

Identity development in the Caribbean: Measuring socio-historic structures with psychological variables

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss how scientific Caribbean psychological scholarship might advance by examining indigenous theories and discourse to identify culturally-relevant variables that might account for differences among social groups (e.g. class, ethnic), and which may in turn explain outcomes of interest. Identity development is used as an example. The theory of plantation economy, and Best's (2001) discourse on race, class, and ethnicity in the Caribbean are examined. Locus of control and values emerge as culturally-relevant psychological variables that might account for differences among social groups, based on their varying experiences of the region's socio-history; and perhaps variables that might account for group differences in identity development. Empirical research linking these variables is briefly reviewed. Suggestions to guide future studies are made.

Keywords: Caribbean, social groups, identity development, locus of control, values

Desarrollo de identidad en el Caribe: examinando estructuras socio-históricas con variable psicológicas

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es discutir cómo la erudición científica de la psicológica del Caribe podría avanzar mediante el examen de las teorías y los discursos indígenas para identificar variables culturalmente relevantes que podrían explicar las diferencias entre los grupos sociales (por ejemplo, de clase, étnica), y que a su vez puede explicar los resultados de interés. El desarrollo de la identidad se utiliza como un ejemplo. La teoría de la economía de plantación, y el discurso de Best (2001) en la raza, la clase y la etnicidad en el Caribe son examinados. Locus de control y los valores surgen como variables psicológicas culturalmente relevantes que podrían explicar las diferencias entre los grupos sociales, sobre la base de sus diferentes experiencias de desarrollo socio-historia de la región, y tal vez las variables que podrían explicar las diferencias de grupo en el desarrollo de la identidad. La investigación empírica que une estas variables se revisa brevemente. Se hicieron sugerencias para orientar futuros estudios.

Palabras claves: Caribe, grupos sociales, desarrollo de la identidad, locus de control valores,

In 2011, Caribbean psychologists met under the aegis of the Caribbean Regional Conference of Psychology (CRCP) to discuss matters of regional psychological significance. The Caribbean, with its more than a dozen islands and territories epitomises diversity. Nonetheless, there is a shared regional character arising from the experience of colonisation (Benitez-Rojo, 1996). CRCP participants therefore observed that acknowledging the region's *sui generis* history and development, in the development of empirical research studies, would advance scientific Caribbean psychological scholar-

ship (Bullock, 2011). Psychology is relatively new in the region, and there does not seem to be an existing definition of Caribbean psychology. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, we operationally define Caribbean psychology as: an approach to psychology that involves constructing regionally-relevant theoretical frameworks germane to Caribbean socio-historic realities.

The goal of the current paper is to propose an example of one such theoretical framework. We herein illustrate that regional socio-historic scholarship can be examined to pinpoint psychological variables that account for social group (e.g. class, ethnic) differences, and therefore differences in psychological outcomes. Specifically, a theory: the theory of plantation economy (Best & Levitt, 2009), and a discourse: a Caribbean interpretation of race, class and ethnicity (Best, 2001),

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generated in Trinidad are examined, to show that psychological variables: locus of control (LOC) and values, might account for social group differences, and differences in identity development. We believe that this theoretical framework is an example that can be adapted to examine other Caribbean socio-historic scholarship to pinpoint psychological variables that suit Caribbean islands/ territories different from as well as similar to Trinidad, and other regionally-relevant psychological outcomes. We next discuss why identity development is a relevant outcome to the Caribbean socio-historic context.

Relevance of Identity to the Caribbean

The colonial history that created the Caribbean's present day population is a reason for the prevalence of identity issues like acculturation (Brathwaite, 2005) and pluralism (Smith, 1974) in regional scholarship (Reddock, 2002). Issues of race and ethnicity are integrally tied to regional identity scholarship, as these social groupings have stratified Caribbean societies since their colonial beginnings (Barrow & Reddock, 2001). Thus, focusing on how Caribbean people make sense of who they are (i.e., the process of identity development), based on their social group membership is regionally salient. For example, the ancestors of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians experienced differing degrees of cultural bereavement (i.e., a grief reaction to loss of language, religion, and social structure; Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Africans underwent a period of culture loss during the seasoning process of adjusting to European languages, religions, and a slave society (Braithwaite, 2005). Indians, to a lesser extent, also experienced cultural bereavement (Younger, 2010). In both cases, social and individual identities had to be re-developed to cope with the exigencies of living in the region. As the descendants of these two major ethnic groups, as well as their mixed progeny, continue to interact daily (Best, 2001), identity, especially ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990), continues to be a locally significant issue.

