

Articles

ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN: LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE CONTEXTS OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION¹

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Abstract

This study used a heuristic phenomenological approach to examine the learning and development experiences of 15 Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women in the United States. The findings suggest that culture and early school socialization in the country of origin influence learning and development experiences in the host country. Some of the major challenges participants faced in their learning and development in the United States were in transforming their cultural assumptions about silence, negotiating language and identity, and reorienting to a new meaning of teaching and learning. Reconceptualizing Belenky et al.'s (1986) model of women's ways of knowing, the study demonstrated that agency, culture, social capital, and the sociocultural environment influence the epistemological position that a woman occupies. The women were found to move freely among the epistemological positions of knowing.

Résumé

Cette étude a fait appel à une approche heuristique et phénoménologique dans l'analyse des expériences d'apprentissage et de perfectionnement

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d'immigrantes antillaises anglophones vivant aux États-Unis. Les résultats de notre recherche suggèrent que la culture et la socialisation scolaire précoce dans le pays d'origine ont une influence sur les expériences d'apprentissage et de perfectionnement dans le pays d'accueil. Parmi les principaux défis relevés par les femmes dans leurs apprentissages et leur perfectionnement, notons l'obligation de changer leur perception par rapport au silence, négocier leur langue et leur identité et revoir leur définition de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage. En reprenant les modèles d'apprentissage féministe de Belenky et al. (1986), notre étude a montré comment l'environnement social, communautaire, culturel et économique influençait la position épistémologique de la femme en société. Les femmes se retrouvaient à tous les niveaux épistémologiques du savoir.

While the Caribbean islands vary in size, cultural background, demographics, geography, and specifics of their history, they share two commonalities that continue to influence the development of their people: the legacy of European colonialism and the legacy of slavery. These commonalities together shape a particular Caribbean culture and identity that influence the Caribbean people's development, both at home and abroad (Kasinitz, 1992; Waters, 1999).

Sociohistorical Processes of Caribbean People's Development

After the Europeans colonized the Caribbean islands, they used them to create enormous wealth, combining European capital, Caribbean land, and coerced and imported labour (Sunshine & Warner, 1998). For the first four hundred years, this coerced labour took the form of enslavement of African blacks, and then after emancipation, indentured servitude of East Indians and Chinese people. The production of sugar, utilizing imported African slaves as labourers, dominated the region for centuries and "left its mark on the land, the peoples, the culture, and the very form of Caribbean society" (Waters, 1999, p. 20).

A particular feature of Caribbean society resulting from European colonization is its multiracial populace, as a result of the transported labourers from Africa, China, and India and colonial masters from Europe. Waters (1999) notes, "The culture of the Caribbean peoples that evolved from this mix was a transplanted and syncretic one—a creole culture in that no particular parts were indigenous, and the parts of Africa, Europe, and Asia that survived were combined and passed on from generation to generation" (p. 21). Therefore, part of the history and culture of Caribbean people is the multi-layered identity that characterizes their development. Because of this

multi-layered nature of Caribbean society, it is characterized for the harmonious coexistence of the different racial, cultural, and ethnic groups that make up its population (Sunshine & Warner, 1998).

Another significant characteristic of Caribbean society is its history of migration. During the colonial era, Caribbean people began emigrating to Europe and North America, but in small numbers. Some of the migrant colonists went seeking employment while others went to further their education. Forced migration among Caribbean Blacks began during the period of slavery, when the colonial masters engaged in the practice of "seasoning" the African slaves in the harsh Caribbean environment and then transferring them to the United States to work the cotton fields (Parris, 1981). Thus, the practice of border crossing to fulfill labour market requirements left its mark on the Caribbean people, making it a characteristic of their life ways. In summary, as a result of slavery and colonialism, two key features characterize Caribbean people's lives: the harmonious co-mingling of cultures, ethnicities, and races resulting in multiethnic identities; and migration, which is used as a strategy for economic development.

The Social Construction of Caribbean Migration

Since the abolition of slavery on West Indian² sugar plantations, Anglophone Caribbean people have viewed migration as a way of life. After the emancipation of slaves on the islands in 1834, intra-island migration began among inhabitants seeking employment as a means to a better life than the harshness of the plantation system. Therefore, when the United States opened its doors to the third world countries in the early nineteenth century, British West Indians began to view it as a country where dreams of personal growth and economic stability could be realized.

Noting the significance of migration in Caribbean life, Kasinitz (1992) writes, "Few societies on earth have been as shaped by the movement of their people as those of the Caribbean.... In much of the Anglophone Caribbean, migration has become a normal and expected part of the adult life cycle, a virtual rite of passage" (p. 19). Since migration is such an integral part of Caribbean people's development, it is important, then, that we understand the motivation behind it.

² The terms West Indian and Caribbean are used interchangeably in this article.

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The primary reason for Caribbean migration was then and is still "the gap between life aspirations and expectations and the means to fulfill them in the country of origin" (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996, p. 12). The substantial economic differential between the United States and the Caribbean has, thus, operated as a strong pull factor, while the limited expansion of economic opportunities for professional development in the Caribbean has operated as a push factor (Palmer, 1983). These concepts of the pull and push factors can be used to understand the primary reasons for West Indian migration and the pursuit for a better life in the United States.

