

Jamaican Boys' Construals of Jamaican and American Teenagers

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Abstract

This paper explored Jamaican adolescent boys' construals of Jamaican and American cultures as embodied by typical teenagers and parents in each country. Fifteen boys participated in focus group interviews and thematic analysis was done by a team of three coders. Boys tended to compare and contrast the two cultures. Their construals of Jamaicans and Americans differed in some respects (e.g., parenting style) and converged in others (e.g., adolescent sensation-seeking). Boys' construal of Jamaican culture as aggressive, anti-gay, and fashion-obsessed aligned with key elements of dancehall culture's prescription of masculinity, whereas their construal of American culture aligned with Hollywood images of spoiled and crazy teens with permissive parents. Understanding how Jamaican adolescents perceive Jamaican culture and American culture is necessary to fully appreciate the biculturalism that Americanized Jamaicans achieve on the island by way of remote acculturation.

Key words: Remote acculturation, cultural construal, Caribbean, dancehall, parenting, autonomy

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Fast food, cable television, name brand fashions, and electronics from the United States (U.S.) are as readily accessible in Caribbean urban centers today as are traditional Caribbean food, entertainment, and merchandise. This societal Americanization is not surprising given the back and forth migratory patterns between the Caribbean and the U.S. (Thomas-Hope, 2002), trade and importation (e.g., consider informal commercial importers, ICIs; Durant-Gonzalez, 1983), Caribbean-bound U.S. tourism (i.e., over one million annual U.S. tourists visit Jamaica alone; Caribbean Tourism Organization, 2013), and modern globalization via phone and internet technology (Forbes, 2012). What is more, societal Americanization is having a psychological impact on some Caribbean youth via a process called *remote acculturation*, which refers to changes in behaviour, identity, and values that occur

following indirect and/or intermittent contact with a foreign culture. Two recent studies on remote acculturation in Kingston, Jamaica have demonstrated that one in three adolescents appear to be bicultural – Jamaican-American – based solely on their immersion in both cultures on the island (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; 2013). One step in understanding how Jamaican adolescents create this new bicultural island identity is to understand how they construe contemporary Jamaican culture versus contemporary American culture. To that end, the current paper uses qualitative methodology to explore Jamaican adolescent boys' subjective construals of Jamaican and American cultures as embodied by typical teenagers and parents in each culture.

Enculturation: Learning Caribbean Culture on the Islands

Children and adolescents learn about and internalize the culture in which they are raised via indirect enculturation and direct socialization (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 2008). During enculturation, cultural values, knowledge, and behaviours are transmitted to youngsters indirectly through observations of and interactions with parents, peers, and non-parental adults in society. Caribbean scholarship across a variety of disciplines indicates several prominent features of Jamaican culture, which may be transmitted to youth. These include emphases on education (Ferguson & Dubow, 2007; Ottley & Richardson, 1999), religion (Ferguson & Dubow, 2007; Morrish, 1982), dancehall culture¹ and stereotyped female sexuality (Cooper, 2004), traditional gender roles (Bailey, Branche, McGarrity & Stuart, 1998), hardened masculine gender identity (Parry, 2004), and virulent anti-gay sentiments (Parry, 2004; West & Hewstone, 2012). For example, Ferguson (2006) notes that schoolwork ranks #1 and religion #2 or 3 among life domains important to Jamaican adolescents, above friends, dating and sports, and that these domains are equally important to adolescents' ideal selves and to their perceptions of what their parents want for their lives (Ferguson & Dubow, 2007).

In addition, Caribbean parental ethnotheories (i.e., beliefs about how children should be raised) feature strong parental authority and gendered-differentiated socialization, both of which shape youth development. For example, when asked about decision-making in multiple everyday scenarios, Barbadian adolescents in one study were likely to rely on parents' perspectives and often reported that they would have no choice but to go along with parents (Ottley & Richardson, 1999). Moreover, adolescents in that study indicated that parents often place firm restrictions on their social activities, especially if parents perceive that they have not spent enough time on valued activities (e.g., church attendance, family obligations). Finally, traditional Caribbean culture endorses gender-differentiated parenting by granting earlier autonomy to boys while sheltering girls (the 'tie the heifer and loose the bull' philosophy; Brown & Chevannes, 1998). Differential socialization of boys into Caribbean images of masculinity also takes place via enculturation into dancehall culture. Hope's (2012) ethnographic analysis of Jamaican dancehall music and culture identifies five prominent themes regarding masculinity: aggression/violence, promiscuous heterosexuality, homophobia, conspicuous consumption, and meticulous styling/preening.

A variety of methods have been used to describe these dimensions of Jamaican and Caribbean culture in the literature, many of them using communities as units of analysis. However, no psychological study has directly studied adolescents' perceptions of Jamaican

culture. Therefore, it is unclear whether adolescents construe their local culture in similar ways to what this literature would suggest. The current study intends to fill this gap.

Acculturation: Learning American Culture on the Island Remotely

Individuals learn a second culture by the process of acculturation (Berry et al., 2008). Acculturation is an age-old phenomenon capturing changes which occur after intercultural contact (Sam & Berry, 2006). Psychological acculturation focuses on changes at the individual level (e.g., in behaviour, identity, and values) and is most commonly conceptualized and studied among migrants (e.g., Berry, 1997). However, recent scholarship demonstrates that acculturation also occurs among non-migrants who are indirectly and/or intermittently exposed to a foreign culture, which is transported into their homeland via modern globalization mechanisms such as trade, tourism, and technology (Ferguson, 2013). This new type of non-migrant acculturation - remote acculturation - was first demonstrated in the form of Americanization of adolescents and mothers in Jamaica (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012).

