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## **Gender Rules: Discrimination and Tradition Among Caribbean-Born Women in US Colleges**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The experiences of immigrant women of color within US higher education provide a unique opportunity to understand the complex influences of intersecting identities within the context of changing social contexts. To determine how the social categories of gender, class, race, and nationality operate in Caribbean immigrant women's experience of being college students, focus groups were conducted with 27 English-speaking Caribbean-born women attending NYC undergraduate colleges. Data show when women move to the US they come from gendered cultural traditions that determined their social roles in the Caribbean. For most women, these rules continue to operate in the US. However, gender roles and traditions are not homogenous throughout the Caribbean, hence, there is variation in how they play out in women's experiences in the US. Further, the formerly distinct boundaries between some Caribbean traditions and US traditions are being challenged. These findings underline the complex influence of intersecting identities in women's roles and call attention to how they affect social identification in the context of college pursuits and other aspects of their lives. In light of increased cross-cultural contact and globalization these findings provide a better understanding of factors affecting the psychological adjustment of Caribbean immigrant women in the US and have implications for enhancing their adaptation across changing social contexts.

### **Keywords:**

Migration, Caribbean women, US higher education

### **RESUMÉN**

Las experiencias de las mujeres inmigrantes de color dentro de la educación superior de los Estados Unidos brindan una oportunidad única para entender las complejas influencias de las identidades que se cruzan en el contexto de contextos sociales cambiantes. Para determinar cómo las categorías sociales de género, clase, raza y nacionalidad operan en la experiencia de las mujeres inmigrantes caribeñas de ser estudiantes universitarios, se llevaron a cabo grupos focales con 27 mujeres de habla inglesa nacidas en el Caribe asistiendo a universidades de NYC. Los datos muestran que cuando las mujeres se trasladan a los Estados Unidos provienen de tradiciones culturales de género que determinan sus roles sociales en el Caribe y para la mayoría de las mujeres, estas reglas continúan operando en los Estados Unidos. Sin embargo, los papeles y las tradiciones de género no son homogéneos en todo el Caribe, por lo tanto, hay variación en cómo juegan en las experiencias de las mujeres en los EE.UU. Además, las fronteras anteriormente distintas entre algunas tradiciones del Caribe y las tradiciones estadounidenses están siendo cuestionadas. Estos hallazgos subrayan la compleja influencia de la intersección de las identidades en el papel de las mujeres y llaman la atención sobre cómo afectan la identificación social en el contexto de las actividades universitarias y otros aspectos de sus vidas. A la luz del aumento del contacto intercultural y de la globalización, estos hallazgos proporcionan una mejor comprensión de los factores que afectan el ajuste psicológico de las mujeres inmigrantes caribeñas en los Estados Unidos y tienen implicaciones para mejorar su adaptación a través de contextos sociales cambiantes.

### **Palabras claves:**

Migración, mujeres del Caribe, educación superior de los Estados Unidos

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REGLAS DE GÉNERO: DISCRIMINACIÓN Y TRADICIÓN  
 ENTRE MUJERES NACIDAS EN EL CARIBE EN COLEGIOS DE ESTADOS UNIDOS

*But it is not a good feeling to know that people judge you just because you're a woman.*

*(Focus Group Participant).*

This poignant statement could be spoken in the language or dialect of almost any country and still find resonance in the women of that country, and indeed, throughout the world. Historically, women have faced global inequities and continue to contend with many of the same injustices today (Leo-Rhynie, 2003; Clarke & Braun, 2009). However, despite the persistent inequities and injustices accompanying being judged inferior, patriarchy is not an effective leveler of women's differences. While all women share in gender oppression, the forms of oppression and its consequences vary among women, depending on the positions they occupy within structures of race, class, and sexuality, and all the other ways in which women are different from each other (Lorde, 1984). Cole (1998) argues it is necessary to address differences among women while discussing our commonalities if we are to be accurate in accounts of women's lived experiences and be mindful of the multiple other categories into which women of a particular group might fit.

Advocating a global analysis of Black women's experiences, Collins (2000) uses the term "transnational matrix of domination" to describe how patterns of intersecting oppressions may be organized differently from society to society, and still retain their challenging effects. When Caribbean women immigrate to the US, the matrix of domination they experienced at home shifts, but is not completely erased by the matrix of the local reality for Black women in the US. Since formal education is one of the "social institutions that regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions that Black women encounter" (Collins, 2000; p.228), this study's focus on Caribbean women's experiences as college students yields valuable insights into the complex nature of women's experience of patriarchy within particular social structures. Structures of patriarchal dominance and race and class discrimination operate in the lives of many immigrant women of color – and these exert their effects within, as well as outside of, educational institutions.

Social identity theory points to the importance of group membership for wellbeing (Tajfel, 1981). In the US in particular, culture, ethnicity, race, social class and gender are bases of affiliation for immigrants, persons of color and women. Further, the social context is significant for social identification: when the context changes significantly, the supports for identities shift and persons make efforts to maintain their important identities. For example, a study of Hispanic students attending predominantly Anglo colleges, found that among students with a strong ethnic identity, maintenance efforts included remoooring their ethnic identity to supports in the new environment by joining cultural groups and forming friendships with Hispanics at school (Ethier & Deaux, 1994).

The psychological and sociocultural factors contributing to the educational experience for foreign-born women of color are a complex mix of hindrances and helps. In psychological research there has been more attention to race and ethnicity than there has been to the role of social class and sexuality in women's cross-cultural social transitions. Crespo (1994) examined the effect of a popular saying originating in Puerto Rican working-class culture: "Study in case your husband turns out to be no good". Crespo argued this counsel recommends education as a route to independence and self-determination but it is based on traditional ideas about women's roles (heterosexuality, getting married), with education being an alternative to the ideal.

The story of Consuelo, an immigrant to New York, demonstrates how Puerto Rican women confront multiple challenges to pursuing an education, and can be used as a starting point for understanding the struggles of other immigrant women of color. Consuelo's language, race and class became barriers to education in the United States, and added to the patriarchal notions that had held her back in her home country. Women such as Consuelo, who persevere in their educational goals, despite



traditional attitudes and racist assumptions, achieve accumulated “revolutionary effects” (Crespo, 1994; p. 148). Crespo discusses this groundbreaking role more fully:

“An education gave women the possibility of depending less on men’s wages for their survival and that of their children. Financial self-sufficiency increased women’s options and gave them a better position from which to negotiate their relations within society. Women’s struggles for education and the ability to support a family without a husband also challenged structures of race and class that kept women subordinated” (p. 148).