In their quest for this better life in the United States; Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women have had high participation in higher education, and a significant number of them can be found in professional jobs (Simmons & Plaza, 1998; Palmer, 1983). Mortimer and Bryce-LaPorte (1981) and Gordon (1981) attribute this value for education to a history of colonialism that dictated education as a vehicle for social mobility. For example, Palmer (1983) acknowledges,

The need for a sound education has always been emphasized in the Caribbean. The European colonizers in the Caribbean declared education a determinant of social mobility, and Blacks who took over the islands have been even more emphatic. Parents, too, have drilled into the heads of their children the need for a sound education. It is no wonder then, that in the United States, Afro-Caribbean women have been so quick to take advantage of every educational opportunity—if not for themselves, surely for their children. (p. 6)

This value for education, economic stability, and social mobility demonstrates the motivation that pushes Caribbean people away from their country and pulls them into the United States to fulfill expectations of a better life. However, upon arriving in the United States, they find themselves in an environment that renders them invisible and devalues their Caribbean experiences (Houston, Cramer, & Barrett, 1984; Sutton & Chaney, 1994). Commenting on Caribbean women's silence and invisibility in the United States, Marshall (1994) argues,

If African Americans have suffered from a kind of invisibility and if the Black foreigner has been treated to a double invisibility, then the West Indian immigrant suffers a triple invisibility as a Black, a foreigner, and a woman. She simply is not seen; nor has her experiences been dealt with in any substantial way in the social science literature. (p. 81)

As an Anglophone Caribbean immigrant woman, I give voice to the *transnational* experiences of Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women,

particularly those emanating from their learning and development experiences in the United States. The overall purpose of this study was to investigate, analyze, and describe how these immigrant women learn and develop within the context of transnational migration.

To understand women's learning and development from a transnational context, I used the following questions to guide the study: (1) How does early socialization in the home culture influence learning and development in the host country? (2) What social and cultural contexts promote or hinder the learning and development of immigrant women in the host country?

Navigating the Research Process

This qualitative study used a heuristic phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) to explore how immigrant women construct and acquire knowledge in the United States and how their early-lived experiences influence learning and development in adulthood. According to Moustakas (1994), heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a problem or a question for which the researcher seeks understanding or illumination. To fully understand the phenomenon under exploration, the researcher invites other participants with similar experiences to share in the research journey. In heuristic inquiry, the focus is exclusively aimed at understanding the lived experience. The heuristic framework allows me to be part of the research and my experiences to be included as part of the analytical texts.

Who Are These Phenomenological Explorers?

The study used a sample of 15 participants from the British Caribbean islands, who were residing in the Midwestern, the Southwestern, and the Eastern United States. The participants had to have been a resident of the United States for at least five years, had participated in a formal education program, and had worked outside of the home. They originated from the islands of Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad, St. Kitts, and St. Lucia. They ranged in ages 35 to 51 years, with the length of time living in the United States ranging from ten years to thirty years. The level of education among participants was also diverse. One participant had 24 college credits; one had a certificate of completion; three had associate degrees and were working on undergraduate degrees; three participants had completed undergraduate degrees; four of them had graduate degrees; one was a doctoral candidate; one other had a doctorate; and one was a medical doctor. Of the fifteen participants, fourteen were married and one was single. All participants had children and they all held professional or administrative support jobs at the time of the interview.

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The majority of the participants came from working class backgrounds with parents who did not attend high school. Of the fifteen participants, one had a parent with a graduate degree from the United States, two had a parent who graduated high school, and the others were of families with limited education. However, the participants shared a common experience of having graduated high school in their home country between 1960 and 1980. This is noteworthy because, prior to the 1980s, high school education was reserved for a limited number of age-eligible students. As a result of the limited opportunities available for secondary schooling at the time, some of the elementary schools had a common practice of selecting potential high school candidates by age nine, placing them in a special class, and coaching them for two to three years to write the common entrance exam. Many of the participants, particularly those from the smaller Caribbean islands, shared that experience. As a result, very early in their development, they were considered to be of a special class. This class structure was determined not by economics, but by academic potential. This group, therefore, is not a representative sample of the general population of British Caribbean women.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since the goal of this research was to understand the learning and development experiences of immigrant women in the United States, interviewing provided a necessary avenue at exploring the phenomenon (Van Maanen, 1990). The participants from the Southwest and the Midwest were interviewed once face-to-face, and the second interviews were either done in person or over the phone. The participants from the Eastern region were, on both occasions, interviewed over the phone. A colleague conducted my interview using the same interview guide. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed.

In analyzing the data, I first constructed a case narrative or biography, describing each of our lives. Second, I identified each significant experience within each of our stories and situated it within the sociocultural context of family, community, institution, and the wider society. The experiences within each of these contexts were further situated within the country of origin or the receiving country. Next, I continued with a thematic analysis of each transcript, and finally did a cross-case analysis to uncover the themes common to the women's learning and development experiences. While there were variations in the women's experiences, I have highlighted those that were common to the majority of participants. Throughout this paper, the participants will be referred to by their selected pseudonyms.

What Have We Learned?

From the study, we have learned the following: (1) formal and informal socialization in the home country provided a disciplined structure and a solid foundation that facilitated adult learning and development in the host culture; (2) renegotiating identity, language, and voice hastened the women's acculturation into mainstream cultures; and (3) the dimensions of the development model articulated by Belenky and associates (1986) were found to be epistemological positions within which a woman navigates, and the sociocultural contexts of the learning determines the position that she occupies. The women, therefore, were found to move back and forth among the five epistemological positions outlined by Belenky et al.

