

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND PARENTING STYLES IN TRINIDAD.

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This paper demonstrates how culture impinges on the relationship between demographic variables, parenting styles, and behavioural outcomes in multicultural Trinidad. Specifically, the variables of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parenting styles, have been conceptualized as social constructs in an attempt to more fully understand the underlying factors behind psychological phenomena within the Trinidadian setting. Social Constructionism (or Social Construction theory) as described by Derry (1999) emphasizes the significance of culture and context in understanding the events that occur in society, and constructs knowledge based on this. I use Social Constructionism to understand how individuals actively employ the guidelines and scripts that various cultures establish and how this in turn influences behaviour. In Trinidad for example, Indo-Trinidadian culture has been perceived as being more collectivistic than Afro-Trinidadian culture, which is perceived as being more individualistic. This paper provides a comprehensive discussion of these two cultural groups.

Keywords – age, gender, ethnicity, parenting styles, social constructionism, socio-economic, Trinidad,

Introduction

According to Rosado (1997, p. 2),

“Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society”.

Trinidad is known to be one of the most multicultural societies in the Caribbean region. Charles (2001) argued that multiculturalism pervades the Trinidadian society and inherent of this multicultural society is a melting pot of several cultures-African, Indian, Spanish Syrian, Chinese and Portuguese. The multi-ethnic nature of Trinidad is maintained by its historical background and cultural systems. Hofstede (2001) posited that the notions of individualism-collectivism may be the most significant basis of cultural differences, and argued that a mixture of individualism and collectivism categorizes the Trinidadian society. Social Constructionism attempts to provide a framework for the understanding of psychological behaviour, on the basis of the individualistic-collectivistic cultural divide that exists in Trinidad.

Social Constructionism (or social construction theory), influenced by Berger and Luckmann (1966), posits that all knowledge originates from and is maintained through social interaction. This suggests that through social interaction, there is an understanding that the perceptions of reality are related and, as individuals in a society act upon this understanding, their common knowledge of reality is reinforced and maintained. The two main ethnic groups in Trinidad, the Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians, each have their own set of values, customs, traditions and practices. While these two ethnic groups have distinct cultures, it is not uncommon for Afro-Trinidadians to practice some of the traditions and customs of the Indo-Trinidadians and for the Indo-Trinidadians to practice that of the Afro-Trinidadians. For instance, the entire population in Trinidad consumes and practices the Indo-Trinidadian cuisine of 'curry and roti'. Therefore, although diversity exists in Trinidad, through social interaction, there are still some common shared values.

Researchers in the field of Psychology often use socio-demographic variables as background variables in an attempt to understand the influence of individuals' own characteristics on behaviour. These variables are not true independent variables and are commonly referred to as subject variables, and as such, cannot be manipulated. They are the characteristics of individuals and include age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES). However, while subject variables are utilized in many of these studies, psychological researchers have been unable to fully conceptualize such variables based on a society's social context. Therefore, it is important to conceptualize socio-demographic variables within the framework of social constructionism in an effort to provide explanations based on age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status differences. In addition to the subject variables, the psychological construct of parenting style varies cross culturally. In order to present a rigorous understanding of the effects of parenting styles, one must also take into account the social and cultural factors that may impact on parenting style. In this paper, specific reference will be made to the behavioural problem of aggression. Aggression is a learnt behaviour. Thus, the social construction of factors related to aggression, would present a more rigorous discussion of how these variables interact within the socio-cultural context of Trinidad.

Age as a Social Construct

Age refers to the biological and social processes that bring about inevitable behavioural and physical changes. According to Bergman and Magnusson (1990), age is perceived as the fundamental marker of development in biological and psychological research based on developmental phenomena. Age is not simply a biological category, but rather a social construct that is shaped by cultural norms and values of a specific society. Age, as a social construct is subject to change as it is affected by societies' norms attached to different age categories. As a consequence, age as a social construct varies across cultures and within multicultural national settings.

Age is commonly classified into developmental categories. Oftentimes, these form the basis for the categories of childhood, adolescence and adulthood in psychological research. These categories are not fixed entities, and therefore occur at different ages, dependent on a particular society. The biological categories of age differ from the social categories. Uprichard (2008:303)

proposes, “..... the ‘being’ child is seen as a social actor actively constructing childhood, the becoming child is seen as an adult that he/ she will become”. This alludes to the socially constructed differences between childhood and adulthood. Furthermore, Corsaro (1997) posits that the images of childhood do not arise from nature, but the ideas of childhood are inextricably linked to a society’s culture and organization. Based on Corsaro’s (1997) postulation, it is evident that biological growth alone cannot fully explain childhood. Rather, the notion of childhood has evolved throughout history and culture, based on the beliefs and values of a specific society. According to Newman (2006), many historians argue that it was not until the 17th Century that Western culture considered childhood as a distinct and unique phase of development. During that time children were considered to be economic assets and regarded as property (Newman 2006). However, such economic notions of childhood diminished by the mid 20th century and as a result, Western culture began to recognize the emotional value of children. Clearly, this supports the view that there are social and cultural meanings attached to childhood.