Women’s decisions to migrate to the United States, therefore, are often based not only on their own ambitions, but on the opportunities they want for their families (Pessar, 1999). While their actions might be culturally innovative, by extending their ambitions beyond traditionally defined roles women were, in effect, pioneers for themselves and for others in their social sphere. Hurtado (1999) conducted a case study of Inocencia, a Mexican woman who led a cross-border existence between Mexico and Texas, and found this educational activism among the participant’s motivations: “Inocencia did not only want to reunite her family but she also wanted them to succeed. She was very willing to take the initiative to insure that all of her children would obtain the educational opportunities that the United States had to offer” (p.93).

This analysis is a departure from the common depiction of female immigrants in a supporting role to men who migrate, and contradicts stereotypical descriptions of poor women from the Global South. Pointing out the “master narratives” associated with immigration are based on men, Hurtado (1999) maintains Inocencia’s situation is common to that of many immigrant women of color. Like Conseuelo’s story, the account of Inocencia’s life is illustrative of how the simultaneity of gender, race, nationality, and class contributes to the challenges immigrant women of color encounter in pursuit of education and its benefits in the North.

Survival strategies employed by immigrant women as told of in these narratives are obliterated by the statistics quoted in US state and national reports on dropouts. Their stories illustrate the reality that some students leave institutions, but return (either to the same one, to another, or to several others) and eventually earn a degree. Gittel and Steffy (1998) report such findings in their study of students who left a US urban public community college before earning a degree: 70% of the students interviewed said they wanted to return to school, had already transferred, or were back in school. In another study, Gittel and Steffy (2000) found 59% intended to return to school, 28% had already transferred, and 4.9% were either back at that school or were on a leave of absence. One respondent, a 23 year-old woman said, “I definitely want to go back. I am trying to go back next semester. I planned to be at (the 2 year college) for about a year and a half and then transfer to (a 4 year college), but that got shot because my grades dropped – I was doing too much with work – there was too much on my plate and school was the last thing on it” (Gittel & Steffy, 2000).

In a study investigating reasons students stay or leave college (McAfee, 2000), cultural identity emerged as a central factor to many students’ stories and was tied to other influences. For example, having family role models, a sense of mutual caring which motivated students to finish school so they could improve their families’ circumstances, and a strong cultural identity increased the likelihood of staying in college. However, having a weak cultural identity, family responsibilities such as child care, or having to find work to support the family contributed to disrupted studies.

The importance of cultural identity in these participants’ stories is consistent with the large body of research establishing a link between immigrants’ and ethnic minority groups’ psychological well-being and their ability to negotiate dual contexts -- the dominant culture and their own ethnic minority group culture (Padilla, 1994; Jones, 1988; Triandis, 1981). According to LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton (1993), members of minority ethnic groups who achieve bicultural competence (the ability to move back and forth between cultures) are more likely to maintain psychological well-being. McAfee’s (1997) findings show, however, that while the ability to move between ethnic minority group culture and the dominant culture is important, students’ success is dependent on them retaining a strong identification with their ethnic group.

The findings of these studies underscore the enormous odds women overcome to enter or return to college, and the resilience involved in their successful completion of a degree. This body of research provides information important for addressing and improving the retention rates of non-traditional undergraduates. A concern beyond keeping women in college, however, includes an evaluation of how women may be affected by their experience of an unsupportive institutional environment, as part of their experience of the larger US cultural context. How is identification with their social, cultural and physical environment related to women's social integration within the US educational system? It is, therefore, worth exploring the gender roles and traditions with which Caribbean immigrant women of color in US higher education contend and the ways these affect their psychological well-being and success.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Twenty-seven English-speaking Caribbean-born female college students participated in the study. Participants were students at two undergraduate colleges in New York City, located in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Participants' mean age was 28 years old, with 45% of the group being between 26 – 46 years old; fifteen women were the traditional college age of 18-25 years old.

The national origins of the participants were representative of the overall Caribbean student population at the two colleges. Nine participants were from Trinidad, six from Jamaica, and four from Haiti; altogether, participants from these countries represented 70.4% of the total group. Other participants were from Dominica and St Vincent (2 from each country) and from St. Kitts, Barbados, Guyana and Grenada (1 participant each).

About 80% of the group immigrated between the ages of 18 – 33 years old; only 22.2% of participants immigrated before age 18. The average length of time participants had been in the US was 6.2 years, with the longest time since immigration being 17 years and the most recently-arrived participant having been in the US for less than a month. Approximately 66% of the group reported being US residents or US citizens; the other participants held F1 visas (i.e., were international students). Of those students who identified themselves as US residents, the researcher did not attempt to distinguish between those who were documented (i.e., green card or alien registration card holders) and those who were undocumented (illegal aliens). Four participants had lived in a country other than their home country prior to living in the US.

Prior to immigration, 48% of participants had completed high school only, 41% had some college or vocational training, and 7.4% had completed college. Less than 4% (2 participants) had not completed high school before moving to live in the US. Of the 11 participants who had transferred college credits from another institution, 6 transferred credits from an overseas college, 3 transferred credits from US community colleges and 2 persons transferred credits from other US undergraduate colleges. At the time the data was collected participants had been attending the institutions for an average of five semesters.

### **Procedure**

Methods of recruitment included posting fliers and handing them out on campus, attending meetings of Caribbean student groups, approaching students on campus to invite participation, and snowballing. When students indicated an interest in participating in the study, they were asked for contact information, and assigned an appointment for a focus group meeting. Each focus group participant received \$15.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

**Questionnaire.** Once they indicated their consent, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire in which they provided general background information (e.g., age, educational background, income level, marital status).



**Focus Groups.** Four focus groups were conducted on each campus, totaling eight focus groups conducted. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and was tape-recorded. Assorted drinks and snacks were provided. The discussions were open-ended, yet guided to include discussion of the following themes: negative and positive aspects of their educational experiences: access to institutional support; interactions with faculty and peers; attitudes of family, friends and partners toward their studies; juggling multiple roles (e.g., mothering, work, church, community, extended family). The focus groups allowed the researcher to take seriously the influence of the social context in the construction of meanings and identities, and enabled observation of women interacting with other women who are facing similar challenges as first-generation immigrants in college (Wilkenson, 1998).

#### Data Analysis & Interpretation

Prior to data collection, a preliminary list of data codes was generated based on the theoretical framework and prior research. This list of data codes directed the construction of the focus group and interview guides. As the focus groups progressed, minor adjustments were made to the discussion guides to render the questions appropriate for the participants in each site.