Aspects of the proposed theoretical framework may, therefore, be of particular relevance to multi-ethnic Trinidad, and by extension Guyana and Suriname. However, the more ethnically-homogeneous Caribbean societies are not excluded, as while identity can be studied specifically in the ethnic domain, ethnic identity is only one of many identity domains. Other domains of personal importance include occupation, politics and religion (Marcia, 1966), and these combine to create an individual's overall identity (Kroger, 2003a). Additionally, ethnic identity is most typically studied in non-Whites (Schwartz, 2005); however, the other domains certainly combine to create an overall

identity in non-Whites as well. Thus, there seems to be a gap in the identity literature that research in both ethnically heterogeneous and homogenous, non-White populations can address.

Identity Development Theory

Before continuing, we must discuss what theorists and researchers mean when they talk about identity; and the initial stage in the lifespan when identity is proposed to develop. A sense of identity is "a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity" (Erikson, 1968, p. 19), and is connected to "... an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" (Erikson, 1968, p. 165). Identity development, therefore, is a psychosocial process, facilitated by relationships with meaningful others. Erikson's discussion of identity begins in childhood, the period when children are influenced by the personal characteristics of their caregivers, and come to identify with these personal characteristics. These are called childhood identifications. Of Erikson's (1993) eight psychosocial stages of development, he proposed the fifth, during adolescence, when childhood identification are replaced with personal identifications, which emerging from interactions with same-aged peers, as the critical period for identity development. Some identity researchers have therefore focused primarily on adolescent samples (e.g. Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008; Knafo & Schwartz, 2004).

Other studies, however, have been conducted with emerging adults (Schwartz, 2005; e.g. Cramer, 2000; Eryigit, 2010). This trend is perhaps due to relatively recent theorising by Arnett (2000) that, in industrialised societies, the years from 18 to 25 (emerging adulthood) are a distinct developmental stage. Emerging adulthood is in some ways similar to adolescence, Erikson's (1993) critical identity development period: emerging adults are typically not yet married or parents; they have low feelings of self-sufficiency as they do not yet feel responsible for themselves; and societies allow emerging adults to explore possible commitments to adulthood roles like employment and relationships. Unlike adolescents, though, emerging adults spend most of their work and free time alone, making others' acknowledging their development (i.e. the social aspect of identity development) notably absent. Even in industrialised societies, however, emerging adulthood may not exist among the working class (Arnett, 2000). Thus, although Trinidad's labour force breakdown (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013) is characteristic of a post-industrial society (Inglehart & Baker, 2000), it is possible that emerging adulthood only exists among middle and upper class 18 to 25 year old Trinidadians.

The most well-established empirical operationalization of Erikson's (1968) theorising on identity suggests that there are four identity statuses: achievement, diffusion, moratorium, and foreclosure (Marcia, 1966). These statuses emerge from various combinations of high and low levels of two identity development process variables: *crisis* and *commitment* (see Table 1). The crisis process is exploring choices in ideological (e.g. occupational) identity domains. Commitment, is investing in identity choices. Achievement is the opposite of diffusion, in that, an achieved individual has explored and committed to identity choices; a diffused individual, however, seems uninterested in exploring to make commitments to identity choices. Moratorium

and foreclosure are intermediate identity statuses. The individual in moratorium is concerned with committing to identity choices, and is therefore currently exploring them; a foreclosed individual has not explored, but nonetheless has committed to identity choices (Marcia, 1966). In the empirical research section, we briefly review work showing social group differences in the identity statuses. The review will be limited to the social groups salient in Caribbean scholarship: class and ethnic (Barrow & Reddock, 2001; Best, 2001), gender (Young, 1999), and age (Rawlins, 2012) groups. We now examine a regional theory and discourse to show how LOC and values were chosen as psychological variables that might be relevant to Caribbean research.