The transition from childhood into adolescence constitutes physical bodily changes, accompanied by secondary sex characteristics. Erikson (1963) posits that adolescence is a period that is different from childhood because of the onset of puberty, which includes the rapid increase in bodily growth, and the addition of genital maturity. However, biological changes are not the only factors that mark this transition. In many societies, there are cultural customs in the form of rituals or ceremonies associated with these biological changes of puberty. Barry and Schlegel (1980) posit that biological changes are accompanied by changes in social roles. There are some societies that have elaborate rituals or rites of passage declaring that the child is now an adult (Newman & Grauerholz 2002). Many of these rituals also emphasize sex differentiation and may be separate for boys and girls. This means that there is a cultural focus on the inception of menstruation in girls and ejaculation in boys. For example, the beginning of menstruation in girls among the Asante of Ghana is marked by a distinctive ritual in which they sit under an umbrella awaiting gifts as a form of honour. After this ceremony, they are now eligible for marriage. This initiation ceremony involves cultural attributes that only exist in the Asante society.

Although such elaborate rites of passage or rituals are present in some tribal societies, no significant rituals tend to exist within the Caribbean social context, to mark the transition from childhood into adolescence. Carrim (2000) supports this argument and posits that, rituals marking puberty tend to be lacking in the Caribbean. However, what appears to be evident during this transition is the emphasis placed on gender socialization. The onset of puberty is associated with learning of new roles and behaviours. The activities of girls are sharply curtailed to prevent pregnancy, while the activities for boys incorporate freedom. This transition represents a new stage of life, which yields maturity. Therefore, the differences in training for boys and girls prepare them for their differential sex role as adults.

While the transition from childhood into adolescence is not characterized by any special rituals, rituals or ceremonies, involving some sort of religious affiliation, mark the transition from adolescence into adulthood. In Latin America (e.g. Mexico, Columbia), a traditional Christian celebration of life known as the ‘Quinceanera’ marks the entry into adulthood for a young Hispanic woman. The ‘Quinceanera’ acknowledges the capabilities of the young woman in handling additional responsibility as an adult and is seeking God’s guidance for this

achievement. More specifically, in Trinidad, the sacrament of confirmation parallels the 'Quinceanera'. Unlike the 'Quinceanera', Confirmation is not only unique to females but involves both sexes. The sacrament is bounded to the Catholic and Anglican religions. Confirmation provides special blessings as the adolescent enters into adulthood and is now obligated to spread and defend his/her faith as a Catholic or Anglican adult. Furthermore, there are special ceremonies that signify the 'coming of age' (transition into adulthood) for both males and females among the Indo-Trinidadians of Hindu faith. For females, this ceremony involves dressing with a 'sari', then declaring their maturity to the public. For males, the coming of age marks their ability to perform religious ceremonies. This transition signifies their level of maturity to perform different roles in society. These rituals are deeply embedded in the historical legacy of Trinidad. Consequently, these rituals have survived the historical periods of indentureship and continue to be part of the Trinidadian social context. It is evident that rituals differ across societies and are an indication that age is socially constructed.

Moreover, the laws of a country dictate age specific boundaries and these vary across cultures. According to UNICEF (2001:8) "Perceptions of children and adolescents and the ways their rights are protected are rooted in cultural and political realities that vary from country to country." In Trinidad, a child under the age of 18 is considered a minor; one who is protected by the law. The laws inform the legal age to be held liable for a criminal offence or to obtain a driver's permit. Embedded in the laws of a country, are the cultural norms. Under the law, cultural norms prescribe the behaviours that are normative for children. For example, in a Jamaican sample of school children ages 9-17, perceptions of normative behaviour were analysed (Gardner, Powell, Thomas, & Millard 2003). Although the study did not specifically find significant age differences as it relates to normative behaviour, 53% of students thought it was 'okay to hit a dog', 40% thought it was 'all right to hit a cat'. Also, if someone was hit first by another student, 39% indicated that it was acceptable to hit a boy while 41% stated that it was okay to hit a girl. The data demonstrates that aggression tends to be more of an acceptable behaviour during childhood. Under the law, when adults display similar behaviours, it is likely that the individual is held accountable for these offenses.