The 2010 report of the CARICOM Council on Youth Development underscores the U.S. influence on Caribbean youth. Surveys and interviews with approximately 6,000 youth from 13 Caribbean nations including Jamaica showed that many Caribbean youth are oriented towards the north, the United States in particular, due to globalization and information and communication technologies (ICT). Jamaican adolescents come in contact with U.S. culture in several ways including imported merchandise (e.g., U.S. name brand attire, electronics), U.S. food chains (e.g., Pizza Hut, Burger King, TGIF), mass media including internet (e.g., U.S. cable television), communication with relatives and friends in the United States (e.g., phone and internet), and U.S. tourism (U.S. visitors of all kinds).

To empirically examine remote acculturation, Ferguson and Bornstein (2012) surveyed 245 Jamaican high school students and their mothers in Kingston and measured several acculturation indicators identified from the immigrant acculturation literature such as cultural behaviours, family values, and family interaction patterns. Using cluster analyses, they found one cluster of youth with a bicultural profile, who they labeled "Americanized Jamaicans" (33% of sample). Compared to a second cluster of culturally "Traditional Jamaicans" (67% of sample), Americanized Jamaican adolescents reported high orientation to Jamaican culture *and* relatively high European American orientation in terms of entertainment preferences, social relations, and identity, as well as lower family obligations, higher discrepancies in intergenerational obligations, and higher acculturation-related parent-adolescent conflict. Traditional Jamaicans had high Jamaican orientation but low European American orientation. A second study in a new cohort of 222 adolescents replicated these original findings and highlighted that Americanized Jamaican youth are more oriented to European American culture, not African American culture (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2013). In their replication study of remote acculturation, Ferguson & Bornstein (2013), also found that Americanized Jamaicans reported more frequent contact with U.S. tourists in Jamaica and more frequent consumption of U.S. beverages.

Moreso than traditional immigrant acculturation, remote acculturation raises the question of how a foreign culture is construed by acculturating youth. What represents American culture in the minds of Jamaican adolescents who have never lived in the United States? It is important to understand the similarities and differences that Jamaican

adolescents perceive between Jamaican and American cultures in order to fully appreciate the biculturalism that Americanized Jamaicans achieve on the island by way of remote acculturation.

Current Study

The purpose of this paper is to explore Jamaican adolescents' representations of Jamaican culture and American culture as embodied by teenagers and parents who they perceive as typical of each country. Acculturation, including remote acculturation, presumes that the new culture(s) with which individuals come into contact is/are different from one's native culture. Given the geographical proximity of the United States to Jamaica and interconnections between the two nations, it is important to assess whether Jamaican adolescents do indeed perceive their own culture and experience to be distinct from American culture and in what ways. This study was exploratory with no a priori hypotheses.

The current study focuses on boys only given that Jamaican culture and socialization are bifurcated by gender. Compared to girls, boys are socialized to be rougher, tougher, and more independent (Brown & Chevannes, 1998), to have more rigid views on gender roles and sexuality (Parry, 2004; West & Hewstone, 2012), and even to be sexually reckless (Ottley & Richardson, 1999). Boys also receive less restrictive parenting and are granted autonomy from parents earlier (Parry, 2004). Because boys' construals of Jamaican culture are expected to be different from girls in these ways, this initial investigation focuses exclusively on boys.

Method

Participants

A subset of male students from a socioeconomically diverse all-boys high school, who participated in a larger study of remote acculturation approved by the Institutional Review Board, was contacted to take part in this focus group interview portion of the study. Boys who had completed all prior aspects of the larger study were invited to participate in interviews and those who responded and received parental consent were included. Fifteen boys, 13 - 18 years old (age $M = 14.46$, $SD = 1.30$), assented and participated in one of four focus group interviews based on their availability (there were two to six boys per group).

Three of the groups consisted of ninth graders (third-formers) and one group consisted of twelfth and thirteenth graders (sixth-formers). All boys were born in Jamaica (as were all of their parents) and had lived their entire lives on the island. In addition, most boys (80%) had never visited the United States, and those who had visited previously spent fewer than two months across their lifetime. Table 1 shows descriptives and participant pseudonyms.

Procedure and Measures

Participants in each focus group interview were asked to "*describe what Jamaican teenagers are like today*" and to "*describe what American teenagers are like today*". The interview questions were phrased in this way to make the topic more concrete for adolescents by inviting them to reflect on their experiences and observations as young

people in Jamaica. Additionally, clarification questions and probes were used to illicit more detailed descriptions. For example, after participants described what teenagers are like in general, to obtain a more comprehensive portrait, the interviewer would probe perceptions about what they are like at home in particular.