Table 1
Marcia's (1966) identity statuses

	Crisis	Commitment
Achievement	High	High
Diffusion	Low	Low
Moratorium	High	Low
Foreclosure	Low	High

The Theory of Plantation Economy Highlights LOC as a Relevant Psychological Variable in Caribbean Research

In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson (1993, p. 268) notes the link between economics and psychology by ending his generativity versus stagnation discussion with the remark that: "If this were a book on adulthood, it would be indispensable and profitable at this point to compare economic and psychological theories (beginning with the strange convergencies and divergencies of Marx and Freud) and to proceed to a discussion of man's relationship to his production as well as to his progeny." Interestingly, the theory of plantation economy (Best & Levitt, 2009), put forward to explain Caribbean economic development, seems to have a parallel relation with the psychological process of identity development.

A tenet of the theory is that in the Caribbean, there is no distinction between the economy and the society. A plantation economy is one in which a single crop (sugar, historically) is produced, primarily for foreign export rather than for local consumption (Best & Levitt, 2009). Plantation economies are therefore part of an overseas metropolitan economy. Even in the current era, Trinidad's revenue is generated predominantly from the exploitation and exportation of crude

oil (petroleum) and natural gas reserves (Renwick, 2008); the local economy is therefore subject to the vicissitudes of externally determined oil prices. Additionally, in plantation economies local disputes are settled by referencing a metropolitan system of law (Best & Levitt, 2009); a judicial metropolitan institution, Britain's Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is currently Trinidad's final court of appeal. Finally, in a plantation economy, politicians practise "maximum leadership" (Best, 2001, p. 2), a system of inequality in which the political leader wields central power over other elected incumbents, inherited from the colonial regime; a legacy perhaps still true of Caribbean political leaders who are described as "constitutional dictators" (Charles, 2012, p. 2).

From the theory of plantation economy, we extrapolate that LOC is a psychological variable which may differentiate social groups in the Caribbean. LOC is a long-studied psychological concept (Rotter, 1990), accounting for perceptions of control in behavioural consequences (Rotter, 1966). An internal LOC is a belief that behavioural consequences are controlled by the self. An external LOC is a belief that an external source like chance, complex environmental forces, or a powerful other controls behavioural consequences. A person's tendency towards internality or externality is created by reinforcement principles. If, for example,

an individual believes that her/ his own behaviour (as opposed to external circumstances) controlled an outcome, an expectation that her/ his own behaviour will produce that outcome again is strengthened. This expectation for internal control over one's own behavior then generalizes to similar situations in the future (Rotter, 1966).

It was noted that social group membership stratifies Caribbean societies, and is linked to identity (Barrow & Reddock, 2001). The theory of plantation economy posits that there is no distinction between the economy and the society. Given the Caribbean socio-historic realities discussed, it seems that the different social groups in the Caribbean have varied socio-historic experiences with economic, legal, and political structures, perhaps influencing their LOC. LOC may therefore account for group differences in the identity statuses. In the empirical research section, examples of work that has linked social groups and LOC, and LOC and the identity statuses will be reviewed.

A Caribbean Interpretation of Race, Class and Ethnicity Highlights Values as a Relevant Psychological Variable in Caribbean Research

Building on Erikson's (1968) idea of identity as a psychosocial concept, and the relevance of social groups to identity in the Caribbean (Barrow & Reddock, 2001), we now highlight a cultural discourse which emphasises the importance of group membership, as salient to understanding present-day Caribbean realities, based on its socio-history. Best (2001) uses the word ethnicity synonymously with the phrase "automatic solidarity" (p. 8) in his discourse about race, class and ethnicity in the Caribbean. His usage of the word implies that ethnicity encompasses various types of social group memberships, *inter alia*, class, homeland, race, and religion.