Early Formal and Informal Socialization to Learning

The findings from the study revealed that the early learning and developmental activities in the Caribbean prepared participants for two significant life roles that formed a foundation for their participation in America's workplace and learning institutions. They learned how to respond to life's struggles through informal learning and "learned how to learn" within the contexts of formal learning arrangements. Therefore, both indigenous and institutional knowledges were found to be significant to their development as learners.

Indigenous ways of knowing. Members of the family lifeworld facilitated much of the early learning activities during the women's early development. The Caribbean family lifeworld extends beyond the traditional nuclear family, and it includes parents, grandparents, siblings, offspring of siblings, aunts, uncles, as well as other community members, all of whom contribute to the knowledge base of the developing individual. Greek, for example noted,

Because we were poor, I mean growing up with a mother and the extended family during a time when things were hard, we did not have material things; we only had family. Family was everything. Even good friends were considered family. The neighborhood, the people in the church, the older women, you know, they were all considered family. They sort of took care of everybody. They were always teaching us the basics of life. From them, we learned how to manage life, the good and the bad. I think from all of these lessons, they taught us how to be problem solvers; they taught us to be independent.... I think because we were surrounded by strong women, we grew up to be strong women who

go after what we want today, even though we have to struggle to get there.

A closer examination of the cultural resources embedded in the women's stories revealed a body of knowledge about community values, collective and individual responsibility, and social capital resources. However, participants did not identify these rich cultural resources as tools for learning, nor did they realize that these life's struggles were forms of learning. Indeed, many of the participants had trouble identifying the knowledge acquired in informal settings as forms of learning. For example, when I asked Crystal about her learning experiences outside the classroom, she noted, "Oh, I don't remember learning outside of the classroom. All the learning took place in school." Upon further probing, she noted,

I guess we also learned from the people around us. The old folks were always telling stories about the old days, and there was always a message in these stories. The lesson was always about struggles and making it. When you think about it, we learned a lot of history from the people. Sometimes, we just learned from watching the way our parents managed with little money; I guess there was a lesson in economics.... Come to think of it, they did not learn those things from books because they had little formal education. They learned from each other and passed down that knowledge. I never saw it that way, but I guess, in a sense, they were educated, but not in the true sense.... Now that I am thinking about it, a lot of what I know about life did not come from formal schooling.

Like Crystal, several of the participants had difficulty viewing knowledge acquired outside the classroom as a form of learning. This is partly because their Caribbean academic culture validated Western thought as knowledge and did not place much value on knowledge constructed in local communities.

Although participants were unaware of the value of their informal learning, through such exposure, they learned to be resourceful, innovative, collaborative, and self-reliant. The findings also indicate that the lessons learned from the early informal learning experiences, within communities of supporters, provided participants with a structure that helped shape their learning and development as adults. Most importantly, as Chris echoed, "those hard lessons I learned as a child taught me how to work; they taught me how to struggle." Knowing how to work and knowing how to struggle significantly contributed to the women's ability to navigate America's cultural systems and meet personal expectations.

Social capital, cultural capital, and institutional learning. Formal education in the Caribbean was patterned after a British system that promoted an objective pedagogy. The goal of schooling was mastery of content and a demonstration of such mastery through the reproduction of knowledge. The unspoken philosophy was “survival of the best and the brightest.” Grace articulated what that experience was for her:

We were under the British system of education. At the time I was growing up in Grenada, you had to know your information. We didn't have multiple choice type tests. You either knew it or you didn't. You can spend years in one form [grade] without being promoted. There was no social promotion. Unless you knew your information that they were trying to impart to you, you were kept back. I guess I was fortunate; I was a quick study; I kept getting promoted.... That foundation set the tone for me to get a chance to attend secondary school and later for me to be successful in the US.

Being selected to attend secondary school in the Caribbean was a significant event because of the limited opportunities available for secondary education at the time. Secondary education was a competitive process, and it was reserved for the top academic achievers. Norma explained the selection process for secondary education and its influence on teaching and learning:

From grade school, you had to have passed a comprehensive exam in order to get to high school. It's kind of funny because the exams were not prepared or graded in Guyana. That took place in England. Between eleven and thirteen, you had a chance to write the exam, which is given once a year. If you didn't get it by thirteen, too bad, you missed out on a chance to go to high school. The exams are scored and ranked and because the ranking is based on the entire island, only the top few students had a chance to go to high school.

Because of the strong value for education in the Caribbean and the competitive nature of secondary schooling, the elementary school structure was very rigidly structured to maximize an objective pedagogy. Learning was teacher driven, and students were the recipients of the masters' knowledge. Consequently, teachers were expected to impart content and to prepare students to pass the high school common entrance exam.

As a result of the value placed on education as a means of social mobility, families placed great emphasis on educating their children and went to great lengths to provide the material and social support necessary for learning. Commenting on the academic support she had from the family and the community, Yvonne explained,

I grew up, influenced by the people around me, and for most of them, what was important was education. I was strongly influenced by my father, but not just my father; it was also in terms of the family, and it was also in terms of peer groups; it was in terms of the whole community. You know, we all seemed to have this similar kind of vision.... Because the society was supportive, the friends were supportive; there were lots of things in society that helped. You were always reminded by members of the community and family members of what could happen if you do not do well in school.... The church was also supportive. The church was a very big part of my life, and there was a very strong Christian ethic.... To us West Indians, education is the only way out of poverty. There was a lot of emphasis on getting a good education.... Because of the emphasis placed on education, we learned how to study; we learned how to learn.