Table 1 *Pseudonyms and Descriptive Information for the Sample*

Adolescent Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Cumulative time in USA	Parental education (highest household earner)
Alex	14	9	None	Some college (≥ 1 year) or training programme
Carl	14	9	None	Completed 10th or 11th grade
Christopher	14	9	1-2 months	Some college (≥ 1 year) or training programme
Damon	14	9	None	4 year college or university degree
Hunter	14	9	None	Graduate professional degree
Jonathan	15	9	None	Completed 7th, 8th, or 9th grade
Justin	18	13	1-2 months	Some college (≥ 1 year) or training programme
Keon	14	9	1-2 months	High school graduate
Kevin	17	12	None	Completed 7th, 8th, or 9th grade
Lamar	14	9	None	Completed 7th, 8th, or 9th grade
Naresh	13	9	None	Graduate professional degree
Patrick	14	9	None	High school graduate
Richie	14	9	None	Completed 7th, 8th, or 9th grade
Sebastian	14	9	None	High school graduate
Stephan	14	9	< 1 month	4 year college or university degree

There were several benefits to using focus group interviews in this study. Group interviews foster an exchange of ideas amongst the participants and the researcher while supporting but not requiring responses to every question. Participant responses may therefore be more spontaneous and natural, and more data can be generated than in one-on-one interviews (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Interviews lasted approximately one hour each and were conducted on campus after school by the principal investigator, who had built a rapport with participants through prior data collection in the larger study. Interview questions were posed in English; however, boys' responses and ensuing discussion between the interviewer and participants often contained a mixture of English

and Jamaican Patois. Boys were given a movie ticket for their participation. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Demographic information reported here (and additional data beyond the scope of this paper) were collected from participants as part of the larger remote acculturation study.

Interview Protocol

Questions for the focus group interviews were developed based on remote acculturation findings from the larger study (see Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). There was a need to more clearly describe and explain adolescents' construals of Jamaican culture versus American culture in order to better understand Americanization on the island. The group interview protocol had seven questions, two of which were used in the current analysis. The interviewer was responsible for taking notes during the interview.

Coding

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilized for coding and analyzing the data. Three coders (one Jamaican living in Jamaica, one Jamaican living in the United States, and one Latina American living in the United States) began the coding process by reading the interview transcripts in their entirety to "familiarize themselves with the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Next, coders identified initial codes (i.e., "coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set"; Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87) independently of each other. Codes were then collapsed into themes. Coders met on multiple occasions to review their codes and themes and to resolve any discrepancies between the categories and themes to establish consensus between them (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005). A thematic map was then created to identify connections across codes and themes (see Figure 1 for finalized map). The final steps of coding consisted of refining themes; that is "generating clear definitions and names for each theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87), and selecting text that represented each theme.

Results

Results are organized into three topics: Jamaican adolescents' construals of 1) Jamaican teenagers, 2) American teenagers and 3) overall adolescent development. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants and used to present the results. Capitalized portions of direct quotes indicate verbal emphasis of the speaker. In addition, English language translations are provided in square brackets following Patois quotations. Parenthesized text within a quotation reflects content that was implied but not directly stated and curly brackets are used to enclose significant non-verbal communications within a quote. The results presented below in this section and in Figure 1 depict the themes and connections that were identified from the boys' interview. The majority of participants agreed with these themes. Negative cases analysis was conducted and discussed when present, and included in the results where appropriate.