The aforementioned suggests that certain behaviours are age specific. For instance, aggression tends to be more normative for younger children than for older ones (Patterson 1982, Tremblay 2000). This also demonstrates how cultural norms govern age expectations of aggression among children. More specifically, within the Trinidadian context, younger aged children both males and females tend to be treated similarly. However, as children enter the school system, gender differentials become more evident, where the treatment for boys differs from that of girls (Bailey 2003). For example, until the recent abolishment of corporal punishment within the educational system, the use of the rod was more often used for boys than for girls as a disciplinary technique. Clearly, differences in disciplinary techniques as it relates to aggression will inevitably lead to cross-cultural differences in age.

In conclusion, age, conceptualized as a social construct accounts for the differences that underlie the development of the categories of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Age categories are marked by rites of passage, rituals or ceremonies embedded in societal culture and ideology. These rituals or ceremonies are not only helpful for the explanation of age appropriate behaviours and expectations, but for a more rigorous interpretation of age differences. Also,

norms and laws set the standard for age appropriate behaviours and vary across culture. Such a reality presents further cross-cultural dilemmas in multicultural settings such as Trinidad.

Gender as a social construct

The terms “sex” and “gender” have been used increasingly interchangeably. The body of research has oftentimes substituted the terms ‘gender’ for ‘sex’ in an attempt to illustrate the differences in male and female behaviour across cultures. The term gender in this section takes its definition from Stoller (1968:9), “Gender is a term that has psychological and cultural connotations, if the proper terms for sex are ‘male’ and ‘female’, the corresponding terms for gender are ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine; these latter might be independent of (biological) sex”. Stoller (1968) argued that sex should be restricted to one’s biological maleness and femaleness, while gender should relate to femininity and masculinity. In light of this statement, one should not assume that being male means having masculine characteristics or that being female means behaving in a feminine manner. Unlike sex, one’s gender is determined socially. Gender encompasses a set of expected behaviours and qualities that construe differences between males and females in a given society. Through social experiences, within the current cultural context, boys learn the behaviours that are perceived as masculine, while girls learn behaviours that are viewed as feminine. Simone de Beauvoir (1953:252) posited, “One is not born but rather becomes a woman...; it is civilization alone that produces this creature...which is described as feminine”. Clearly, there are cultural connotations attached to the notions of masculinity and femininity. This paper therefore, emphasizes the need to conceptualize gender, not only as a socio-demographic variable but also as a social construct and a cross-cultural variant rather than a biological determinant.

Psychological researchers have attempted to tease out gender differences with regard to behaviour. However, rigorous explanation and interpretation of these gender differences are still lacking in psychological research. This limitation warrants the need to present a more analytical review and interpretation of gender differences based on a society’s socio-cultural context. It is also evident that that psychological research tends to focus on male issues. Bjorkqvist & Niemela (1992) contend that over the years, studies on aggression have concentrated on male physical aggression, assuming that female aggression is not worth the trouble studying. Therefore, it may be argued that this male bias persisted as a result of the failure to account for gender socialization and a lack of accurate measurements of aggression. The literature on gender differences in aggression suggests that males tend to behave more aggressively than their female counterparts (e.g. Archer 2004, Hudley 1993). Bjorkqvist & Niemela (1992) further argued that such findings should not be the rationale for a male perspective of aggression. Bjorkqvist and Niemela (1992:6), postulate, “the characteristic male perspective has greatly biased aggression research. Male researchers have not only usually chosen male subjects, but their operationalization of aggression have favoured typically male forms even when the research object has been female aggression.” It is only recently that female aggression has received some attention. Current studies on gender differences in aggression have focused on the quality (type) rather than the quantity (levels) of aggression. Thus, gender as conceptualized socially explains how societal norms and beliefs influence the ways in which males and females differ in relation to, not only level but also the type of aggression.

The nature versus nurture debate has been used to explain gender differences in behaviour. While gender is conceived as a social construct, one should not ignore the notion that sex impinges upon gender, whereby the biological differences between men and women such as chromosomes, hormones, physical features impact on the roles they acquire in society. Regarding biology, there seem to be cultural overlay that explains gender differentials on behaviour. According to Bandura (2002), biology provides many potentialities in that it permits a broad range of cultural possibilities. For example, biological differences between men and women reinforce the notions of patriarchy (male domination of society). Ortner (1974) argues that there is a traditional view that women's reproductive system is responsible for their subordination, thus maintaining the notion of patriarchy. The ideology of patriarchy, has given men dominance over women. This also suggests that under patriarchy, males have a behavioural advantage, which maintains their masculine role of power and authority.