He articulates a tri-dimensional problem experienced by the ancestors of Caribbean people upon their arrival to the region: first, the population was not indigenous; they therefore had no emotional connection to the region. The indigenous Amerindian communities were decimated, and a colonial society was created to satisfy the demands of an export-oriented, sugar-producing plantation economy. Secondly, the society consisted mostly of individuals forced and fooled into exploitative labour; they came from different places, at different times. The groups therefore initially had little emotional connection to each other. Thirdly, the situation of exploitative colonialism created social structures based on enslavement, and subsequently indenture. Thus, the colonizing group enforced restric-

tions and punishments to which the laboring group had to adjust in order to survive.

Best (2001) posits that the alienation from country and economy, as well as the ensuing exploitation of land and labour, were the psychological stimuli from which a sense of belongingness among the social groups, or ethnicity (i.e. automatic solidarity), emerged as a response; and which is still essential to understanding Caribbean realities. It seems obvious that the social groups of the true plantation era (e.g. colonizer, enslaved chattel, indentured labourer), from which present-day class and ethnic groups are descended, differently experienced Best's (2001) socio-historic tri-dimensional problem. Different values were therefore likely learned based on group membership, as values are learned as a response to groups' specific experiences based on their social locations (Schwartz, 1999), to guide what constitutes socially acceptable behaviour (Mustapha, 2007). Thus, based on Best's (2001) Caribbean interpretation of race, class and ethnicity, we extrapolate values as a psychological variable that may differentiate social groups in the Caribbean.

Values are universal guidelines common to diverse cultures that motivate behaviour in various situations faced during the course of living (Schwartz, 2006). The values, which motivate attitudes and behavior in Schwartz's theory, exist on two dimensions: *conservation* versus *openness to change*, and *self-transcendence* versus *self-enhancement*. Conservation is the motivation to maintain existing conditions, and the assurance that comes from conforming to established norms; while openness to change is the motivation to pursue individual intellectual and emotional interests. Self-transcendence is being motivated by a concern for other's welfare; while self-enhancement is a concern with individual outcomes and personal interests. Again, values are learned in the context of social groups (Schwartz, 1999), and in the Caribbean, social group membership is inextricably linked to identity (Barrow & Reddock, 2001). We therefore speculate that perhaps values also account for group difference in the identity statuses. In the empirical section below, we will briefly review work that has linked social groups and values, and values and the identity statuses.

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

We have discussed how a theory and discourse indigenous to the Caribbean highlight LOC and values as psychological variables perhaps relevant to regional identity research. These variables have not often been investigated in relation to identity development. Perhaps because identity studies are most often conducted with White populations (Schwartz, 2005), variables

relevant to the individualistic orientation of Euro-American culture (Arnett, 1998) tend to prevail (e.g. personality, Kroger, 2003b; Schwartz, 2005). We are not proposing that variables typically investigated with Euro-American populations should not be included in Caribbean identity research. Considering the region's experience with European colonialism, and close contact with North American culture (Brown, 1995), they should. However, we believe that in order to advance scientific Caribbean psychological scholarship, regional research should also examine variables that might specifically account for the region's socio-historic realities.

Empirical Research: Social Groups, Locus of Control, Values, and the Identity Statuses

In keeping with the proposed theoretical framework, examples of empirical studies which have specifically investigated relations between the variables proposed as regionally-relevant, are briefly reviewed next: social groups (i.e. class, ethnic, gender, age) and the identity statuses (i.e. achieved, diffused, moratorium, foreclosed); social groups and the psychological variables (i.e. LOC and values); and the psychological variables and the identity statuses.

Social group differences in the identity statuses. In a cross-cultural class comparison, American and Turkish emerging adults with parents of higher compared with lower socio-economic status (SES), tended to be in moratorium in the occupational identity domain (Eryigit, 2010). An ethnic group comparison found that ethnic minorities (including from Suriname) tended to be in moratorium, while the Dutch majority tended to be foreclosed and diffused (Crocetti et al., 2008). In a gender comparison among emerging adult Americans, women were more likely to be in moratorium than men, who were more likely to be foreclosed and diffused (Cramer, 2000). Another gender comparison, using a longitudinal study design and an emerging to middle-aged Finnish adult sample, revealed that women generally proceeded to achievement more quickly than men; however, both genders were achieved by middle age (Fadjukoff, 2007). In an adolescent age group comparison, older (14-19 year olds), compared with younger (10-13 year olds) Dutch adolescents, were more likely to be foreclosed and in moratorium, and less likely to be diffused (Crocetti et al., 2008). Thus, growing older seems to be associated with achievement (i.e., exploration of, then commitment to identity choices). Culturally-dominant group membership, and being male seems to be connected to both diffusion (i.e., a lack of concern for exploring, or committing to identity choices) and foreclosure (i.e., a conformist type of commitment). Higher SES, minority status in dominant cultural settings, and being female seems to be linked to moratorium (i.e., exploring identity choices).