Transcription and processing was followed by thematic analysis of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The transcripts were first read in an open-ended way, and themes listed as they emerged. Then transcripts were mined systematically for themes consistent with a preliminary, and then amended, code list. Using the computer program, ATLAS Ti, codes were assigned to these themes, and then the material was sorted to identify theoretically meaningful patterns. Consistencies and inconsistencies with the theoretical framework were examined and noted. Also, those instances where the existing theory does not adequately capture the experiences of this group were noted and theorized.

## Results

In this study, gender themes were interwoven with themes of race, class and cultural identity. Participants' discussion of how they experienced immigration as women was set among interconnected concerns, demonstrating that immigrant women negotiate intersecting structures, and their gender-related concerns are linked to a wide range of experiences overlapping with their experiences as college students. Illustrative of the ways in which these women's lives as US college students are interwoven with their other roles, while we discussed college, women spoke of their lives as (a) Caribbean women – single or in relationships; (b) immigrant mothers and mothers who gave birth to first-generation Americans; (c) women who work; and (d) women of African ancestry. These themes have been used to organize the presentation of findings.

#### Gender and Tradition

Tradition, the handing down of beliefs, legends, and customs from generation to generation, is of particular interest in the context of immigration. When a woman leaves her country of origin to live in another, there is a large part of her home country remaining with her. Some of this exists as a latent memory seldom having direct bearing on her daily routine; other aspects of home are more dominant and these direct her choices as she creates a life away from home. In the same way there is no one way in which traditions are manifested across generations, neither is there any way to predetermine what traditions will persist when one leaves one's country of origin. What immigrant women do have in common, however, is that when they move to the US they have to contend with the traditions of their home country as well as those where they now live.

Beyond being from the same geographical region, Caribbean people have similarities in customs, culture and outlook linking them as an ethnic group. Despite the undeniable heterogeneity distinguishing Caribbean countries from each other and the diversity within each country, critical shared histories and experiences have forged strong cultural links across the nations. This is true throughout the English, French, and Spanish-speaking Caribbean, although ease of communication and varying colonial influences have resulted in more similarities within than across those language subgroups. However, regardless of country of origin, women who leave the Caribbean to live in the US carry with them memories, beliefs, and customs uniquely defining them as Caribbean women:

When you talk about tradition, I'm talking how my parents grow me, that's what I call tradition, how my parents grow me and how I came out. I'm talking the tales that my grandmother used to tell me that I can pass on to my kids. Because those to me are the fundamental things that you instill in your child that they'll never forget, you know because it's so easy to get side tracked in this country, it is so easy.

There are, however, some traditional gender values less resistant to change. As women who were born in the Caribbean and are pursuing a college education in the United States, participants in this study embodied an interesting mixture of holding on to traditional values and carving out new values for themselves. Although participants demonstrated a clear sense of what their traditional roles were, some women were critical of the relevance traditional roles had for their lives today.

Interviewer: So let me ask you something a little bit more on the personal side, would you say that you are traditional women compared with other women of your culture? Are you traditional women or non-traditional women?

A\_\_\_\_: Meaning?

Interviewer: Meaning, do you carry on a lot of the codes and the cultural practices and beliefs of the women of your culture—like your mother's generation and your grandmother [N\_\_\_\_ laughs] or are there things that you don't think are important anymore?

N\_\_\_\_: [laughing] I am not carrying the grandmother thing. The mother I am following some of that, [A\_\_\_\_: Right] but now, since the new generation, the millennium and everything -- forget it, I am doing my own thing, shoot. Because I am certain what my mother used to do then, I am not going to do it now, but I am doing my own thing. I am sure that what I am doing now she will never do it, so which is that, hey, everybody do their own whole new thing, you know. That's what I am saying. I am carrying some of my mother and continue to do my own.

S\_\_\_\_: Because being here and then, like you call it, the millennium or 21st century, you cannot act like you're living in a different world, you know, back in the 18th century, in fact you have to be ... [A\_\_\_\_: Up to date] Yeah, up to date.

For these women, their current social and temporal contexts demand of them a more modern approach to their lives. There is no ready-made way to live the lives they are living, with loyalties to home, school, work and family – all in a new country. Across the groups, few women described themselves as being traditional, although it was clear no one was completely ready to turn their backs on the traditional influences. However, some women were resolute: nothing less than the traditional way was going to do:

A\_\_\_\_: I'd say I'm traditional.

Interviewer: You're traditional?

A\_\_\_\_: Yeah, I kinda hold on to my past.

Interviewer: O.K.

A\_\_\_\_: About what my parents taught me, and what they say is what they learned from before. It's kinda like I was also grown in a— I was grown sheltered. My parent's sheltered me, and my father always sat me down and like, [taught] me a lot of stuff. That's why I didn't allow this culture to suck me in. I kept all my culture with me, and that's something I say I'm going to put into my-- I don't care, that's something I'm going to instill in my kids. That's why I make it my business right now that my son knows where I came from, what I had to go through. ... I'm not going to give up my culture. I'm not going to give up what I learned, and I'm going to pass it on to my kids and my grand kids if I could. I don't want to be sucked in like a lot of people are sucked into American life. I don't want that.

For this woman, holding on to traditional values and practices were a form of paying homage to her parents in recognition of all they had gone through to make life for their children. Her parents' efforts are embedded in her understanding of her culture and so there is no retaining her culture without the



memory of their struggle. For her, maintaining tradition means the sense of her parents' reality and their values are kept with her and passed on to her children. For other participants, what it meant to be traditional was complicated by the reality of daily living in the US. As these women negotiated various social demands, some deviation from the ways of the home country did not detract from their ability to consider themselves traditional:

A\_\_\_: I am traditional.

Interviewer: What are some of the things that you hold on to that are important?

A\_\_\_: In Haiti we have so many holidays that I still respect, then at Christmas usually—back in Haiti I used to go to church every Sunday, here because I go to work it's hard for me to do it. But I used to go to church on Christmas—You were expected to go to church on Christmas Day, New Year's day, I still do these things and what else? I live on my own—I mean I don't have anybody to follow it's just myself, but I still do the same things that my mother would do. ... I mean, once you come here it's hard to try to keep up with your culture but I still do. Only one thing, let me give you an example. Back in the day even though I didn't have a good relationship with my father, I would still write him or talk to him on the phone, but now I don't. I don't care. If I see him I'll say hi to him. But now I feel like I don't have to because it's different, I don't live in Haiti no more.