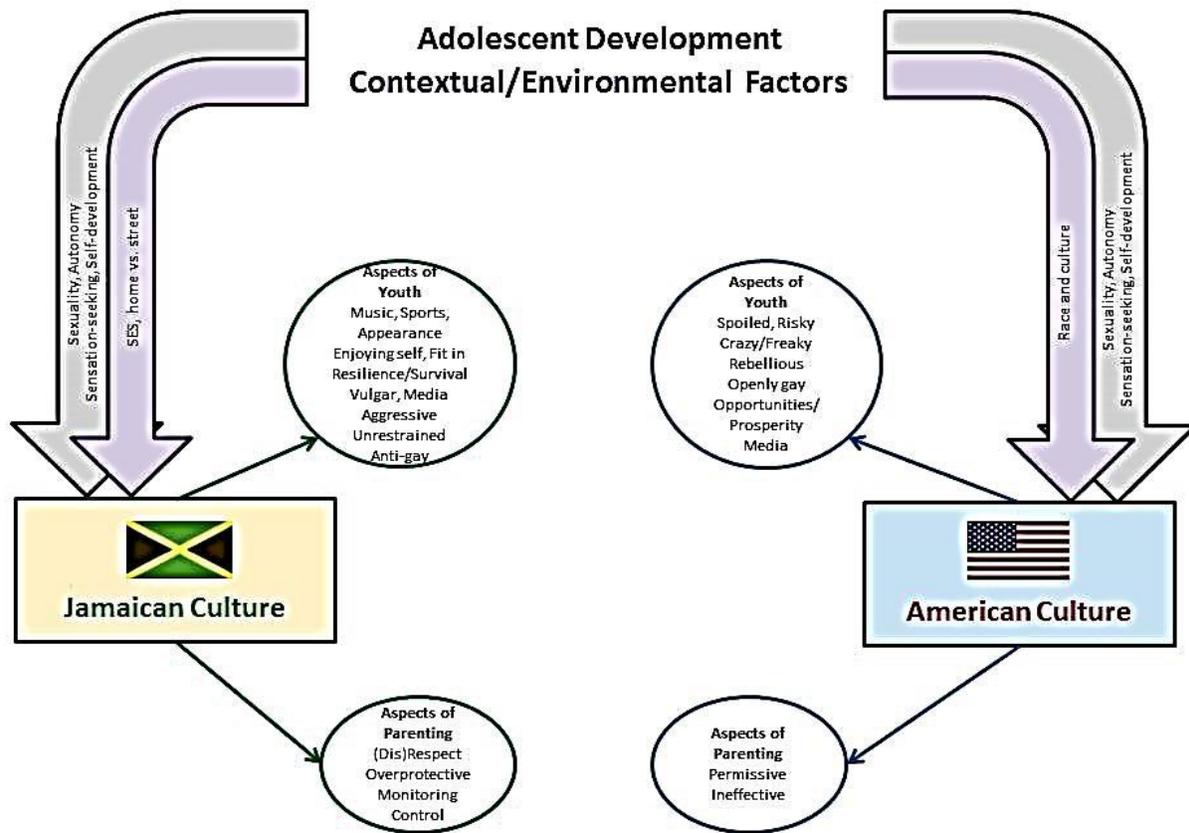


Figure 1. Thematic Map of Jamaican Adolescent Boys' Construals of Jamaican and American Cultures

Construal of Jamaican Teenagers

Aspects of youth. Boys described typical aspects of teenage life for Jamaicans such as music and appearance. For example, Stephan stated “Music, I believe is a very important part for teenagers” and went on to explain “Is not really...the lyrics, Miss (they) are not up-to-date, but di beat... yu can move to the beat...” Hunter concurred and named the artiste “Vybz Kartel” as particularly iconic for Jamaican teenagers. Although some boys did not approve of the content of Kartel’s songs, they identified with the lure of the rhythms as articulated by Sebastian: “...his music is just {pause} awful, but di- di riddim...I love to ‘ear the riddim” [...his music is just awful, but the rhythm...I love to hear the rhythm]. Richie also stressed the importance of a teenagers’ appearance by saying: “Miss, number one is, Miss, looking good.” Patrick explained close-fitting clothes as one aspect of what looking good would entail:

Look...we are jus trying to say...tight pants mek yuh look more neata...an...more approve...A dat wi a seh...Yeahh... wi nah ave nuh problem wid big pants dem... jus style. [Look, we are just trying to say tight pants make you look neater and more (socially) approved. That’s what we are saying, yeah. We don’t have any problem with big pants, it’s just (a matter of) style].

Damon added, to the amused agreement of his peers, that being colour coordinated is also important:

“Miss yuh see like... nuff people Miss dem nuh know how fi dress Miss... Sometime dem put on like a arange shirt...blue pants..... an den a yellow shoes...dat CYAH work.” [Miss, you see a lot of people, they don’t know how to dress. Sometimes they put on an orange shirt, blue pants, and then yellow shoes. That CAN’T work].

Other aspects of teenage life discussed were sports – Stephan said “Love, love sports” and the need to fit in. In regard to the latter, Naresh explained:

Yeh...It has to be peer pressure...because is like, when you come to di high school, yu fit een to...everybody...you don’t want to be di odd one out [...when you come to the high school you fit in to everybody, you don’t want to be the odd one out].

Also prominent in boys’ descriptions of Jamaican teenagers was the need to enjoy oneself. Patrick stated “so what’s di fun if yuh not enjoying yuhself?” [so what’s the fun if you’re not enjoying yourself?].

When discussing life in Jamaica, boys’ references were contextualized by home life versus the street and socioeconomic status. Keon elucidated “...Miss dem behave good when dem deh home an den come on di road an behave bad” [Miss, they behave well when they are at home but then they go out in public and behave badly]. Boys discussed elements of resilience and survival as central to Jamaican teenagers, boys in particular. To survive the boys explained that certain behaviours were required when they were outside of their homes. Justin explained,

They believe that acting rough you can survive, you know it’s like you going into a certain community you have to walk a certain way like you a bad man so that nobody cannot...dem nah guh like actually wan to come an rob yuh [...you have to walk a certain way like you are a ‘bad man’ so that nobody will actually want to come and rob you].

Kevin believed that this rough behaviour was tied to difficult life experiences of Jamaicans, both presently and historically:

Jamaicans overall are fighters and that what makes us Jamaicans ... Cause of like the history we’re coming from ...Jamaicans always fighting trying to um you know elevate themselves, push, cause you know, they don’t really have, um us Jamaicans barely have anything, most of us are poverty stricken so they always have to be fighting... Trying to elevate themselves to get better in life.

Other boys felt that some Jamaican teenagers behaved inappropriately outside of the home, which ranged from being wild (unrestrained) to being vulgar (uncouth). For example Justin stated “they behave, is like wild animals, you know, some of them” and went on to say “they have the freedom to do whatever, um carry out their vulgar behaviour.” Carl explained “Miss like how me dan cuss badword pon di road Miss...Miss mi wouldn’t cuss it a mi yaad miss” [Miss, like the way that I curse/swear out in public...I wouldn’t curse/swear at home]. Along with this notion of vulgarity there were clear aspects of aggression present in Jamaican teenage life; as stated by Alex “Miss, aggressive, Miss.” For example, in describing his Jamaican characteristics, Patrick demonstrates that he too can be

aggressive and threatening: “beat up pickney when mi ready” [I beat up children/peers when I want] and “Buss blank ...powpow” [I shoot blank shots...powpow]. Justin recounted an experience which suggested that aggression was also true of Jamaican teenage girls “recently there were a bunch of girls who were actually rougher than us... I’m being serious, I don’t want to call the school name but they were actually being rough like hitting each other in the face.” Some of the aggression was directly tied to bullying and a very strong anti-gay sentiment in Jamaica. For example Damon stated: “You see Jamaica Miss... if a homosexual was at a Jamaican, Miss, we beat dem” [You see in Jamaica, Miss, if a homosexual was in Jamaica (or was a Jamaican) we would beat them]. As Stephan articulated, boys felt that Jamaican-produced television shows often portrayed similarly aggressive and violent themes:

Miss but like Jamaican shows dem jus’ have like one ting about people from di ghetto an dis ahn dat... Yes Miss like gun, who go shirtless, ahn who a rob, and who a sell weed and dem stuff deh Miss” [Miss, but Jamaican shows just have one theme about people from the ghetto and this and that...yes Miss, like guns, who goes shirtless, and who robs, and who sells weed (marijuana) and those things].

Aspects of parenting. Boys discussed their interactions with parents and how parenting in Jamaica may be different from parenting in the United States. Adolescent boys’ views of parents appeared to vary with age. The younger boys felt that Jamaican parents were overprotective. For example, Lamar said “Mi tink dem OVA protected too much” [I think they are too OVER-protective]. The younger boys also felt that parents engaged in a great deal of monitoring of their behaviours. As Damon explains:

if mi outside a talk to one girl an mi go back inside...mi fada ask mi... ‘who dah girl deh?’and Me seh ‘One a mi fren dem’..... Him seh ‘Weh yuh mean by one a...?’ Den him start question me Miss... [If I am outside talking to a girl and I go back inside my father will ask me ‘Who is that girl?’ And if I say ‘one of my friends’ he will say ‘What do you mean by one of?’ Then he will start to question me, Miss].

Parental control was also discussed as an aspect of Jamaican parenting:

Damon - ...if like wi fi go somewhere Miss she ago want mi go wid har... But if me ago someweh now she nah go wah mi go out... she nuh wah mi GO OUT. [...if we go somewhere she is going to want me to accompany her, but if I am going somewhere, she won’t want me to go out; she doesn’t want me to GO OUT].

Hunter agreed that typical Jamaican parents exercise control and monitoring over teenagers’ movements by making sure that: “Miss yu nuh deh pon di road everyday...and certain friends yu nuh keep” [you are not out in the streets (socializing) every day and you don’t associate with certain friends, Miss]. On the other hand, the older boys felt that some Jamaican parents are not as strict as they used to be. Justin noted the difference, “I think probably back then the parents were like strict, more strict.” Boys also discussed differences in respect for parents and other adults. Justin explained the importance of respecting parents and the importance of parents teaching respect for other adults:

Alright, it come across like a fear, but I don't think it's a fear, I think it's an act of respect for your parents but what the parents need to do is teach them, to respect others, not just the parents.

Christopher echoed this sentiment by saying that Jamaican parents should teach youth to be respectful; "And make sure dat mannas... to elderly people" [And make sure that manners (are shown) to elderly people]. Despite the importance attached to respecting elders, boys also discussed the lack of respect shown by Jamaican youth outside of the home.

Justin: I can recall um a situation where some [*name of school removed*] boys were on the bus and they were making this whole heap a noise and the adults were like telling them to be quiet and they started being rude to the adults. It was like yeah 'hey you can't talk to me you're not my mother, you're not my father.'

In sum, boys construed Jamaican teenage culture as one of fun, fashion, and fitting in, which may partially explain why Jamaican parents are perceived as controlling and restrictive. However, boys also viewed Jamaican life as marred with difficult life experiences, which produce the cultural elements of toughness and aggression.

Construal of American Teenagers

Aspects of youth. When discussing typical American teenagers, Jamaican boys' references were contextualized by race and culture. As Naresh explains, "If, the white-, I'm going to say the white people have a stigma dat black people always are di wrong ones, right?" However, the prototypical American teenager in the boys' descriptions was White/European American (not Black/African American) and the cultural elements discussed pertained mostly to White/European American culture. For example, at one point the interviewer probed for clarification "when you're talking [and] thinking about the typical American teenager, it sounds like you're thinking about a White American teenager..." and multiple boys responded "yeah".

The boys contrasted American youth with Jamaican youth, perceiving the Americans as more extreme in terms of behaviours and more privileged in terms of resources. They construed American teenagers as more likely to participate in risky behaviours (e.g., Justin: "Like um you see people skydiving and bungee jumping and all these tingz, yeah...they take more risks with their lives"), to be rebellious (e.g., Naresh: "...they speak back to their parents!"), and to engage in crazy behaviours (e.g., Naresh: "the American boys are very, I'd say, freaky...their culture is just NOT right...they bore ALL places" [...they have body piercings in ALL places]). Media, television in particular, was boys' primary source of information about American teenagers and although many acknowledged that television is an imperfect source, they nevertheless found the depictions consistent and compelling. For example, after describing American teenagers as crazy Justin said: "...maybe it's because I don't really interact with them like personally, but seeing them on television, and there're so many shows with true life stories, you know how they actually (are) in the home."