Social group differences in LOC. In a class and ethnic group comparison, higher SES was related to internality in an adolescent sample; additionally, working class African-Americans were more external than middle class African-Americans, as well as working and upper class Whites (Rotter, 1966). A review of a related concept, control beliefs, indicates that among those reporting higher, compared to lower SES; among European-, compared to African-Americans; and among men, compared to women, control beliefs tend to be higher (i.e. internality); and generally increase in early adulthood, are at their highest in midlife, and decline (i.e. externality) in late life (Lachman, Neupert, & Agrigoroaei, 2010). Thus, in the United States of America, higher SES, being European-American, being male, and being a young to middle-aged adult are all associated with internality.

LOC differences in the identity statuses. In a LOC comparison among a White, middle-class, American university sample, internality was positively related to the achieved and foreclosed statuses (Adams & Shea, 1979). A LOC comparison among emerging to middle-aged adult women, showed that externality was negatively related to achievement (McEwan, de Man, & Simpson-Housley, 2005). In a review of concepts related to the identity statuses, including LOC, it was noted that internality is positively related to the achieved status, and externality to diffusion and foreclosure (Kroger, 2003b). Thus, internality seems to be positively related to achievement. Externality seems to be negatively related to achievement; and positively related to diffusion (i.e. the status proposed by Marcia, 1966, to be the opposite of achievement). However, positive relations have been reported with both internality and externality, and the foreclosed status. This conflicting literature seems to warrant further research.

Social group differences in values. In an ethnic group comparison, young Afro-, and mixed-Trinidadian women were less transcending than young Indo-Trinidadian women (Arneaud, Ali, & Alea, 2013). A gender comparison among a Finnish sample revealed that women were more transcending than men (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005). A Canadian age group comparison across the adult lifespan showed that young adults were less conserving than emerging, middle-aged and older adults; and that emerging and young adults were less transcending than middle-aged and older adults (Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2007). A Trinidadian age group comparison across the adult lifespan showed similar results on the transcending value dimension, in that, emerging adults were also less transcending than middle-aged and older adults (Arneaud, et al., 2013). Thus, on the conservation value dimension, young adults seem to be the least conser-

vative (i.e. young adults seem to be the most open to change of all the adult age groups considered). On the self-transcendence value dimension, Indo-Trinidadians; women; and older adult age groups seem to be the most transcending social groups.

Value differences in the identity statuses. Although social groups differ in the identity statuses, as well as values, there is a surprising lack of empirical research relating the values to the identity statuses, given that even Erikson (1993) proposed that social values guide identity development. Only one study was found, and in fact, value differences in the identity statuses was not directly examined; instead, the congruence of values among adolescents and their parents (i.e. both the accurate perception, and acceptance of perceived parental values), and identity status was investigated. It was found that adolescents who perceived their parents' values more accurately tended to be achieved and in moratorium, as opposed to foreclosed and diffused; and that adolescents who were more accepting of the values they perceived their parents to hold tended to be achieved and foreclosed, as opposed to in moratorium and diffused (Knafo & Schwartz, 2004). Thus, it seems that, during adolescence, accurately perceiving one's parents' values is perhaps an aspect of the concern with exploring ideological identity choices typical of both the achievement and moratorium statuses; and that acceptance of perceived parental values is perhaps an aspect of the commitment to ideological identity choices typical of both the achievement and foreclosure statuses.