Several of the women articulated Yvonne's description of the social support they received and the value that the community had for education. They described the seriousness associated with learning, their rigorous study habits, and the emphasis placed on institutional knowledge.

Since the goal of education was the reproduction of knowledge, few opportunities were available in schools for the construction of knowledge in a collaborative environment. However, despite the rigid school structure, there was social support for learning within the environment. Giffa, for example, noted, "What I remember most was how encouraging the teachers were, especially if you were a good student. That is one of the things I missed here in the States."

Although participants enjoyed the social capital resources available for learning, they acknowledged that these social capital resources were not equally disseminated. Power and privilege were reserved for the few academically promising students. Norma noted,

My relationship with teachers was always the best.... I think that, unfortunately, if you are smart, and even if you are not well behaved, they are willing to bend the rules a little. I think teachers are very important, and I was influenced by several. Looking back, I think it was a little unfair for me being always at the front of the class. I would get to hand out the books and little things like that, and sort of like the dumber kids were in the back.... Now I don't think this is necessarily fair. If my son isn't that smart, I don't want him treated in this manner. I want him to have the same access and the same treatment as that bright kid.

Today, as adult parents, some of the women acknowledge the injustice that resulted from the power dynamics inherent in a culture that defined social status by academic excellence, which in turn was defined and assessed by Western standards. Because of the emphasis of meeting those standards, the educational system nurtured a few and neglected the majority of its learners. However, as a result of the social and cultural capital resources that were available to support their learning, the participants agreed that the rigid school structure, the emphasis on mastering objective knowing, and their disciplined study habits contributed to their ability to excel in American educational systems.

In summary, while the family and community structures promoted informal and collaborative learning arrangements, the school communities emphasized formal learning in structured environments. As a result of that early socialization to learning, the participants associate constructivist learning with the type of learning that takes place in the collaborative environments of family and community and objectivist learning with formal institutional learning. Consequently, their exposure to both ways of knowing influenced their learning and development as immigrants in a Western country.

Immigration and Learning

We have established that the primary motivation for immigrating to America was for better opportunities that were not available in the home country. However, upon arriving, the women were met with culture shock, ridicule, aloneness, and a lost sense of self. They had graduated high school with several ordinary and advanced level certifications and held professional jobs in their country. They were quite visible as emerging leaders and professionals. However, upon entry into the United States, they had to learn to transform themselves into marginal and invisible individuals.

Learning to be marginal. The transformation from power in their home country to marginality, and hence invisibility in the host country was a painful process for the women. The transition was less challenging for those who were received by members of a Caribbean community, who attempted to soften the harshness of acculturation for the novice immigrant. For those who did not enter into a community, the early transitional experiences were far more challenging. Rita, for example, did not have a Caribbean community to welcome her upon her arrival. She immigrated to the United States to join her Caribbean husband who was then in the American military and stationed in a community in the Southwest, where there was not a Caribbean presence. Her husband, therefore, was her only Caribbean

connection in the United States and her primary link to the outside world. In describing her early experiences with marginality and invisibility, Rita explained,

When I came here at 24, I was emerging as a potential leader on my island. I had served one year as an elementary school principal, and I was active in my church and community organizations. I was a member of the village council and as a young leader, I was highly respected within my community, and I was visible. When I arrived here, my world collapsed. I had few social contacts because at first, I did not work outside of the home. The first few African American contacts I made would constantly correct me at the way I spoke and the way I pronounced my words. They would say to me, "this is not how we say it," and proceeded to tell me the right US pronunciation. Because of the embarrassment of always being made to feel stupid, I initially avoided social contacts. Therefore, my husband became my world, and I became dependent on him for my early socialization into American life.

Rita's story speaks to many of the women's early experiences in America and their experiences with self-doubt. During the interviews, the participants discussed the ridicule they encountered from American citizens because of their unfamiliarity with the cultural norms and practices. Most humiliating of all was the ridicule that resulted from their Caribbean accents. As a result, some of them retreated from outside contacts with the American public and relied primarily on the Caribbean community in learning their way through American cultural systems.

Learning American ways. Learning their way through the milieu of American institutions was a daunting task. The task was made easier for those who immigrated into a Caribbean community enclave, where expert resident immigrants taught them the ways of the land. Some women learned from modeling after members of the culture and adopting some of their behaviours and practices. As they moved away from their Caribbean community, and they began to interact with members of the wider society, their knowledge about life in America continued to expand. As Chris articulated,

I can recall many people who helped me learn the American way. I think it started out with my immediate family members, who were already in the US. My sister and my brother and mostly my aunt whom I lived with were my teachers in the beginning.... But most of my learning took place after I met my husband who had been in the US long before I came. He

was very supportive; he was like a guiding angel. Because I was not aware of the US culture, he guided me along.

For many of the women, their husbands played a significant role in their learning and development. Not only were they among the most significant teachers, they were most supportive in the women's quest for further education. This form of spousal support was found to be very important in the maintenance of careers in white dominated cultures, where Black women are often marginalized and silenced. Because of the level of support that existed in their home, it became a place of refuge, a safe place where they could retreat after negative encounters within America's sociocultural environments. This study also found that having this "homeplace" was particularly important to them as they made entry into institutions of higher education.