This participant describes herself as being a traditional woman, because she tries to reproduce traditional practices in her daily life. However, she admits there is at least one aspect of her life not reflecting traditional values – respect for one's parents. Indeed, unquestioning and enduring respect for parents is a common tenet in Caribbean households. Deference to one's parents is ingrained during childhood and extends into adulthood. This regard for parents is an example of a traditional value conflicting with modern values as women come of age in America. The meaning “leaving home” takes on for immigrants, further complicates the already charged developmental phase of transitioning to adulthood.

One thorny task in this transition is figuring out just what “home” one is leaving. Apart from the actual physical home of their parents or influential others, leaving home introduces the threat of leaving one's traditions behind. In the focus groups, women discussed how this tension between traditional and modern values was influencing their choices. In some cases, women were critical of what they had seen in their families and did not want to reproduce those traditions in their own future.

Interviewer: ... What were the roles?

T\_\_\_: The women belong in the house, stay home with the kids. Because of that my grandmother did not get to go to school. She went so far as all-age [school] because her mother thought that she is not going to waste her time on no gal pickney because gal pickney just a go get pregnant and whatever, whatever.

L\_\_\_: True

T\_\_\_: Which I think is ridiculous because a lot of women here, they get pregnant and they go along ... But my grandmother did not get to go to school and my grandmother is one smart woman.

L\_\_\_: Yes

T\_\_\_: But it is not a good feeling to know that people judge you just because you're woman.

The practice of not providing girls with an education beyond elementary level was widespread in Caribbean societies in earlier days. Usually, education and skills training was reserved for boys while girls were trained in household duties, in preparation for becoming good wives. This was especially true in poor, rural communities where opportunities for secondary education were limited. Today, this is not the case. However, although Caribbean girls are not systematically being denied educational opportunities because of their gender, they have not been relieved of societal expectations about their domestic abilities:

L\_\_\_: My mother is like an on a cusp. So now I get mixed [messages] from her. She will say, make sure you find this type of man, make sure you cook for him but make sure you do your education. So I'm like—[laughter]

M\_\_\_: Oh my God.



L \_\_\_\_: ...she is teaching me to get my education [Chorus: Right] but she is also saying, "Make sure you know how to take care of your man as well." [Chorus: Yes, Right] I'm not saying you can't do both but you can't do both full-time.

This message is not only passed on from mothers to daughters but is pervasive among their peers. Women told stories of being assessed by their boyfriends based on whether or not they could cook. One woman said she actually resented her mother for having taught her to cook, because now she has to fulfill her boyfriend's expectations of her. Another participant agreed, "... they expect it." All of this resentment could be avoided, they explained, if the men could be expected to share in household chores. And herein lies the problem:

L \_\_\_\_: In the Caribbean, we're trained to look after men, you know. We're not trained for them to look after us, or for them to look out for us, or for them to care for us, we're trained to care for them. So this is what they look forward to, for us to wait for them hand and foot. "Get me a beer" -- "Here honey." "Get me some food" -- "Here". [We] take it out, when they get to the table, put it there for them to eat. We're trained for that, Caribbean women, and it's different when you're here, like for women-- American women here, they won't do that. It's different.

Lo \_\_\_\_: ... They dominate, they think that they should be the number one figure, not the woman. So as she was saying, the Caribbean women they, they just take the back seat and let the men lead out. But now, it's like turned over, even more of the women are doing that than the men.

As this focus group continued, we discussed the extent to which expectations of and for women were changing among Caribbean people, both those living in the US and those in their communities back home. The previous quote captures a difference in perspective among the women in this study: Some thought the Caribbean traditional gender values were still as patriarchal as they ever were. As one woman argued, she had seen no change in her family back home, all her female relatives still treated the men "... as if they're the king, or what." For her, any change in her attitude was due to the exposure she had gained from being in the US. Other women thought things were changing back home to reflect more equitable arrangements. As women discussed how they would like things to be different in their own lives, they agreed for a relationship to work, "... it has to be reciprocal. It has to be a together thing, you and me. It can't be you do that and I'll do my thing on the side." Similarly, in another group, women admitted to being traditional "to a certain extent", however, their ideals were changing:

V \_\_\_\_: I think because we are educated and more open now, we can stop the cycle and choose. Because I have chosen a lot of things that I want and leave out things that I don't want. You know, things that I find was unfair, you know, stuff like that. I said, my boys are gonna do everything in the house. Girls the same thing. I'm not choosing work, you know, stuff like that—  
M \_\_\_\_: --there has to be parity, equality between two people. This disparity thing it don't work no more.

Chorus: Yeah. Right.

I \_\_\_\_: I'm like this, you know, we have a fifty-fifty share. I work, go to school. You work, do whatever. When we come home ... in terms of cooking and cleaning, we share the responsibility. If you're not— if you can't do that – 'bye. [Laughs].

Unfortunately, this may be more a reflection of their desires than their reality. No participant mentioned either having such a partnership herself or coming from a family background in which household responsibilities were not primarily the woman's domain. Based on these discussions, even though Caribbean women are now paid workers and professionals, they have added to (not replaced) their responsibility to the home and family. Gains Caribbean women have made in the public sphere have not offset domestic demands. Even in families who can afford to employ household and childcare help, it is the woman's duty to supervise these employees and ensure the smooth running of the household. Having claimed Caribbean men were changing, one participant offered as evidence having seen stay-at-home dads, at which the group erupted in laughter. Stay-at-home dads, one woman countered, was "... basically an American thing." Another participant was more reflective but still uncertain:

I don't know if Caribbean men would ever stay at home with the kids ... I don't think we could ever try to change that. I don't think that would ever change with Caribbean men, staying at home



with kids. But I'm not, I'm not going to say it may not, it's possible but, for the men-- yeah, I guess for the men that I've known, friends and personal -- I don't think...

As she struggles to give voice to the possibility men may be playing a more significant role in domestic and childcare duties, she reveals how tenuous the idea is, in practice. However, participants being so vocal about their dissatisfaction is witness to social change in the making for this generation. Instead of being blindly resigned to the way things are, these women were conscious of the traditional imbalance toward patriarchal values. This awareness was evidenced by their strong critique and keen analysis of the implications of gender inequity:

M\_\_\_\_: Every time I hear women speak about relationships the only thing that really strikes me is that you know who the lucky ones are? Men. Because we tire ourselves out. And in the Caribbean to a certain extent, I think it is much more complex, the issue with women. We are matrifocal as a society because men were simply not there. So in terms of the children, the support, you know, family structure, it's really centered on the women but, but you are really talking about real power, political and also psychological power in the society. It really belongs to men.