Essentially, gender constitutes a set of norms and values relating to appropriate behaviours that determine roles and attributes. Gender reproduces a set of customs and beliefs to facilitate these norms and social rules. Caribbean feminists have also argued that gender roles during the time of colonialism have filtered down to subsequent generations (Bailey 2003, Barriteau 1995). For example, using a post-modern feminist approach, Barriteau (1995) postulated that men and women are equally embroiled in gender construction. Barriteau (1995) also posited that women are defined by the social construction of gender, which is not associated with being 'non-male' but based on the ways in which society interacts with and influences women. Bailey (2003) presented a review on gender socialization based on studies that have pointed to distinct gender identities among boys and girls. The report highlighted the work of Caribbean researchers (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity & Stewart 1996) who conducted a study on gender socialization in Jamaica, Barbados and Grenada. The study revealed that boys were more outwardly directed in their socialization when compared to girls who were more inwardly directed. Boys were allowed more freedom and often found roaming the streets, allowing them to be more exposed to violence. For boys, toughness and physical strength were encouraged, thus maintaining their masculinity. Furthermore, these researchers added that by age 10, boys began to recognize their masculine traits, whereby physical dominance was a significant marker of masculinity. Conversely, girls have been encouraged to be passive and to remain indoors, thus maintaining their femininity. A report by UNICEF (2005) substantiated this argument on gender socialization. This report suggested that boys tend to be more violent than girls. For them, violent behaviours are perceived as normative behaviour for boys and fundamental to their role and subsequent construction of masculinity. These differences in gender identity sought to have significant effects on behaviour. Such evidence has clarified the notions of gender socialization in the Caribbean indicating that gender roles generate expectancies about gendered characteristics, leading to different patterns of behaviour that persists throughout future generations. Essentially, socialization is an effective force as this process continuously directs gender-appropriate behaviours for men and women.

In conclusion, the salience of gender as a social construct has shaped the behaviour of children. Ideally, gender is an elusive concept. The social construction of the masculine gender has allowed aggression to be normative behaviour for males. In contrast, the construction of femininity has not only encouraged females to be less aggressive than males but has given them the tendency to hide or to create alternative forms of aggression. Thus, the social construction of

gender provides a deeper insight into the complexity of the interaction between gender and aggression.

Ethnicity as a social construct

Like age and gender, ethnicity may be conceptualized as a social construct. Similar to the two concepts of sex and gender, researchers have argued that race should not be used synonymously with ethnicity (Hahn & Stroup 1994, McKenney & Bennett 1994, Senior & Bhopal 1994). Race and ethnicity are different concepts and must be distinguished from each other. Race is biologically determined and entails genetic predispositions while, ethnicity is commonly referred to as a social construct, whereby there is a collective culture, including shared religion, origin, language and cultural traditions (Chaturvedi & McTeigue 1994, Freeman 1998). This definition suggests that ethnicity is a broader concept than race. An understanding of ethnicity as a social construct connotes that ethnic groups are social categories (Waters 2002). Furthermore, Waters (2002) argued that the construction of ethnic categories is a reflection of society's shared social meanings. Ethnicity and culture are interrelated and this explains how cultural traits are transmitted across different ethnic groups.

Multi-ethnic Trinidad

Culture plays an integral role in shaping the lives and adaptation of individuals. As aforementioned, Trinidad has been described as a multicultural or multi-ethnic Caribbean society. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the different ethnic groups that exist in this society. The demography of Trinidad comprises of two main ethnic groups of Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians and the remainder consists of Mixed-Trinidadians (Wilde 2008). Singh (1996) asserted that there is little doubt that the Indo-Caribbean people share with other groups some of the dominant societal values and mixture. More specifically, Nevadomsky (1982) contended that Indo-Trinidadians identify with the dominant social values and are part of the common patterns of status. With the conception of creolisation, there is some elimination of certain elements of the indigenous culture. Singh (1996) postulated that all ethnic groups in Caribbean societies have embraced the features of creolisation. In Trinidad, there exists a central core of culture in which all races participate (Hodge 1996).

However, Hodge (1996) further contends that, "history has not succeeded in melting the peoples entirely, - either culturally or genetically-into a homogeneous block..." (p. 1). Researchers have also argued that it is difficult to envisage the Trinidadian society as being characterised by common set values (Smith 1970, Kuper & Smith 1971). It should therefore be noted that while social change is taking place in contemporary Trinidad, the Indo-Trinidadians are still characterised as having a set of customs and values peculiar to them (Singh 1996). Therefore, colour, language, religion and culture become the basis for ethnic identities within a multi-cultural society. Each ethnic group forms its own set of beliefs and values to which individuals are exposed. These different ethnic groups arrived in Trinidad under different circumstances and came for different reasons to perform different roles. As such, these ethnic groups continue to differ from each other in several ways.