Realities of American educational systems. The women immigrated to the United States with the message that career opportunities came with education. Consequently, they embarked on an academic journey in their quest for a better life. This journey took them to America's institutions of higher education, where they found that speaking in class was one of the greatest challenges that they faced in the classroom. Their early school experiences did not readily promote classroom dialog, and the experiences they encountered in America as a result of their Caribbean accents made it particularly difficult for them to use their voices to articulate their thoughts and ideas. In the Caribbean secondary classroom, ideas were expressed on paper, through essays, creative writing, and analyses of texts. Consequently, using the voice to articulate knowledge was not a part of their early schooling socialization. They became silent knowers in an academic culture, where their silence contributed to their invisibility and marginality. Giffa shared her experiences within the American classroom; she noted,

When I first started school, I was nervous and I was afraid to speak because of the experiences I had with other people telling me that they did not understand me. I was afraid that they would not understand me and so I didn't speak, even though I wanted to participate in class discussion. I knew the information, but I was afraid to speak.... The students and the teachers would not talk to me, I think because I was so quiet. The teacher would talk to other students in and out of class, but he would not talk to me. They started to come around when they found that I was a bright student. Because I would not talk in class, they thought I was stupid.

The women shared similar experiences with schooling and the impact of these interactions on their concept of self. Because they were silent, they became invisible. Moving from a position of visibility and power in their home country to one of invisibility, silence, and marginality in the new country definitely impacted their sense of identity and self-definition. Interestingly, however, the study revealed a shift in identity as the context of the learning changed. For example, when within their Caribbean community in the United States and in other informal environments, they experienced a more positive sense of self and found their voice to articulate their thoughts. In formal locations dominated by Whites, however, they experienced a shift in identity as they moved from voice to silence.

The study also found that as participants moved within the institutional culture and were accepted by cultural members over time, this outsider-within feeling slowly minimized. Yolanda, for example, said,

At first, because I was a quiet student, they would not talk to me or associate with me. That was very difficult for me to understand. If you do not speak in class, people look at you as if you are dumb. After a while, they began to realize that I was a bright student, and they began to accept me, and I began to see myself less like an alien.

This experience suggests that the longer one remains with a cultural group and the more she interacts with that group's membership and is accepted by them, perceptions of being marginalized diminishes. However, to facilitate the developmental process, the women had to negotiate the expectations of their bicultural worlds.

Negotiating sociocultural expectations of home and host cultures. The women had to resolve the tension between the cultural norms of their country of origin, where knowledge was something acquired, not something constructed, and the American culture where personal authority and independent thought are valued. Because of the power of language and voice in the acquisition, construction, and demonstration of knowledge in the American culture, they felt compelled to reconstruct voice and language in order to meet the expectations they had for career development in the United States. As Norma noted,

One of the messages I got from my cousins when I first got here was that I should practice speaking more like an American and lose the Guyanese accent. I remember one day we went to Woolworth's and I was speaking to my cousin across the aisle, and she said to me, "s-h-h-h, don't speak so loud, people are going to hear you." I said, "Oh my God Sandra, look at this thing here," in my Guyanese accent, and she went, "God, I don't

know her. Girl, haven't I told you not to talk like that in public; you are making people think that you are some savage from the West Indies." She made such a big deal about it that, at that moment, I realized I had work to do in changing the way I spoke. I had to work to soften the strong accent.

Norma's experience spoke to that of many of the participants who were instructed by the more expert transnationals to change their speech patterns in order to sound more like an American. Sounding more like an American was a way to hasten the acculturation process and partake in the opportunities for a better life. However, some of them struggled with the tension between maintaining their national identity and compromising it for the better life. Yolanda spoke to that tension:

One of the first jobs I applied for here in America was a secretarial job with a big company. After I had the interview, they wanted to hire me, but they told me that they were afraid that their customers would not understand me because of my West Indian accent. I did not get the job. From that day, I took my auntie's advice and I practiced speaking slower and less like a Bajan.... I felt like I was selling out, but those of us who are foreigners come to this country to better ourselves. I don't think I would be where I am today if I continued to speak in a strong Bajan accent.... When I am not in a professional place and when I am with island friends, my Bajan accent comes out just as strong. I guess I can switch without knowing.

Negotiating language to fit the context of the interaction was one strategy that the women used to minimize the negative effects of their immigrant identity and for maximizing the opportunities for professional development. The women came with a strong ambition to succeed and were determined to work hard to accomplish their goals. Accomplishing their goals meant that they had to be visible and we had to speak out. Therefore, they had to negotiate their earlier conceptualization of silence, find their voice, and gain their visibility in order to be recognized as credible learners in institutions of American higher education.

In summary, what this study found was that the women's learning and development took place within social contexts of home and host cultures and propelled by personal agency. In the next section, I will present a reconceptualization of the model advanced by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) to demonstrate how cultures, contexts, and personal agency come together to inform our knowledge of these women's development.