As the data presented in this section illustrate, Caribbean women share a complex tradition of being strong mothers and women, yet continue to live with patriarchal values. Coming from this heritage, some Caribbean women see American women as living lives with greater freedoms than theirs. The weight of their expanding responsibilities, the contrasting models they see around them in US society, and their increasing critical consciousness leads them to demand more of their relationships and to be less confined by traditional scripts. However, when they don't like or admire what they see in US society, their experiences might also polarize them to retain familiar traditional values.

#### Gender and Motherhood

Women in this study who were mothers contend with what every mother in modern society has to deal with – how best to divide time that is never enough among all her various obligations. When our conversations turned to mothering, however, women spoke less about time concerns than I expected them to do. The pull of work and family responsibilities did not render their college commitments less important; neither did these women voice any ambivalence about their decision to be students. In fact, there seemed to be among participants an uncompromising commitment to getting into school and getting the degree. This was especially clear in the case of one 24 year-old woman whose son was born when she was 19 years old and about to start college. While the group discussed freshman adjustment difficulties, her contribution gave us all pause:

My first semester was the worst but not because of that, because of my son. A newborn? Please. I was school, home, breast feed, back to school, back home. 'Cause he refused to take a bottle. So in between each class— and then I had to drag him to school with me. So that posed a problem. So my whole first semester was a mess.

She went on to tell us how she got through that first semester when her plans for child-care fell through. With no one else available at home, she had to take her son to school with her. Her brother was a student at the same college and they alternated their schedules so they were not both in class at the same time. They completed the semester like that, taking turns to care for the fussy baby. When she had difficulty finding a place to breastfeed, her brother located the Caribbean Club, a space where she could feed her baby-- if not in complete privacy, then in relative comfort. Since the room had computers, she was able to work on assignments in between classes while her son napped. This is not a typical day in the life of the “traditional” American college student.

If mothering can be placed on a continuum to demonstrate how mothers' concerns do not necessarily lessen as their children get older, but the nature of their concerns do change, then there was one participant whom I would place at the end of the continuum opposite to the participant mentioned in the preceding paragraph. This 44 year-old woman described herself as having been a “full-time wife and mother” throughout her college experience. She had two grown daughters who were also students at the college she was attending. She had completed all the credits necessary for a degree but was taking some additional classes she thought would make her more competitive on the job market. The added benefit of

being enrolled for an extra few semesters, she explained, was her and her two daughters being together in the same graduation procession.

This participant joined the group late; when she joined I told her we had just been discussing the challenges of attending college and asked her if she wanted to jump in:

Yes, certainly! I have a lot to say ... You know that ‘challenge’, I turned that challenge into something positive. Because ‘challenge’ for me was too hard. It was just making everything worse.

She did have a lot to say and it was important for her to be able to speak from the wealth of experience she had amassed in her various roles over the years. As this group discussion progressed, she functioned as a voice of wisdom and caution, tempering the younger students’ often angry and impatient critique of the many lines they had to walk as they pursued the degree. In her life she was countering the narrative framework I was facilitating – of the nontraditional student being “challenged”. To think of her experience as a challenge was not a useful formulation for her, and so she had inverted the narrative into something meaningful and productive for her. Did she face difficulties as a full-time wife and mother who worked full-time and was also a student? Absolutely. About those difficulties, she said,

There’s a lot, but it’s not important because this is my time, you know. When parents send children out and they take that time-- you know, sometimes we get children before we’re ready, right? Most of us. And you took that time out to focus on your kids, and now’s when we’ve got to come and claim that time, so I’m reclaiming that time now, you know, and that’s it. I’m really very happy.

She saw herself as being in a good place: she had raised her children and seen them through college and she was about to get a college degree. She was now able to celebrate what she had accomplished for herself and her family. She got there by focusing less on the difficulties ahead of her and more on what was possible. The four other women in this focus group, whose ages ranged from 18 to 27 years old and who did not have children, did not share the benefit of her vantage point and had not yet experienced her particular sense of satisfaction.

All mothers who participated in the study were concerned about how to raise children in America, whether their children were born in the US or had been born in their home countries and were now living in the US. Even those participants who were not mothers were able to connect with the dilemma of being immigrant-parents: how to pass traditional values of home to their children while raising them in America. They were clear about the importance of retaining the cultural values of their home countries but pondered together about how much was enough. Also, they shared a deep concern for figuring out how to facilitate their children learning beneficial values, while rejecting those they deemed undesirable.

N\_\_\_: The day that I do have my child I will not raise that child the same way other people are raising a child up here.

S\_\_\_: Yes but sometimes even you say that but you-- it’s not-- you’re going have to—

N\_\_\_: You heard that word called *laissez-faire*, I am not going to let it do. I am not going to let it happen. Because my mother ... in the house she still keeps the customs, the same things. The Haitian parents when they grow up like this they still keep it.

A\_\_\_: Some of them, I mean you can’t blame them because that’s the way they were raised.

The above quote is from a discussion about the importance of respect in Caribbean culture, in which participants commented on how they see children misbehaving in public, something they or their siblings could never do. At home, parents lay down strict guidelines for appropriate behavior, which are reinforced with “one look” in public. One participant gave the example of her brothers, aged five and twelve years old, who got in trouble for unruly behavior on the street even when their mother was not around. If someone was in the area who knew their mother, she would eventually learn of the incident and they would be punished. This type of community participation in childrearing is a common practice among people of the Caribbean, especially for those from rural areas. One benefit for immigrants to the US who now live in areas populated by other Caribbean people is being able to reproduce that sense of community within the enclave, knowing this is not necessarily how all people live in American society.



I find that this country is so full of separateness; this is what this country is basically all about. Now, first thing you have to teach your child is a sense of identity, I figure if you do that and you have a sense of identity and you have a family setting, a good family setting and a strong family background at home, there is nothing-- I'm not saying they won't deviate or they'll go and they'll do their stuff and whatever but they'll always come back, you know what I'm saying?

In this participant's opinion, a sense of self grounded in family and community was essential for countering the individuality characterizing US society. However, a strong identity is not simply dispensed by the spoonful at breakfast. How, exactly, did these mothers teach identity? In one focus group, three of the five participants were mothers, two of whom had both first- and second-generation immigrant children in each of their families. They were concerned about their decisions regarding the children, and the long-term effect of those decisions. For example, one mother had decided she was not going to be living in the US permanently so she sent her Jamaican-born children back home. However, her American-born nine-year-old son is "bright and good at sports" so she kept him here so "he can have certain opportunities", at least until it is time for him to go to high school. Then, she's not sure she wants him to stay in the US. If she does decide to move back to Jamaica, she wonders, "... am I depriving him of his heritage and everything?"