American teenagers were also seen as being openly gay, which Jamaican youth said was unacceptable on the island. Patrick explained: "But {Patrick 'hisses' his teeth which communicates disapproval} a foreign now...mi see dem a walk roun...'Hi babae' ... an call to

man an all dese tings” [... (discussing the United States), I see them (American men) walking around saying ‘Hi Baby’ and flirting with men and all these things].

American teenagers were said to be undisputedly spoiled. For example, Naresh explains “...99.9% of Americans are very spoiled, everybody know dat...” [...everybody knows that]). However, Jamaican teenagers also said that American youth have many opportunities and are able to prosper. Kevin explained this as follows: “because of their resources you know they can afford certain things, so the quality they have, is going to be much better than us.”

Aspects of parenting. Boys described American parents as permissive. For example Damon said: “Miss di American girls Miss dem can bring boys inna dem house without getting inna trouble” [Miss, the American girls can bring boys into their homes without getting into trouble]. American parents were also considered ineffective. For example Sebastian asked rhetorically: “...When American parents told their child to... tell them that they’re grounded and deh still keep on getting out of the house, what deh do to stop that? [...what do they do to stop that?]” Additionally, Kevin explained the shared perception regarding lack of consequences “Yeah because they’re (i.e., American teenagers are) going to get away with it more than us Jamaicans...”

To summarize, Jamaican boys construed American teenagers as extreme in their behaviours, taking unnecessary risks, and acting crazily. This, of course, goes hand in hand with their perception of American parenting as permissive and ineffective.

Overarching Adolescent Development

When discussing Jamaican and American teenagers the boys touched upon four themes that cut across their construals of both cultures: sexuality, autonomy, sensation-seeking, and self-development. First, teenagers begin to discover sex and be motivated by the desire for sex.

Damon stated about teens in general: “everybody now weh a teenager Miss... dem wah bruk dem virginity” [Every teenager today wants to lose their virginity]. When the interviewer asked the follow-up probe “Okay, in Jamaica or the U.S.?” several boys responded “EVERYWHERE EVERYWHERE...everywhere” and began to chatter excitedly. Boys also described adolescence as a time to begin noticing girls. Discussing Jamaican teens Patrick stated: “Mi talk about girls a lot... A jus me dat. [I talk about girls a lot...that’s just me.]”

Boys discussed the desire for autonomy and independence as central to teenage life. This involved going out and being independent of their parents’ monitoring, and having privacy. When referencing Jamaican youth Naresh stated:

but like when, like when you, sp-...like when you sp-speaking on the phone now and deh come and deh interrupt...what’s that? what’s that? You doh need to interr-...that’s my phone call, my personal phone call... I have a one line so if they can tek up the phone and listen to that, that’s that’s intervene, deh doh need to intervene. [but like when you are speaking on the phone and they interrupt, what’s that? What’s that? You don’t need to interrupt, that’s my personal phone call...I have a separate line so if they take up the phone

and listen to that, it's intervening (interfering), they don't need to intervene (interfere)].

In regard to American teenagers, Jonathan described their desire for autonomy by saying "...deh want too much freedom". It was also clear that boys believed all adolescents engage in sensation seeking behaviours of various kinds. In comparing both Jamaican and American cultures Justin stated: "um crazy, I mean I know we do the driving and the partying and the drinking... but I think they're a little bit more extreme with it". Lastly, there was discussion of self-development as an element of teen life across cultures, which came in various forms. As Kevin explains, developing leadership skills is something both Jamaican and American teenagers desire although it may be more common practice in American schools:

I do see um I mean in some of am the school system up there so when I go up there am it good to see teenagers really just taking on that leadership... us teenagers in Jamaica like to see dem doe have to be relying on teachers to organize... Anything, you know, just take on that leadership role... And just get yourself out there. [I do see, I mean in some of the school systems up there (referring to North America) it is good to see teenagers taking on leadership; we Jamaican teenagers like to see that they don't have to be relying on teachers to organize them. Anything, you know, just take on that leadership role and get yourself out there].

In sum, Jamaican boys perceive that certain aspects of being a teenager are universal - exploring one's sexuality, becoming autonomous, engaging in sensation-seeking behaviours, and self-development desires - although other aspects of everyday teenage life may differ based on local context and cultural beliefs and practices.

Discussion

Given the significant influence of the United States in Jamaica and the evidence of remote acculturation of Jamaican adolescents toward American culture (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; 2013), it is important to understand Jamaican adolescents' perceptions of American culture in relation to their own local Jamaican culture. The purpose of this paper was, therefore, to explore Jamaican adolescent boys' construals of Jamaican and American cultures as embodied by typical teenagers and parents in each country. Study findings revealed that boys tended to compare and contrast the two cultures in their descriptions leading to cultural construals of Jamaican and American cultures that were different in some respects (e.g., parenting style), but similar in others (e.g., adolescent sensation-seeking). Boys' construal of Jamaican culture as aggressive, anti-gay, and fashion-obsessed aligned with key elements of dancehall culture's prescription of masculinity, whereas their construal of American culture aligned with U.S. media images of spoiled and crazy teens with permissive parents. Thus, media portrayals informed perceptions of both local Jamaican and U.S. cultures. In addition, boys hold a contextualized view of adolescents within each country (e.g., race, community characteristics) and across countries (e.g., country-level resources and poverty). Each of these major findings will be discussed in turn, followed by limitations and future research directions.