With respect to the Africans, the circumstances under which they left their ancestral land and were brought to Trinidad made cultural continuity very difficult. Although the Africans regained some of their culture, some was replaced by the European culture. The perception of the Afro-Trinidadians to their ancestral culture was one of rejection, and through assimilation, the Afro-Trinidadians viewed the Europeans' culture as the approved culture (Hodge 1996). On the other hand, under indentureship, the Indians had maintained most of their ancestral culture as they were allowed to retain their culture. Thus, there is a continuity of the Indian culture among the Indo-Trinidadians. The continuity of the Indian culture is not simply maintained by practicing the culture of the Indian ancestors but by maintaining an emotional relationship with their ancestral land (Hodge, 1996). With respect to the mixed population in Trinidad, Hodge (1996) posits that there are several people of mixed decent that do not form a separate group of people because they are culturally black Trinidadians. Moreover, Hodge (1996) suggested that there is a distinct group of brown Trinidadians (Mixed-Trinidadians) who have been perceived as a group that form the middle class. Clearly, this is an indication of how ethnicity and class are intimately related. In this view, ethnicity is socially constructed, as it has shaped patterns of social mobility.

The cultural system that maintains the multicultural society of Trinidad is the balance between individualism and collectivism. Although, Trinidad may be viewed as a collectivist society, there are several predictors of individualism. According to Charles (2001), Trinidad as compared to many other Caribbean nations has a very large middle class and an education system that is available to a vast majority. Based on Hofstede's (2001) work on cultural dimensions, this is indicative of an individualist society. Charles (2001) also posits that there are some predictors of collectivism, particularly among the Indo-Trinidadian population. The extended family structure is still a feature among the Indo-Trinidadians. This family type usually consists of two or more generations living together in the same house, sharing basic facilities and pooling their incomes together for collective spending. It should also be noted that this family type was more prevalent before the mid-nineties. In contemporary Trinidad, although the extended family type is still a feature of the Indo-Trinidadian family, there is a gradual shift from the traditional extended family type to the nuclear family. This may be attributed to factors, such as the move towards Modernisation and Westernisation, due to the expansion in the economy.

In spite of the move towards Modernisation and Westernisation it may therefore be deduced that the Indo-Trinidadians still maintain their collectivistic cultures given the manner in which their ancestors were brought to Trinidad and their treatment during indentureship. Conversely, the Afro-Trinidadians may have adopted a more individualist culture, since the Africans who were the ancestors of the Afro-Trinidadians were stripped of the collectivist cultural identity and were forced to adopt a more individualist European culture (Stewart 2004). Consequently, it may be argued that because of this cultural divide between the Indo- and Afro- Trinidadians, differences in behaviours are expected.

Aggression in a Multicultural Society

In a study on aggression among the youth in Trinidad, Descartes (2010) contended that the social construction of ethnicity within the Trinidadian cultural context might account for the observed ethnic differences in aggression. Given that the study revealed that Afro-Trinidadians displayed higher levels of aggression when compared to Indo-Trinidadians, Descartes (2010) argued that

ethnic differences in aggression might be related to the unique cultural differences that exist between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. Therefore, the observed ethnic differences may be related to the differentials in socialisation that operate within the collectivist/individualist orientation. In collectivist cultures, adolescents are more likely to endorse appropriate codes of conduct and behaviour, and tend to follow the conventional norms of that society (Le & Stockdale 2005). This suggests that in collectivist societies, individuals would be less likely to display high levels of aggression. On the other hand, in individualist societies, the cultural values encourage adolescents to engage in risk-taking to explore their identity and allow them to be more assertive and to express themselves as distinct individuals, separate from their family (Le & Stockdale 2005). Consequently, Afro-Trinidadians who adopted the individualistic European culture may be more likely to be aggressive. The impact of cultural and historical factors and their direct relationship with the notions of collectivism/individualism may have accounted for Afro-Trinidadians displaying the highest levels of aggression when compared to their Indo and Mixed counterparts. On the other hand, the alignment with collectivistic values for Indo-Trinidadians resulted in them endorsing the lowest levels of aggression. These findings seem to suggest that culture may be the underlying factor responsible for these ethnic differences in aggression

It should also be noted that the family structure in the Caribbean is highly influenced by its historical legacy. Researchers contend that parenting practices that are effective within one specific culture may not be as adaptive in another cultural context that does not share the same meaning system (Kagitcibasi 1996, Ogbu 1994). Thus, different cultural dimensions or patterns may influence the relationship between parental behaviour and thus, outcomes in children. As a result of the differences in culture between the Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, parenting style and practices would differ between the two ethnic groups. In conclusion, it is evident that the different ethnic groups in Trinidad have distinct cultural traits. However, while there are major disparities among the different ethnic groups, there is a growing knowledge of shared cultural traits. Cultural borrowing or shared culture has helped shaped the culture of contemporary Trinidad. This makes it possible for persons belonging to different ethnic groups to coexist with little ethnic antagonism. These features are indicative of a functioning multicultural society.