This mother's concern about the pros and cons of keeping her son here versus sending him back to Jamaica extend beyond his entitlements as a US citizen. Her tentative plan to send him home when he gets to high school age is not arbitrary: Many Caribbean-born people believe children get a better quality high school education in the Caribbean than the New York City public high school offerings. Another commonly held view is that children raised in the Caribbean are less prone to disciplinary problems than those raised in the US. As the two mothers continue the discussion, the larger context of their dilemma becomes clear:

V\_\_\_: My daughter, she went to Bishop's [High School, in Trinidad] and she really got a good education over there. I knew she wouldn't have gotten that here, unless I had money to send her to a private school or something like that. And the attitudes and stuff that they pick up here, it's a lot worse. You know, so now I'm debating [sending my son back home for high school] but I can't have my son grow up without me so, it's like, you know, what to do? I'm debating that.

B\_\_\_: I have the same problem. If I had someone to take care of my son, very well in Jamaica -- my other kids are grown ... I would let him stay there--

V\_\_\_: But growing up without you is, is not good.

It is not uncommon for Caribbean mothers living in the US to send their children back home where close community ties and family network provide them with more supervision than the mother is able to offer while pursuing her goals. The added advantage of what parents consider to be a superior education, based on the content area covered and higher standard of discipline in Caribbean high schools, is a major consideration in making this decision. When all goes well, children pass through adolescence and into young adulthood in the relatively structured environment their parents grew up in. During which time, it is hoped they gain a strong identity -- as individuals and as Caribbean young people. However, as is illustrated in the above excerpt, mothers are torn between wanting the benefits of home for their children and knowing the potential difficulties associated with not having their children with them.

Mothers whose American-born or foreign-born children are living in the US are also concerned with finding ways of instilling in their children a strong identity infused with a sense of their national cultural origins:

I make it my business, every vacation my son has, even if I don't get vacation ... every Christmas, every summer, my son goes [to St. Vincent]. I want him to learn my history. I mean, I say to him, "You're Vincentian," he refuses. He's like, "I'm not Vincentian, I'm American" He's like, "That's my flag, that's your flag." You know, but I have to work with him because the schools are brainwashing him. That's the problem. They're brainwashing my poor baby.

There was a strong interest in transmitting tradition evident among the mothers in this study. However, women did not want some elements of their cultural background passed on to their children:

B \_\_\_\_: ... As women, or our parents, we don't teach little boys how to respect little girls but we teach little girls how to come up and prepare to be a wife and a mother. We have to learn how to cook, and wash, and to be respectful to our husbands and what have you ...

V \_\_\_\_: And then how about back to the parents too, how they raise the boys. Because I know for me, my mom was guilty of that but she took it from her parents and passed it down. She treated the girls completely different; the boys were like kings—

G \_\_\_\_: Yeah, they get away with everything

B \_\_\_\_: Uh huh

V \_\_\_\_: -- did nothing in the house and the girls did everything. They pass that down and it's not right.

B \_\_\_\_: It's a cycle that has to be broken.

Overall, the group spoke of tradition as comforting for them and discussions resonated with an enduring yearning for familiar aspects of their home and upbringing. However, their desires were selective: Women wanted to take an active role in interrupting the transmission of traditional values that had not supported their development. While they might have been raised in a culture of patriarchal values, they did not want to reproduce these oppressive structures for their children.

#### Gender and Work

Caribbean women who immigrate to the US and attend college are usually classified as non-traditional students: They are first-generation college students, are older than the average college student, and many have families and jobs. Therefore, multiple obligations define the quality of the college experience for Caribbean students. Even those students who work have to maintain a full-time course load in order to satisfy financial aid requirements. This balancing act of work, school and family obligations makes it difficult to participate in group-work and research activities, and precludes attending extra-curricular activities such as student clubs, and college-wide programs that inform and/or entertain:

I am trying to get the hell out of this place. I'm tired of paying them money. Plus, I'm working full-time so I have no time to be in the club. So I'm like school, and as soon as class is finished I have to go to work and I work straight through till night. So the time to hang out is not there, because it's school, work, home.

Most Caribbean students, including those who had post-secondary or professional training in their home countries, do not yet have the US academic credentials most employers require. Caribbean women, therefore, find it easiest to find employment as household help, nannies, and caretakers of the elderly. They also work in the lower levels of the healthcare, foodservice and hospitality industries. The college students who occupy these jobs often endure severe hardships but see these jobs as the stepping-stones to achieving their aspirations:

My first job, I got it after four weeks when I came up here, as a baby-sitter for this family who treated me horribly. I had to cook, clean, wash, and look after 2 kids for \$250 a week, all right. For \$250 a week. I did that for 5 months, and I was like all right, all right, fine, I have to do it. All I kept saying to myself, I have to do this.

Working in this manner, in addition to juggling family and academic responsibilities, is a matter of economic necessity for these students, who are seeking upward mobility by way of the opportunities available in the US. Given the economies of the countries they left, the money they earn here is more than they would at home, even when they work at menial, low-paying jobs many Americans do not want.

If you do a random check of women pushing White babies in carriages, they really didn't come from that, and I think that ambition and drive and motivation to support their families back home is what brings them here in the first place.

The US income-earning potential is a significant pull-factor for women from the Caribbean but it is not the only factor influencing this stream of immigration. An additional benefit is they have access to college or some level of training, and a wider range of options than is available in their home countries:

I think that to me when you're at home, you just-- everybody's doing one thing, either teaching or working in the bank or whatever. That's the main difference. Here, as a woman you get more choices. You get to go into business, be a doctor, you get to have lessons, do different things.



And to me, when you go back home, you could go there and give back what you got. So you might go back home and open your own business-- be a businesswoman. Now you're a big thing. You're a big thing, you know?

In turn, the US economy benefits from their presence, as do the women for whom they work: People here want to earn their money. It is more valuable for a White female to work and pay minimum wages or better than minimum wages to Black females. So it is more cost effective to hire Black females without paying taxes or whatever they do, and the White females move ahead. But there're some clever Black females who do night work and study by day. I met a few of them, and they were on the Dean's List.