Construal of Jamaican Culture

Boys' construals of Jamaican culture largely aligned with dancehall culture. Specifically, three of the five features of masculinities in dancehall culture outlined by Hope (2012) were prominent: aggression/violence, homophobia, and meticulous styling/preening. This is particularly noteworthy because coders were blind to Hope's analysis of dancehall culture during coding (based on the exploratory intent of this study). Boys described aggression and violence as commonplace and tolerated in Jamaica across various settings, not including the home. Hope suggests that this hypermasculinity is a cultural element which is rehearsed, and in the case of our study, transmitted, via dancehall artistes' songs and public personae:

Dancehall culture's dalliance with gun-talk, gunplay, and violent lyrics and the succession of artistes who continue to embody and [perform] these lyrics re-presents an extreme form of aggressive/violent masculinity that plays into the typologies of violent masculinities that are idealized in inner city and lower/-working class culture. (p. 64-65)

Similar to Hope's (2012) findings, the theme of aggression/violence in boys' construal of Jamaican culture intersected with clear anti-gay attitudes. Boys indicated that anyone perceived as effeminate or gay would become the target of bullying and possible violence, as is prescribed by dancehall songs and dancehall culture. Hope explained that dancehall culture uses "excessively violent and fatal imagery to render the homosexual male redundant and powerless...Like misogyny, homophobic ideology is irrevocably bound up with notions of aggression and violence where the boundaries of masculinity are rigidly policed against perceived gender traitors." (p. 67-68).

Boys' strong emphasis on style and fashion, tight pants and outfit coordination in particular, is a Jamaican form of 'metrosexuality' and is consistent with what Hope (2012) labels 'fashion ova style' within dancehall culture. Ironically, as Hope points out, this cultural element runs counter to, yet coexists with, the hypermasculinity of dancehall culture:

Fashion ova style reflects the cross-fertilization with high fashion and style from the developed capitalist metropolises, American hip hop culture, and the historical imperatives for African flamboyance and ostentatious costumes...The excessive and highly narcissistic focus on the body, its care and public presentation, is implemented with an emphasis on stylized coordination of expensive brand name clothes (Moschino, Versace, Dolce & Gabanna, etc.), jewellery (gold, diamond, and platinum), shoes, and other accessories. (p. 124-125)

The value placed on education and religion did not surface as prominent themes in boys' construals of Jamaican culture although these domains are ranked at the top of the list when Jamaican adolescents are asked what is important to them (Ferguson, 2006). Studying/reading at home was mentioned once in the context of parental restrictiveness and religion was mentioned as a contrast to having fun. It is possible that boys' construal of Jamaican culture is driven by popular culture and excludes aspects of their experience that may not be perceived as widely endorsed by all Jamaican youth.

Boys' view of Jamaican parenting seemed to vary with age. The younger boys viewed parents as restrictive whereas the older boys critiqued parents as becoming too lax.

One potential explanation for this difference in the view of parenting is that younger boys in grade 9 have a newly increased desire for autonomy which they have not yet been granted; this may contribute to their perception of parents as restrictive. On the other hand, older boys in Grades 12-13 have already been granted significant autonomy by parents and are beginning to identify with an adult perspective. Older boys may, therefore, think that parents are too lax when they see teenagers behaving in an unruly manner. This interpretation is consistent with cross-cultural research demonstrating that adolescents' role in family decision making (i.e., parental autonomy-granting) increases during adolescence (Qin, Pomerantz & Wang, 2009; Wary-Lake, Crouter & McHale, 2010).

Construal of American Culture

Jamaican boys' view of American culture emphasized the economic prosperity and power of the nation, which is similar to Latino American adolescents' construals of American identity as 'big' and powerful in Massey and Sanchez's (2007) qualitative study. Adolescents in Massey and Sanchez' study did not, however, view Americans as spoiled and crazy, but as hurried, competitive, and cold. Nonetheless, Latino immigrant youths in a qualitative study by Iturbide and colleagues perceived American youth to be privileged, lazy, and unappreciative (Iturbide, Raffaelli & Plata-Potter, 2013), which is consistent with the current findings. There is also some empirical evidence that American parenting may indeed be more permissive than it once was as it no longer emphasizes obedience to the same degree (Alwin, 1992). Alwin analyzed historical data collected in 1924 and 1978 among Midwestern American mothers regarding their top three priorities in training children. This researcher found that the desire to instill strict obedience dropped from 45% of mothers in 1924 to 17% in 1978. In addition, loyalty to church dropped from 50% to 22%, whereas independence as a goal for children rose dramatically from 25% to 75% and tolerance rose from 6% to 47%. Alwin discussed these shifts in parental values as a response to social changes in the United States: autonomy/independence was increasingly viewed as a necessary trait, so parents increased emphasis on these skills to prepare their children to be most successful as adults. However, some contemporary psychologists believe the pendulum has swung too far and are concerned about this trend of parental permissiveness. Twenge and colleagues, for example, lament the growing narcissism in American culture (Twenge, 2013) and name permissive parenting as one of the root causes (Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

To be sure, Jamaican boys' construal of American culture was also oversimplified and stereotyped, which is consistent with the fact that 80% of them had never visited the United States. Although it may be true that 99.9% of American teenagers on U.S.-produced television shows are 'spoiled', such a sweeping generalization is clearly overblown in actuality. Having sources of information limited primarily to sensationalistic U.S. cable and movies predisposes Jamaican boys to have a superficial and one-dimensional understanding of American teens and families and a lack of appreciation for the significant within-group variation that exists.

