartment. She eventually moved to a smaller apartment. Although Tommy continued to live with her, he reported that his life was much changed, saying, "I can't even play the radio now. Her apartment is right next to the housing office, and she's afraid she'll get kicked out if they know I'm there."

This situation of illegal extra occupants in public housing appeared to be widely acknowledged within the projects. During one political organizing effort, for example, local activists openly discussed how they could involve the unofficial residents of the projects. One tenant leader referred to this situation saying, "you know, we got a lot of men around here who are floaters."

Another set of institutional regulations which affect eligibility for entitlements concerns school enrollment. We

have paid a great deal of attention to schooling patterns in our various studies of young males.

The combined effects of welfare and public housing regulations may help to explain why the undercount of black and Latino males becomes much more severe for certain age groups, particularly those over eighteen and under forty. While they are still under the age of eighteen, resident males increase the total amount of entitlements for which a family is eligible. After they reach the age of eighteen, their official presence in a household endangers these entitlements. Although previous research has noted the fact that welfare regulations seem to discourage the reporting of the presence of adult males, our field data suggest that welfare regulations along with schooling and housing policies actually encourage the reporting of the presence of males who are still of school age.

The final information from our field data which may contribute to understanding of motivational factors concerns the influence of ethnicity on householding patterns. Because of these cultural differences in patterns of household formation, the effects of welfare and other official policies on reporting patterns may be different among cultural groups at similar levels of poverty and welfare dependency.

The particular culturally-influenced pattern in question concerns patterns of residence that occur after a young female bears a child. Our research over the past few years has been focused on the issue of teenage pregnancy and particularly on

the fathers of the children of teenage mothers (Sullivan, 1985, 1987, 1989). In the course of this research, we have noted some interesting differences between La Barriada and Projectville in the residence patterns of young couples. Compared to a third, predominantly white neighborhood, both the Puerto Rican neighborhood of La Barriada and predominantly black neighborhood of Projectville share some basic similarities in income and dependency levels and in the regulation of teenage fertility. The white neighborhood is working-class rather than poor and has much lower levels of poverty, welfare dependency, and female-headed households, around 10% compared to about 50% and above in La Barriada and Projectville. Teenage pregnancies in the working-class white neighborhood are also much more likely to end in abortion or marriage than in either of the poorer, minority neighborhoods.

Our ethnographic findings so far correspond to a large body of research on teenage pregnancy which suggests that higher levels of economic opportunity lead to increased motivation to postpone early childbearing and to legitimate those births that do occur.⁷ Our ethnographic data, however, suggest that there are some differences between cultural groups at similar income levels in patterns of marriage and co-residence following teenage childbearing.

⁷This topic is complicated, as fertility and marriage rates among all racial/ethnic groups have been changing over time. See Hofferth and Hayes, 1987.

In Projectville, most of the young, black fathers we studied did not marry or establish co-residence with the mothers of their children. Though many of these fathers did maintain regular contact with their children, in most cases the young couple both refrained from marriage and continued to reside with their own parents (though, as mentioned above, some young men tended to move around quite a bit). In La Barriada, in contrast, many more of the young, Puerto Rican fathers did get married. Six of eleven whom we studied married legally and another three considered themselves to be in common-law marriages. All nine established co-residence. In addition, most of those who established co-residence resided with the young father's family.

These different patterns of marriage and residence between populations with similar levels of poverty and AFDC enrollment have some interesting consequences for incentives to acknowledge officially the presence of young males in households. (These males ranged in age from thirteen to their twenties in the age at which they become fathers; most were between seventeen and twenty.) Young males who continue to reside with their own families in households supported by AFDC do not seem to threaten the family's welfare budget to the same extent as do males who reside with the mothers of their own children on a welfare budget. As they become too old to be enrolled themselves, males living with their own mothers are simply taken off the budget by welfare officials while their mothers and

younger siblings remain on the budget. In contrast, young males who officially acknowledge paternity, either through marriage or outside of marriage, and who establish official co-residence with their children automatically become targets of legally mandated child support enforcement efforts.

Our data suggest that this situation powerfully discourages young couples in poverty from marriage. This remains true even though New York State has an AFDC-U program for families including unemployed males. AFDC-U accounts for a very small percentage of the total AFDC caseload, and the males in these households are under constant pressure to seek and maintain work.