Socio-economic Status (SES) as a social construct

Though it is a complicated socio-demographic variable, SES has been conceptualized as a social construct. SES denotes the relative position of individuals, families or groups into stratified social systems (Grusky 1993, Smith & Graham 1995). According to Green (1971) socio-economic status is an index that reflects the balance or net effect of social, environmental, situational, educational, financial and other forces in an individual's world. Therefore, SES is determined by one's social and economic position in society. Each socio-economic status group shares a similar lifestyle and identity (Haralambos & Holborn 2000).

The conceptualization of SES as a social construct is based on the Marxist and Weberian perspectives of social class. Both schools of thought suggest that society consists of a number of discrete social class groups. According to the notions of Marxism, social classes are formed based on one's ownership or non-ownership of resources. With regard to the Weberian perspective, social classes are formed based on one's market relations (Goldthorpe 1980). A

third approach is that, SES is associated with social stratification. With this approach, indices of SES have been established. Parsons (1940) argued that stratification is a necessary element of social organization and is evident in all societies.

Within the Caribbean social context, SES is regarded as a form of social stratification, based on social differentiation in which social classes are set apart with respect to statuses within hierarchically structured social order (Braithwaite 1975). Stone (1973) posited that it is important to conceptualize social groups in society by its period of social history. Like ethnicity, the experiences of colonialism have influenced the way in which SES levels have been formed. Other social factors such as colour and gender influence SES in the Caribbean (Stone 1973). Therefore, to fully understand the importance of SES as a social construct (similar to age, gender and ethnicity) one must envision the Caribbean society based on the interplay of race, class and gender. It may be argued that the stratification of contemporary Trinidad may be considered heterogeneous in nature. According to this, the social system is likely to be categorized into three (3) major classes: low, middle and upper. Each social class is marked by differences in culture in terms of access to social resources (Braithwaite 2001). In Trinidad, members of each social class or level would share similar set values and lifestyles.

Social classes feature their own lifestyles and values. As a result, parents in each social class have distinct ways of socializing their children (Lloyd, Meeker & Eells 1949, Maas 1951). For example, Maas (1951) claimed that the parent-child relationship tend to be rigid and hierarchical among the lower classes while the middle classes have a more egalitarian and flexible parent-child relationship. However, the middle class parents often use strict rules outside the home setting, and supervise their children in order to maintain the moral standards and value patterns that categorize their class. Although discipline exists in the lower classes, it is always accompanied by harshness and limited supervision. However, with respect to outside activities, parents from the lower classes tend to be more permissive when compared to parents from the upper classes (Maas 1951). Given that parents of different social classes socialize their children differently, these class differentials may have an effect on the personality of children and in turn their behaviours.

Moreover, research suggests that children from families with low socio-economic status often lack the financial, social and educational support (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber 1998, Skinner, Elder & Conger 1992). Furthermore, families with low socio-economic status may have limited and insufficient access to community resources and would impact negatively on the development of children (McLoyd 1998). Consequently, children from families with low socio-economic status may be at greater risk of having behavioural problems than their peers from the middle or high socio-economic status.

It is evident that socio-economic status is a very complex variable. Thus, it is a difficult demographic variable to define and measure. Presently, the Central Statistical Office in Trinidad has no available data on how to measure SES within the Trinidadian multicultural context. It may be argued that this is partly due to the intricacy in arriving at a composite score of SES. Many researchers have used indicators of income, occupation and education level to obtain a single score for SES (e.g. Winkleby, Jatulis, Frank and Fortmann 1992). Winkleby et al. (1992) have used the indicators of income, occupation and education individually and also as a

composite score. However, Duncan and Magnuson (2002) contend that the components of SES do not act in concert to affect the lives of children, but each has distinct effects and is not interchangeable with each other. Furthermore, Duncan and Magnuson (2002) argued that it is unsafe to combine the indicators of SES only when researchers have better understood their individual effects. It must also be noted that, these indicators tend to be inconsistent and heterogeneous in nature, hence making it difficult to obtain a composite measurement of SES based on the socio-cultural context of Trinidad. Furthermore, given the cultural diversity that exists in Trinidad, researchers must be cautious when developing or even adopting a standardized measure, as they must make every effort to capture the true nature of socioeconomic statuses between the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians.