Reconceptualizing Women's Ways of Knowing: A Transnational Perspective

Immigration scholars (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1995) call attention to the fact that a significant proportion of today's immigrants who settle in the United States still maintain strong ties with their home country. To capture the essence of the back and forth movement of these migrants across national borders, these authors propose the use of the term "transnational migration" or "transnationalism" (Glick Schiller, 1999). According to Glick Schiller (1999),

This new approach makes visible the networks of immigrants that extend across international borders. It posits that even though migrants invest socially, economically, and politically in their new society, they may continue to participate in the daily life of the society from which they emigrated but which they did not abandon. (p. 94)

This view, then, presents Caribbean migration as a transnational process, whereby the immigrant maintains loyalty and ties to both home and host countries and is, therefore, influenced by both cultures. From this transnational perspective, it is important to understand how this dual-place orientation influences Anglophone Caribbean women's ways of knowing.

With the publication of *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986), the field of adult development was jolted out of its complacency with male-biased theories of learning and development. As scholars and educators, our understanding of learning and development had been informed by traditional theories based on all-male and mostly male samples (Belenky et al, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1991). These biased theories provided educators with developmental frameworks to guide educational practice, forcing women into an uncomfortable and sometimes harsh educational environment (Belenky et al).

Attending to women's developmental experiences, alternative studies offer a feminist rebuttal to male-biased research. While these studies have advanced our knowledge of women's development, they have neglected to include, in any substantial way, the experiences of women of color. Although research has pointed out that adult development is gender related, Luttrell (1989) points out that women do not share a single developmental experience and that other sociocultural contexts, such as race, class, culture, nationality, and ethnicity, influence a woman's development and her interpretation of her experiences. Just as their male counterparts, some female scholars are advancing theories that take an essentialist approach to adult development. *Women's Ways of Knowing*, the most widely acclaimed theory of women's development to date, is no exception. While the theory contributed

meaningfully and substantively to our understanding of women's epistemological development, it did not inform our understanding of the multiple realities that shape the lives of women of color, particularly that of those who spent their formative years in another country.

Although the model as presented by Belenky and her associates does not represent the experiences of Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women, the dimensions of the model can be reconceptualized to help our understanding of their development transnationally. This is a reminder that development theories or models should not be viewed as essentialist but as fluid constructs that can have different interpretations, based on the sociocultural contexts of the lifeworld. This reconceptualization stems from the experiences of the women who participated in the study and from the academic literature on Caribbean people's development.

An analysis of the women's learning and development experiences suggests that the participants navigated the epistemological positions advanced in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, but they were not fixed in any one particular position. The findings indicate that the epistemological positions of Silent Knower, Received Knower, Subjective Knower, Procedural Knower, and Constructed Knower are not stages of epistemological development, but different positions that a woman occupies as she interacts with the various systems within the sociocultural environment. An important finding was the interactional roles of agency, social capital, and the sociocultural environment in influencing the epistemological position that a woman occupies (see Figure 1).

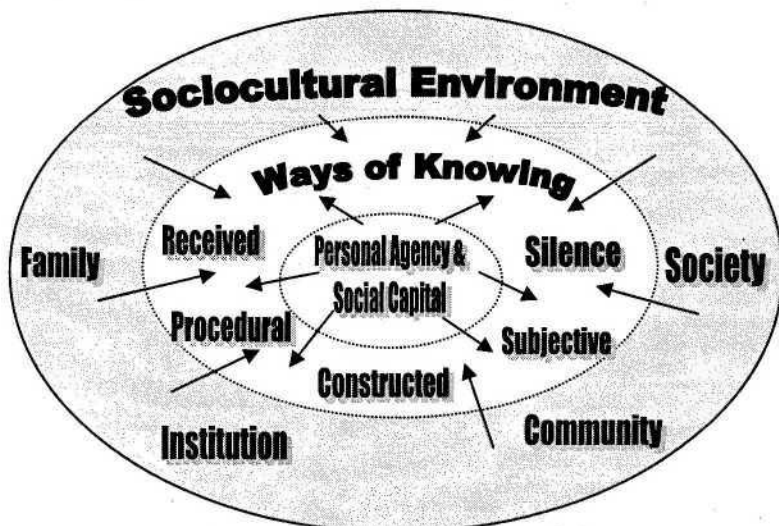


Figure 1: Sociocultural Contexts of Knowing

The sociocultural systems are embedded within the sociocultural environment and include the family, both in the United States and in the Caribbean; the community, both American and Caribbean; the institution, primarily the school and the workplace; and the society at large. The individual's perception of her access to the social and cultural capital resources within the sociocultural environment influences the epistemological position she evokes.

Individual agency is the catalyst that interprets the sociocultural environment and positions the self within the best and safest way of knowing. The contexts of the learning, therefore, influence the learning epistemology and positions the learner as a silent knower, subjective knower, received knower, procedural knower, or constructed knower. Learners, then, float among these positions as they acquire and construct knowledge. Below, I will discuss the women's navigation among these epistemological positions.

Silent Knowers. This is the first position in Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's (1986) framework, and they describe the women in this position as those who experience themselves as voiceless and mindless and who rely on external authority for their sense of self. As Belenky et al. (1986) note, "Although the silent women develop language, they do not cultivate their capacities for representational thought. They do not explore the power that words have for either expressing or developing thought" (p. 25). What this study of Caribbean women demonstrates is that the notion of silence is not a universal phenomenon and that it has cultural interpretations.

The women in this study were found to be silent in American educational systems because of their socialization in an academic culture, where oral speech was not used in the evaluation of competence. While some Caribbean women choose a position of silence upon entering the American classroom, they are neither deaf nor dumb, but are articulate and often intellectually stimulating. For example, Norma, who is today a medical doctor, noted the following:

Because I was a quiet student in class, they thought I was dumb. I would sit quietly and get my work done, and when the grades came out, everyone wanted to know who was that person who maxed the text.... At home it was kind of rude to interrupt the teachers when they are talking. If you did not understand something, you would ask the teacher after class.