As noted, however, cultural norms appear to override these economic incentives to some extent among the Latinos in La Barriada. Though poor and AFDC-dependent, many do get married and establish co-residence. This leads to some interesting adaptations in terms of their official reporting of householding patterns. The case of one of our informants, whom we call "Armando Falcone," illustrates. When Armando's girlfriend became pregnant, he did not marry but he did acknowledge paternity and she moved into his house. Armando did work when he could, but, like many young men in the inner cities, his employment was irregular. Under those circumstances, the family needed AFDC but his official residence in the same household as his children and their mother would have threatened eligibility. As he went in and out of employment,

they faced the prospect of being cut off from benefits and having to re-enroll repeatedly. Their solution to this was to conceal Armando's official residence in this household from welfare officials. The mother of Armando's child claimed that she did not know the whereabouts of the father and that she was living with a "friend," who was in fact Armando's mother, although that fact was not perceived by AFDC officials.

The comparison of these neighborhoods suggests that processes connecting culturally-influenced patterns of householding and official reporting of householding patterns may vary significantly. What the overall effect on reporting rates between these two neighborhoods would be is not entirely clear. If there are many cases like Armando's, it could be that under-reporting of young fathers is actually higher in poor neighborhoods that are predominantly Puerto Rican than in those that are predominantly black and not of Spanish origin. However, it is not clear how other processes might cancel out or reinforce this process. Our earlier examples suggested that residence in public housing might discourage reporting of the presence of young males. The black residents of Projectville live overwhelmingly in public housing while almost none of the Latino residents of La Barriada live in public housing. The public housing effect might therefore cancel out the effects associated with higher rates of marriage and co-residence in the other neighborhood.

This section has reviewed our field data for indications of motivational factors affecting official reporting of householding patterns, particularly the reporting of the residential statuses of young males. Our data do confirm other ethnographic studies which suggest that AFDC policies and regulations strongly discourage the reporting of adult males. Beyond that, we have explored a number of other processes which appear to influence motivations concerning reporting of household composition in individual cases and in two small local neighborhoods. Further work, both ethnographic work and survey analyses, would be needed to discover if these local-level processes are generalizable and what effects they and other similar processes might have on aggregate reporting rates.

Some issues for further work can be suggested here. First, closer examination of differences between different cultural groups living under similar conditions of poverty and welfare dependency could lead to a better understanding of the effects of both culture and poverty on reporting patterns. Second, comparisons of local populations who do and do not live in public housing but who are otherwise demographically similar might reveal something about the effects of housing policies on reporting rates.⁸ Finally, it might be helpful to try to

⁸Ongoing work by Terry Williams and William Kornblum appears likely to get at this issue.

estimate how many people are at risk from being identified to the criminal justice system. One approach might be to try to count how many people are "wanted," that is, for whom there are outstanding warrants for arrest.

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Table 1

Ethnographic field data and census data
La Barriada households (grouped by buildings)

	Field	Census	Difference (Census minus field)
Building B1			
Total	24	26	+4
Adult Males	4	3	-1
Adult Females	8	8	0
Children	12	17	+5
Building B2			
Total	22	27	+4
Adult Males	2	3	+1
Adult Females	7	6	-1
Children	13	17	+5
Building B3			
Total	27	24	-3
Adult Males	5	3	-2
Adult Females	7	7	0
Children	15	14	-1
Building B4			
Total	18	25	+7
Adult Males	2	3	+1
Adult Females	6	7	+1
Children	10	15	+5
Buidling B5			
Total	24	35	+11
Adult Males	3	3	0
Adult Females	8	8	0
Children	13	24	+11
Building B6			
Total	30	28	-2
Adult Males	4	2	-2
Adult Females	8	8	0
Children	18	18	0
Buidling B7			
Total	22	29	+7
Adult Males	4	2	-2
Adult Females	8	8	0
Children	10	19	+7

La Barriada Totals:

	Field	Census	Difference	Percentage difference:
Numbers:				
All persons:	167	194	+28	6.8% (census greater than field)
Adult males:	24	19	-5	20.8% (census less than field)
Adult females:	45	45	0	0 %
Children:	91	124	+33	36.3% (census greater than field)

Table 2

Ethnographic field data and census data
Projectville households

Field Census Difference
(Census minus field)

Projectville Households:

	Field	Census	Difference
Household P1			
Total	6	6	0
Adult Females	1	1	0
Adult Males	0	0	0
Children	5	5	0
Household P2			
Total	5	5	0
Adult Females	1	1	0
Adult Males	0	0	0
Children	4	4	0
Household P3			
Total	11	10	-1
Adult Males	1	1	0
Adult Females	1	1	0
Children	8	9	-1
Household P4			
Total	2	2	0
Adult Males	0	0	0
Adult Females	1	1	0
Children	1	1	0
Household P5			
Total	6	5	-1
Adult Males	0	?	
Adult Females	1	?	
Children	5	?	

Note: Census data received included only summary form giving total for household; breakdown by gender, relationships not possible. It looks as though a resident nephew of the female head of household was not reported.

Projectville Totals:

Numbers:	Field	Census	Difference	
All persons	30	28	-2	Percentage difference 6.7% (Census less than field)