In conclusion, SES, like gender, is a social construct based on society's historical and cultural milieu. Within the Trinidadian socio-cultural context, SES is a form of social stratification whereby each socio-economic status group is differentiated from one another, a concept grounded in pluralism. It must also be noted that SES as a social construct is a complicated variable which is difficult to measure. However, in spite of being a complicated socio-demographic variable, SES plays a key role in developmental research and has implications for behavioural outcomes, life expectancies and available opportunities (Bornstein & Bradley 2003, Bradley & Corwyn 2002).

Parenting Styles in a Multicultural Society

Parenting styles have been greatly influenced by the cultural milieu of the society. Sprott (1994) asserted that the cultural context is of great importance to parenting research. The values and norms of a culture are transmitted from one generation to the next through child rearing practices (Keshavarz & Baharudin 2009). Cultural differences in ideals and values based on the notions of individualism and collectivism provides an explanation for the interpretation and of parenting styles across cultures (Triandis 1994). Thus, understanding the cultural context of a society can help predict the differences in parenting styles that predominate in that society and to account for such differences (Keshavarz & Baharudin 2009). This clearly suggests that parenting styles are socially constructed and are not universal typologies as suggested by Baumrind (1971). In order to conceptualise parenting styles as a social construct, it is important to first outline Baumrind's classification of parenting styles. Thereafter, it is useful to demonstrate how the concept of Baumrind's parenting styles is a product of the cultural context and as such, may not always generalise to other cultures.

Baumrind (1971) investigated parenting styles using a North American sample and classified parenting styles in three categories: permissive authoritarian and authoritative. Permissive parents are very responsive, nurturing and affectively warm but place little demands on their children, allowing them the freedom to do as they wish. This type of parenting was found to be associated with negative outcomes in children such as poor academic achievement (Diaz 2005). The authoritarian parents are extremely controlling, demanding and emotionally cold. These parents set strict rules and guidelines in which their children are expected to follow. Children are not encouraged to negotiate these absolute rules and standards. When children do not abide by their rules, authoritarian parents use punitive and harsh measures of discipline. Authoritarian parents are also less likely to praise and reward their children as a means of motivation. In

addition, past research showed that the authoritarian parenting style is associated with negative behavioural outcomes in children, such as low self-esteem, aggression and poor academic achievement (e.g. Colpan, Hastings, Lalace-Seguin & Moulton 2002). In contrast, the authoritative parenting style is characterised by warmth, responsiveness and control. While authoritative parents set high standards for their children, they are also encouraged to exercise independence. Their children's viewpoints are highly respected. This type of parenting is linked to positive behavioural outcomes in children and is considered to be most effective in fostering high self-esteem, confidence and academic success.

To reiterate, the individualistic/collectivist orientation has provided an explanation for the differences in the conceptualisation of parenting styles across cultures. Collectivist cultures place strong emphasis on interdependent relationships with others. These societies are represented by key factors such as sociability, security, harmony, integrity and family. Conversely, individualistic cultures place more emphasis on independence from others. Such cultures are represented by important factors of emotional autonomy, assertiveness, and the need for privacy when there is an invasion of this sort (Hofstede 2001). While in most societies there seem to be a coexistence of individualistic or collectivistic values, each one differs in its own way (Niles 1998). It is noteworthy that a society's historical and ethnic background would contribute to the notions of collectivism and individualism.

Given that differences exist between these two cultural orientations, it is perceived that parenting practices would differ across cultures. In collectivist societies parents tend to promote certain values such as helpfulness, conformity, and interdependence within the family and those in their in-group (Greenfield & Suzuki 1998). Such qualities characterize the authoritarian parenting style based on Baumrind's typology. In collectivist cultures, this form of parenting appears to be more appropriate than that of other cultures. Chao (1994) also argued that the concept of parenting styles does not capture the essence of authoritarian behaviours of Asian parents and the characteristics of control and demandingness are more common among such families, but however reflect a distinct set of underlying beliefs compared to European-American parenting. For instance, behavioural control, a characteristic of authoritarian parenting is related to positive outcomes in Asian children and is perceived as parental warmth and acceptance while it is viewed as a negative characteristic of parenting among European American children (Kim 2005). Moreover, Chao (1994) asserts that demandingness is deeply embedded in the notions of training, which encompasses parental control, parent-child interactions and support. The concept of training underlines obedience, self-discipline and academic success. This provides a possible explanation for why authoritarian parenting fosters positive behavioural outcomes in children in collectivist societies.