Summary of Empirical Research

The empirical literature directly related to our proposed framework is sparse, with not many relations established between the social groups salient in Caribbean scholarship, and the identity statuses; the social groups, and LOC and values; and LOC and values, and the identity statuses. In identity research, differences in psychological concepts (e.g. personality, Kroger, 2003b) and the identity statuses, as opposed to differences in social groups and the identity statuses are more often investigated. Additionally, as mentioned, perhaps LOC and values are not prominent variables in identity research because they do not seem to be culturally relevant to the populations in which identity research is typically conducted.

Nonetheless, the empirical work reviewed showed that there are some relations between the variables proposed that might be worth exploring, and that the framework may yield useful theoretical assumptions that can be analysed in Caribbean identity research. Thus, as an example, considering the class and age

groups, and LOC variable: we might expect that individuals of higher SES, during emerging adulthood, will have the opportunity to explore identity choices in the moratorium status (cf. Eryigit, 2010), which is likely to develop to the achieved status as commitments to identity choices are made by middle age (cf. Fadjukoff, 2007); and further that these individuals' higher SES likely means that their LOC is internal; and that consequently, to some extent, this internal LOC accounts for the development of the achieved status by middle age. Thus, we recommend examining the relations proposed based on regional socio-historic scholarship discussed, together with the relations established in the European-American identity literature, in order to explore which variables might be most relevant in constructing a theoretical framework for identity development research in the Caribbean.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

Best (2001) urged Caribbean academics to use indigenous perspectives to theorise about the region. He proposed that a historical understanding of the conditions that founded the region is the *sine qua non* from which empirical works follow. In this paper, we attempted to heed this recommendation by exemplifying a theoretical framework for psychological research on identity development. A local theory and discourse were examined, from which LOC and values emerged as psychological proxies for socio-historical structures emic to the Caribbean.

The proposed theoretical framework can also be used to identify other potentially culturally-relevant psychological variables for regional research based on the scholarship herein discussed, as well as regional scholarship not discussed here. With regards to the scholarship discussed in the current paper, for example, control beliefs (Lachman et al., 2011), might be used as a psychological variable instead of, or along with LOC, as contradictory results have been found with LOC and the foreclosed identity status. Additionally, other regional scholarship might be examined to identify other psychological variables that might differentiate social groups in the Caribbean, and that might account for differences in various psychological outcomes of significance to the region. For example, internalised racism (Tull et al. 1999), might emerge from an examination of the creole society thesis (Brathwaite, 2005), which proposes that social relations of inequality based class and racial group membership, coalesced to establish the unique character of Caribbean societies. Likewise, social well-being (Keyes, 1998) might be measured to examine the social groups' relations to

social institutions (e.g. family, religion, education), which the plural society thesis (Smith, 1974) proposes are central to Caribbean culture.

Psychological studies are being conducted in a quickly expanding context of globalisation (Jensen, 2003; Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, 2011), brought on, for example, by immigration, which brings identity issues like acculturation to the fore (Schwartz, 2005). In some ways, this modern globalisation parallels Trinidad's early globalisation, brought on by its migratory colonial history (Brereton, 2010). Trinidad is a small island (5128km²), where interactions among individuals of diverse ethnicities has been customary (Best, 2001) since the late 15th century (Brereton, 2010). Thus, identity development research conducted on the island can clarify whether the proposed theoretical framework might also be relevant to identity development research in broader multi-ethnic contexts.

For example, cross-cultural psychologists might consider exploring the indigenous theories and discourse of populations external to their own. Identifying and measuring psychological variables that might be specifically relevant to both external and internal cultural contexts, across cross-cultural samples, can potentially increase the validity of their research results. Cross-cultural psychologists might also consider exploring social group differences in these culturally-relevant psychological variables (i.e. not just examine relations between psychological concepts like LOC and identity development, for example), as categorising individuals by social group membership, in order to predict behaviour, is an internationally salient phenomenon (Hall, 1997). However, mere social categorisations cannot explain or predict behaviour (Hall, 1997, Phinney, 1996). Empirically measuring group differences with psychological variables, though, may come closer to ascribing meaningful explanations for social group differences, and differences in their psychological outcomes.

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Received 03/12/2012

Accepted 03/04/2013

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