Therefore, Caribbean women are making the best of a situation that is, in many ways, undesirable. For the most part, the jobs they have while in college are not their dream jobs, but these facilitate their long-term goals. Although the nature of the work they do may not be ideal, these jobs are available and pay enough for them to fulfill their financial obligations and attend school. This is an important consideration in how they view the quality of their experience as immigrant college students. For these students, the bottom line is they will get a degree, so they do what they need to do to accomplish that goal.

#### Gender and Race

In the relatively homogenous racial context of Caribbean societies, residents use fine-points such as shade of skin color, hair texture, other physical descriptors, and rural/urban and class distinctions to establish and maintain subgroups. However, in the racially charged US, the two major distinctions are White and non-White. The experience of living as an African descendant in a country where one is among the majority is, in many ways, different from the experience of living as an African descendant where one is among the numerical minority. In the majority-Black context, one does not constantly think of one's Blackness in relation to others, since almost everyone else is Black. However, as the following quote illustrates, it does not take long for Caribbean immigrants to figure out how they are regarded in US society:

When you come up here its different because basically, you go out in the working world -- at least that's what my sister's been explaining to me. Out there, yes, they look at you as Caribbean, but you're Black, whether you like it or not, you're not White, you're just Black, you're a Black woman.

This is not neutral labeling. Coming into a country expecting new worlds of opportunity, only to find these are constrained by social categorizations is a hard lesson to learn. Further, for some Caribbean immigrants, embracing the Black racial identity is at odds with maintaining their ethnic and national identities. Those who are resistant to reconciling themselves with the Black identity inevitably find themselves in situations where they are forced to figure out where they fit into US society. Part of the learning taking place in college, especially for newly-arrived Caribbean women, is discovering a new master status -- their racial identity. This is illustrated in the following quote of a participant recounting a conversation between her and another student as they completed administrative forms:

There are a lot of mistaken identities and a lot of mishaps and misunderstandings because of what people think you are. A Guyanese girl, a student, was asking me "What am I?" I was like, "Hello. You are Black, you are Caribbean, you are minority, and you are female. So if you do not know what you are, I am telling you what you are, and I am telling you what New York sees you as. So you better get used to being a little Black female." She says, "But I am Indian and I am from Guyana." I said, "You don't know what you are. You're Black, you're not White. Therefore you are ... you said it!" She didn't know.

Given enough time and such illuminating experiences, Caribbean women who need to do so will undoubtedly learn their Blackness is the primary characteristic that defines them in the US. However, the question remains: how does being Black influence women's experience as immigrant college students? In the context of discussing how immigrant women of color in the US are regarded as being Black and, in addition, female, one participant added, "That's the next strike". This quip is referring to the "three strikes

– you’re out!” rule of cumulative defect and indicates they know that in the US, being Black and a woman is rarely a position of advantage.

The perspective around race and gender was not completely bleak, however, as some students had located an upside to being a woman of color on campus:

I would say, one advantage, in general, of being a woman of color is that they try to do this thing where they offer all these scholarships to minority students, and being minority and a woman is even better, especially in the sciences. This is how a lot of Black students get in, through the MARC program and stuff like that. You’re Black and you’re a woman. And in the sciences, I can tell you there are not a lot of us out there. So for that reason, I would say that’s one advantage.

In this vein, students could either identify themselves as Black to take advantage of scholarship opportunities or they could be nationalistic to their own detriment. Of course, international students (i.e., those with student visa status) do not qualify for most fellowships. Of those students who would qualify based on their immigration status and academic standing, many were not aware of the funding opportunities available to them. At times the focus group discussions turned into information-sharing sessions during which students complained about the failure of the institution to publicize the opportunities they were now learning about from fellow students. Only the most savvy students applied for the scholarships – others either didn’t know they existed or did not recognize the value of doing the extra work of applying for scholarships. Very few students were in the habit of scouring notice boards for offerings and even fewer mentioned having professors who advised them to apply for scholarships. And then there were those students who said they just did not have the time fellowship applications required.

Applying for merit-based funding was one area in which participants demonstrated a critical consciousness of what it means to be part of a larger community of Black females in a US college. The same student who described funding opportunities as an advantage, commented on the accompanying price of being an award-winning student:

The disadvantage is that there are not enough of us. So when you excel in certain things a lot of people look at you. So there’s kind of a pressure there because you don’t want to fail. There’s not a lot of you and you must really try to push yourself so that more of you can be in this area or something like that. So for that reason I think it’s a bit of a disadvantage, just because the pressure and the stigma can get to your head if you let it. You feel like as a woman, you have to work harder to excel in a lot of things because we live in a male dominated society, that is one, and you’re Black, that’s two. So you feel that you have to try a little bit harder than the average guy and harder than the White person . . . if you let it get to your head it can be a burden.

The burden this participant describes is not a new phenomenon; historically, this is what women of color have had to contend with in academic settings. Experiencing a heightened awareness of what is expected of women of color in academic settings can lead Caribbean immigrants to develop a broadened racial identity, incorporating a Black identity with their ethnic and national identities. Participants in this study who pursued opportunities to gather with similar others to discuss Black issues found it difficult to agree, even within such groups, on what is important to Blacks. For example, in one focus group participants mentioned a club on campus, Daughters of Africa, where students meet to discuss issues relevant to Black women. One participant described the purpose of the club as follows: “It’s really about reclaiming African consciousness, philosophies, you know, it’s a very good objective.” Two participants said they had visited this club but they no longer attended the meetings. When I pressed for an explanation of why that club did not work for them, one woman told me she had gone to a meeting during Black History Month and the topic of discussion was African American women’s hair. She did not think this was an appropriate topic to dedicate her time and energy to, so she left the meeting and had not returned since then. Her comment sparked a heated discussion as the other participants challenged her judgment:

L \_\_\_\_: It’s such an important issue, it might seem trivial, but it’s an absolutely important issue.

M \_\_\_\_: It’s important.

T \_\_\_\_: To me, there are issues that need more attention than sitting down and discussing-



L\_\_\_: But do you know that the most important thing for Black people to learn is to love themselves?"

T\_\_\_: But, but I understand that--

L\_\_\_: But the basis for us learning to love ourselves T\_\_\_, you cannot build anything unless you put down the foundation, it a go drop down!

M\_\_\_: Exactly. You said it real good. You see because you don't understand, people don't understand, colonization -- which we have been through and we're still going through -- is not about the economic exploitation, you have psychological rape on a daily basis going towards Black people. So you want to tell me you walk into a room, and they're talking about the importance of loving ourselves as we are, and that gets you angry?