As mentioned earlier, variations in historical and ethnic backgrounds of different cultures are key factors contributing to the differences that exist in collectivist/individualistic cultures. Trinidad is a multicultural society comprising mainly of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians, who are the descendants of collectivist cultures of Africans and Indians respectively (Kumaraguru & Cranor 2005, Lapinski & Levine 2000). Similar to that of other collectivist cultures, the authoritarian parenting style seems to be the most dominant type of parenting in the Caribbean. Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates and Petit (1996) assert the authoritarian parenting style employed by Caribbean parents is characterised by a "no nonsense" parenting behaviours and is associated

with positive child outcomes. These meanings attached to the authoritarian parenting style are perceived of as normative parenting control and not reflective of a lack of care and warmth towards children.

It is also important to note that the ancestors of the Indo and Afro-Trinidadians, came from different roots, came for different reasons and came to different roles (Hodge 1996). As mentioned earlier, the conditions under which these main ethnic groups entered Trinidad, led to the differences that may still exist between the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians and this in turn will affect parenting practices of each ethnic group. The Africans came to Trinidad as slaves while the Indians came as indentured labourers. This led to the some erosion of the African's cultural identity and the acceptance of the European culture. As a result of this ethnic cleansing, the Afro-Trinidadians today demonstrate a blend of European and African cultural values and child rearing practices. Therefore, this may have led to the Afro-Trinidadians adopting a more individualistic way of thinking and as a result, it is more likely that the Baumrind's typology of parenting may be applied to this ethnic group. Unlike the Africans, the Indians were permitted to retain their ancestral and traditional identity. It may therefore be argued that the Indo-Trinidadians held to their collectivist culture and thus similar to Asian societies, the authoritarian parenting style may be more appropriate and ideal for Indo-Trinidadian parents.

However, while a large number of Indo- Trinidadians still follow their traditional values of their Indian ancestors, Singh (1996) argued that the American culture has impacted on the Indo-Trinidadian culture. According to Singh (1996), the Indo-Trinidadians have accepted some Western values as a result of Modernisation and Creolisation and this led to changes in attitudes toward family, marriage and divorce. For example, Singh (1996) further posits that among the Indo-Trinidadian community, the growing acceptance of western values may be responsible for the transition of the family structure. Today, the family structure of the Indo-Trinidadian community is shifting from the extended type family to a nuclear family type. These two family types have different value systems in which the former is based on collectivist principles of interdependence while the latter on individualist principles of autonomy and independence. This transition in the family structure has major implications for changes in the family lifestyles, values and aspiration (Singh, 1996). Moreover, the impact of the European and American cultures on that of the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians respectively made allowances for both the collectivist and individualist orientation between these two major ethnic groups. For example, in a study on self-esteem conducted in Trinidad, Rollocks, Dass, Mohammed and Seepersad (2007) suggested that the observed differences in self-esteem might be one of culture-specific features related to the collectivism/individualistic orientation for Indo- and Afro- Trinidadians.

Parenting style conceptualized as a social construct is interpreted based on the notions of collectivism and individualism. Every culture develops set patterns of child rearing practices and that what is perceived to be good parenting in one culture may be regarded as maladaptive in another culture. Parenting styles developed from samples of western cultures cannot simply be transferred to other cultures. Thus, parenting behaviours would have diverse consequences for children's development across cultures. As a result of critical cultural and historical factors, Trinidadian parents, particularly Indo-Trinidadians have mainly accepted collectivist values and consequently the authoritarian parenting appears to be the most dominant style of parenting used. In addition, owing to factors of Modernization and Westernization, there was a gradual shift

towards the acceptance of individualist values among Indo- Trinidadians and more so Afro-Trinidadians. The individualist/collectivist divide that exists in Trinidad, has also made it difficult to fully conceptualize parenting styles between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians. Therefore, this warrants the need to further explore this area of research.

Conclusion

The variables of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and parenting styles were conceptualized as social constructs within the multicultural society of Trinidad. Oftentimes, these variables have been used to demonstrate differences in relation to behaviour, without first acknowledging the impact of culture on these relationships. When compared to parenting styles, it may be easier to conceptualise the socio-demographic variables as social constructs, given the nature of these variables. Although parenting style is defined psychologically, it varies across cultures. The cultural diversity of parenting style has made allowances for its conceptualisation as a social construct. Therefore, psychological researchers need to be cautious in the application of parenting styles, particularly in a multicultural society. By using Social Constructionism as the framework for this discussion, several arguments based on the collectivist/individualist were put forward in an attempt to understand the relationships between the socio-demographic variables, parenting styles and behaviour.

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