In West Indian cultures, silence in the presence of authority figures is viewed as a sign of respect and a demonstration of proper upbringing. Accordingly, Triandis (1989) posits that in collectivist cultures that stress

interdependence and social connections rather than individualism, the rules of speech tend to be more tightly regulated by relationships and statuses. Because of the status ascribed to teachers during these women's early school experiences, the privilege of free speech was ascribed primarily to the teacher, and sanctioned voice to the student. Consequently, they learned to be silent in formal academic settings, where speaking in class was done primarily through invitation.

Caribbean women also develop another form of silence to protect their definition of self. Because of the ridicule they encountered as a result of their language upon first entering the United States, they adopted silence as a strategy for protecting their constructed definition of themselves. Upon entering less threatening environments, their Caribbean communities, for example, voice was the vehicle for defining self and for demonstrating competence. Marcia, for example, in talking about her early experiences in the United States, noted,

You know, instead of them telling me that they did not understand me, or that is not the way we say it here in the US, I would sit there and say nothing.... I got tired of having to think of where I was so I could speak proper.... My cousin had told me that I must not speak like a Bajan when I am in public.... When I am at home, I can remove the mask and be myself.

This experience is representative of that of many of the other participants and suggests that the contexts of place and the level of social capital resources within the environment influence the back and forth movement from silence to voice, and hence, one's perception of her identity. The perception of being in one's "homeplace" or in a "safe place" also influences the movement from a position of silence to voice. Collins (1991) suggests that the Black woman's safe space is a social space where she can speak freely. In these spaces, it is safe for the Black woman to freely function and "do the things that normal Black women do. This space serves as a prime location for resisting objectification as the Other" (Collins, 1991, p. 95). Unlike Belenky's (1986) model that sees silence as a fixed position occupied by women who have no concept of agency, Anglophone Caribbean women of the African Diaspora use silence to resist the objectification of self as Other. This position, however, changes with context.

Received Knowers. According to Belenky et al (1986), Received Knowers are women who learn from listening to the voices of others and who have not found their voice to articulate their constructed knowledge. However, this study found that while some of the women preferred to learn

from authority, they were highly reflective and had the abilities to construct their own knowledge, which was often represented in their written work.

Their preference for learning from the experts stems partly from their early socialization within a colonial education system, mediated through European philosophy, curricula, structure, methodology, textbook, and certification (Senior, 1991). As Senior notes, "while the standards of education and facilities vary from one Caribbean country to the next, the structure imported, mainly from Great Britain, is similar in all the countries" (p. 46). This structure emphasized competition for few secondary slots and certification as a demonstration of knowledge. Consequently, their chances of attending high school or of having their knowledge validated through certification depended upon their abilities to reconstruct or reproduce the knowledge handed down from experts. This phenomenon of received knowledge was rewarded with a secondary education or with the recognition of being a bright student.

Although the women were socialized as received knowers, they were also socialized to be reflective knowers, as the demonstration of knowledge was often in the form of critical analyses or essays. Adjusting to an objective form of assessments was one of the difficulties the women faced in American education systems. As Yolanda noted,

When I first started school, I had a hard time with the true and false and multiple choice tests. I did not know how to study for these. At home, we wrote essays for our exams, and I was good at writing essays; but here, I had to get used to the true and false.

While the women were socialized into a system of banking knowledge, the reproduction of that knowledge, for the most part, was through critical and reflective analyses.

Goldberger (1996), in her reframing of the epistemological positions in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986) notes, "Receiving knowledge from external authority is not necessarily unreflective and automatic; at times one may choose to listen and receive knowledge from others" (p. 347). The women were found to occupy the position of received knowers in structured learning environments, particularly when opportunities for career development were dependent upon academic credentials. In less formal environments, they positioned themselves to receive indigenous knowledge from family and community members—knowledge that prepared them to manage life's struggles.

Subjective Knowers. According to Belenky et al. (1986), the women at this position place strong value on their intuition and their own internal

truths. These women depend on gut feeling for the truth. The women in this study navigated to a position of subjective knowing, particularly when faced with the management of life's struggles. Much of the indigenous knowledges acquired as children stemmed from the intuitive wisdom of family and community members. These were lessons from the gut and provided a tool kit for managing the struggles of living. Collins (1991) sees these personal experience or wisdom as central to learning. According to Collins, one acquires knowledge through wisdom, which is the ability to negotiate the forces in one's life through intuition. Wisdom provides us with the knowledge to live and survive, despite oppressive forces.

Because Caribbean women have historically taken on the role of *de facto* household heads, rearing and caring for their children (Olwig, 1993), they have had to rely on the subjective knowledge of self and others in the management of their households. According to Senior (1991),

Most Caribbean women are faced with problems related to the survival of their households and with developing strategies for coping. In the English-speaking Caribbean, an overwhelming majority of the female population is in charge of producing, providing, controlling, or managing those resources essential for meeting daily needs. Women's strategies for coping or "making do" extend far beyond conventional concepts. (p. 129)

As a result of their historical development within the structure of *de facto* household head, Senior notes that Caribbean women have developed as resilient, independent people with a strong sense of personal agency.