Even within the focus group, these women disagreed on the position they should take regarding discussing hair -- an issue loaded with political and psychological implications. This issue illustrates the larger point on political positioning and critical consciousness regarding race -- significant fissures remain among Black women, even among those who share histories of oppression based on race, class, or even nationality and cultural background.

### Discussion

Studying Caribbean immigrant women navigating the natural field setting of US colleges has shed new light on how theories of social identity are relevant to the lived experience (Ethier & Deaux 1994). Gendered cultural identity supports are strong and multiply influential. Among the group, women portrayed evidence of holding on to strong traditional values. Some of these values, resistant to change, served to uniquely define the experience of being a woman from a particular country. Still other traditions they held seem to have been written by a universal hand and shape the experiences of all women, regardless of their cultural origins (Hedge, 1998).

These findings reveal the dynamic relationship between gender and traditional values for Caribbean immigrant women; the influence of gender on their roles as mothers, workers and as women of African ancestry; and how these relationships and influences impacted participants' aspirations, relationships and personal identities. Although patterns in the data suggested these categories, which have been useful for the purpose of organization, what has also been demonstrated is how interrelated they are. For example, when mothers discussed the perplexities of how to raise their immigrant children (mothering), they were considering how deeply to allow tradition to guide their parenting, especially since they were raising children of African ancestry (race) in the US. In reality, women's roles and social identities are not distinct, they permeate each other and are altogether infused by the meanings associated with being female.

The colleges from which participants were recruited had majority female student enrollment. However, this numerical dominance in college did not override their status as Caribbean-born women of color in the wider society, which illustrates the extent to which gender remains a critical social issue (Clarke & Braun, 2009). Participants reported how their gender related to their race and ethnicity within the context of US higher education. These intersections were nested among the ways in which Caribbean traditional gender roles influenced their immigration experience and their struggles to (re)define themselves as women in America. Even in this space where they were in the majority as females, gender mattered, offering proscriptions and constraints for who they could be and how they could be.

In addition to the intricate connectedness of women's social roles and identities, the findings highlight the tension between universal and culture-bound gender influences with which women contend. Some of the issues women raised were immigrant-specific and arose in the context of living away from one's home country. One such immigration-related issue is the emergent Black identity (Cross, 1991; McFarlane, 2000). Many Caribbean leaders today promote a Black national consciousness and the nations observe symbols in recognition of the universal African struggle. However, to be Black in the Caribbean is, in many ways, a different identity experience from being Black in the US (Ramkissoon, McFarlane & Branche, 2008; Worrel & McFarlane, 2017). The data illustrate how women contend with their evolving racial identity in the context of their lives as immigrant women.



Other issues are culture specific, so these women would have had to deal with these issues even if they had never left the Caribbean. For example, while Caribbean women are not the only cultural group still negotiating how many of the domestic chores automatically are women's domain, tradition dictates have resulted in this being a larger problem for this group today than it is for many other cultural groups. Hart (1989) describes the dualistic family pattern in the Caribbean as follows: "A culture of male machismo is matched by recognition of women's strength and responsibility for the family." Among this group, we witnessed the subcultural manifestations of this across-gender conflict for their generation.

Other issues, such as having to work harder than men for recognition and compensation, are of universal concern to women (Collins, 2000). Altogether, there is complexity in the range and content of the issues faced by Caribbean immigrants as women pursuing a college education. The findings underscore the need for a psychology of women committed "to challenge and transform relations of power which maintain myriad inequalities experienced by women" (Capdevila & Lazard, 2015; p.197)

Another significant finding is the resilience of the women in this group. Individually and as a group these participants portrayed tenacious and continuous strength. The tenacity portrayed in these women's stories is not represented in the master narrative used to describe similar groups, such as young single mothers of color (Romero and Stewart, 1999). The community, home, and work are often contexts unresponsive to women pursuing a college degree. Caribbean women continuing on this path at such high personal cost indicates the value of a college education to them and the extent to which they are willing to go to achieve it.

Besides being a reflection on Caribbean immigrant women's persistence, however, the findings provoke new ways to think of the larger context in which immigrant women's experience as college students takes place. Studies of immigrant identity have found differences between Black first- and second-generation immigrants (Waters, 1996). First-generation immigrants are more likely to identify as Caribbean, West Indian, or to use their nation of origin as their identity label and second-generation immigrants are more likely to use a hyphenated identity label (e.g. Barbadian-American) or to identify as American. However, previous studies do not provide any insight on what role parents have in the formation of these identities, or how parents feel about their role in this process. In the current study, a window is opened on to women contending with matters of their children's identification, even as they fashion their own responses to their own cross-cultural transition.

As I have previously discussed (McFarlane, 2010), there was evidence on both campuses of a consciousness of their membership in the larger Black community and the role it's history plays in their current experiences. The economic challenges faced by 'developing' nations result in limited opportunities being available for Caribbean citizens in their home countries (Trotz, 2002). Regardless of how bad the current US economy might be, the life in the US provides more routes to financial mobility than are readily available at home. Women who immigrate to the US believe a college degree enhances their chances of success, whether they plan to remain in their host country or to return home.

Despite the constraints of tradition and the forms of discrimination accompanying being an immigrant woman from the Caribbean, college makes more possible. The findings illustrate the ways in which the roles and identities women carry infuse the college experience. Their experience stands, in many ways, in contrast to traditional college students and in other ways, in contrast to traditional Caribbean women. Yet these distinguishing features do not obscure the ways in which these women's lives are bound by gender traditions – linking their lives to each other and to the lives of women across the world.

This study of immigrant women of color in higher education has the potential to inform academic discourse on access, resistance and resilience in education. These findings are to be interpreted mindful the data was collected in a diverse, urban setting, which might render an immigration experience unique relative to other places in the US or the world. In addition, Some Caribbean countries were not represented among the women recruited. Perspectives of women from other countries in the region may vary from those of the current respondents. Nevertheless, these findings could influence the development of new theory on the socio-cultural and psychological adaptation of immigrant women of color, particularly those attending public colleges in an ethnically diverse, urban setting. By shedding light on



women's identification in the contexts of cross-cultural and educational transitions, these findings have the potential to influence policy decisions and practice related to women, immigrants, and foreign-born students. Together, the theoretical advances and practical applications of this work may provide a basis for re-evaluating educators' responsibilities to non-traditional students, and might inform interventions designed to address the needs of this currently under-served group. Beyond the educational setting, other contexts for application include healthcare delivery, workplaces and communities, where policy makers may attend to the social identity processes involved in facilitating full citizenship for immigrant women of color, and productive co-existence for all in this increasingly border-free world.

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