As a result of their strong sense of autonomy and agency, some have played critical roles in extra domestic and economic affairs (Olwig, 1993). Olwig found that the women's ability to engage in extra domestic affairs has been made possible through their networks of domestic relations with family, friends, and community members who have supported them in their developmental efforts both inside and outside of the home.

Through this relational approach, members learned to trust their intuition as well as those of others. This is a shift from the conceptualization of Belenky et al.'s (1986) model where the women in that position were viewed to value only their intuitive knowledge at the disregard of that of others. The context of networks and kinships consisting of extended family and community members were found to be important dimensions of Caribbean women's development.

Procedural Knowers. Belenky et al. (1986) identified two distinct types of procedural knowledge, which they named "separate" and "connected"

knowing. Separate knowing involves objective, analytical, detached evaluation of knowledge. Separate knowers challenge the knowledge that is being presented and take issue with it (Goldberger, 1996). They are objective in their thinking and have a vested interest in formal educational structures. Connected knowers, on the other hand, believe in the knowledge presented and try to incorporate it into their own knowledge base. Clinchy (1996) refers to these two groups of knowers as the doubters and the believers.

In listening to the voices of the Caribbean women as they reflected on their early and then later school experiences, there was a gradual shift from connected to separate knowing. Their early schooling in the Caribbean socialized them to be connected knowers. Because their form of learning was not to question the power of authority in either formal or informal settings, they grew up as connected knowers. However, upon arriving in the United States, they were met with a culture where separate knowing was encouraged and viewed as a vital part of learning. Therefore, for the most part, they remained silent in the American classrooms while other students challenged the teacher and the written word, discussed the issues, and verbalized their constructed knowledge.

Being a silent and connected knower had its own rewards in the Anglophone Caribbean classroom. The students who sat quietly in class, absorbed the words of authority, and successfully reproduced the knowledge on an examination were often classified as bright students, and received additional attention from the teacher. This educational structure stifled the development of separate knowing in Caribbean educational systems. Over time, here in the United States, the participants have learned to become separate knowers in the American classroom and challenge the work and ideas of those who profess to know.

Constructed Knowers. Constructed Knowers have been defined to have an integrated sense of self and who are articulate and self-reflective. These women have reconstructed positive images of themselves and refuse to accept others' negative definition of them (Belenky et al., 1986). According to Goldberger (1996),

constructed knowing is the position at which truth is understood to be contextual; knowledge is recognized as tentative, not absolute; and it is understood that the knower is part of (constructs) the known.... [C]onstructed knowers value multiple approaches to knowing (subjective and objective, connected and separate). (p. 5)

Patterns of the women's growth and development clearly demonstrated characteristics of constructed knowing. Although they were first socialized

within an objective epistemological orientation, they continue to grow in the value they place on their own ability to construct knowledge. This growth is facilitated *in* environments with social capital resources, where participants are made to feel welcome, and where the contexts of their race, gender, language, and ethnicity, do not create barriers to their development. For example, in reflecting on her learning experiences over time, Jackie enthusiastically noted,

Oh my God, learning is life. That is my whole concept. To live and to breathe is to learn. Learning is walking down the street, where you can learn so many different things. Learning is everything that you do; it is everything that you are introduced to. The people you meet, all of that encompass learning, and that is what I am getting now. Before, it was all about passing the common entrance exam. Now it is about learning, and it is so pleasurable.... As I am learning, I am growing as a person, and as I am growing, I am ever learning.

Jackie was the youngest participant at 35 years old and the only single parent in the group. Like many of the participants, she was found to be highly reflective, passionate about living and learning, and committed to a moral and ethical life, guided by a sense of spirituality.

Conclusion

In Summary, this study found the epistemological perspectives articulated in *Women's Ways of Knowing* to represent different positions within which a woman navigates as she learns and develops. Because of the flexibility in women's ways of knowing, a woman can evoke any of these positions depending on the sociocultural contexts of the learning situation and the meaning she gives to it. Then, based on the perception of self within the learning arena and the level of social capital inherent in that environment, she evokes one of the five epistemological positions. Context, therefore, is the nucleus that shapes women's learning and epistemological development. To emphasize the significance of contexts in the learning experiences of women of color, Bing and Reid (1996) note,

If we accept the idea that the way a woman "knows" or experiences her world changes as her position changes in an ever-shifting cultural context, we are forced to explore the meaning of context and examine its full implications. Otherwise, we accept the continued derogation of women of color, who already hold a tenuous position in the power structure, and prevent them from having a meaningful voice in society. (p. 193)

The power structures that Bing and Reid refer to are situated within the sociocultural environments of family, community, institution, and the wider society. Embedded within these structures are the tools, symbols, resources, strategies, and social and cultural capital the individual requires to manage the expectations of the learning process. The problem for women of colour, and immigrant women in particular, is the extent to which they have access to these resources to improve their power positions in formal learning institutions.

This study clearly demonstrates the need for further exploration on women's learning and development, particularly from a sociocultural perspective. The sociocultural view pays attention to the values, practices, and resources inherent in learning communities and highlights how these validate some and marginalize others (Alfred, 2002). The larger question that the sociocultural view poses to educators concerns the conditions they might create in order to allow for multiple worldviews in academic discourse. In other words, we need to give value and credibility to multiple voices and expand the knowledge that dominates the field to include a more sociocultural perspective.

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