Cultural Construals Overlap in General Adolescent Development

Construals of Jamaican and American teenagers overlapped in a few areas that represent culturally universal features of adolescent development. Due to biological and

pubertal maturation, adolescents experience normative increases in sexual attraction and desires (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2009), and adolescent autonomy is considered to be an adaptive competency across cultures (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Qin et al., 2009). Although boys compared their experiences in these aspects of development in their local context to their perceptions of Americans' experiences, it was clear that they saw sex and autonomy as relevant to both groups. Boys shared the general desire for adventure and thrill, which appears in adolescents across cultures (Arnett, 1992; Zuckerman, Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978), but disapproved of what they considered excessive sensation-seeking on the part of American teenagers. Finally, boys lamented their lack of opportunities to develop personal resources such as leadership and mental health self-care skills and admired the fact that American teenagers benefit from such opportunities in their schools. Self-development desires and efforts are common in adolescents across countries (Lerner, 1982).

At the same time, Jamaican boys did not seem to appreciate other aspects of their teen culture that might be culture universals, such as enjoying oneself and a need to fit in. On the other-hand, they correctly perceived the intense focus on style and appearance to be a unique cultural feature for Jamaican youth based on dancehall culture, which goes above and beyond general adolescent self-consciousness.

Limitations

There are some study limitations that should be considered when interpreting results. First, we make no claims about the representativeness of this sample for the average Jamaican adolescent. Findings are most descriptive of urban boys from the participating all-boys high school and of youth from the larger remote acculturation study. Findings would likely differ for girls (i.e., different features of Jamaican culture such as stereotyped female sexuality may be more salient to them) and rural boys, and may also differ for urban boys in co-educational school settings. Second, being cross-sectional in design, study findings are a snapshot of adolescents' construals and cannot speak to how those construals may evolve over time. Finally, the presence of so few older adolescents means that our conjectures regarding age differences need to be replicated.

Implications

Despite its limitations, this study provides the first data to our knowledge on Jamaican adolescents' perception of their local culture compared to that of the United States. Understanding how youth construe these cultures is necessary both to appreciate the blend of behaviours, identity styles, and values performed by bicultural Americanized Jamaican adolescents on the island, and also to predict and interpret associated adolescent well-being. For example, the current finding that Jamaican adolescents construe (European) American culture as entailing 'crazy' and rebellious teen behaviour, granting greater/earlier adolescent autonomy, and using less restrictive parenting with regard to teenagers' social lives (compared to Jamaican culture) sheds light on why Americanized Jamaican adolescents have lower family obligations, higher obligations discrepancies from mothers, and much higher conflict with mothers than do Traditional Jamaicans (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012).

Current findings may have implications for acculturation research methods. Scholars in psychological acculturation conceptualize it as a dimensional process (Berry, 1997; Ferguson, Bornstein & Pottinger, 2012), meaning that each culture one experiences is considered conceptually distinct from others (rather than opposing). Accordingly, recommended acculturation measures have separate subscales for each culture and many, if not most, index each culture by naming it specifically in scale items. For example, the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II has “Mexican” items and “Anglo” items and the Suinn-Lew Asian self-identity Acculturation Scale (Suinn, Ahuna & Khoo, 1992) has “Asian” and “American” items (ARSMA-II, Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). Similarly, the Acculturation Rating Scale for Jamaican Americans (ARSJA, Ferguson et al., 2012), adapted from the ARSMA-II, has separate ‘Jamaican’, ‘European American’, and ‘African American’ items. Although this practice of acculturation measurement has merit including clarity and high face validity, the researcher must make assumptions regarding how each culture is construed by the participants. For this reason, it can be useful to verify participants’ cultural construals as part of the overall acculturation research methodology. A qualitative approach such as used in this study is particularly well-suited to this exploration of cultural construals (for a quantitative example see Stroink & Lalonde, 2009).

Sources from which acculturating youths gain information regarding the cultures around them can foster biased cultural construals. As discussed earlier, boys’ perceptions of American culture were heavily influenced by U.S. television. However, boys’ construals of their own local Jamaican culture were also caricatured in some ways: dancehall culture featured so prominently in their view of Jamaican culture that this may have overshadowed other elements. Taken together, results do suggest that boys’ cultural construals of a given culture are likely to align with the public projection of that culture by those within it (e.g., Americans choose to portray their culture to themselves and to the world via Hollywood movies, and Jamaicans choose to project dancehall culture both to themselves and to the world through music and artiste personas).

This study also has implications for how adolescents exposed to two cultures, whether immigrants or non-immigrants, construct these cultural construals. Boys in the current study developed construals by comparing and contrasting Jamaican and American cultures on several dimensions including fun-loving versus extreme thrill-seeking, poor versus rich, anti-gay versus openly gay, restrictive versus permissive parenting, and respect for elders versus dismissiveness, respectively. Although interview questions referenced each culture separately rather than pitting one against the other, comparing and contrasting may have been a natural consequence of reflecting on the two cultures during the interview and across the larger study from which the boys were drawn. In their qualitative study of cultural construals among Latino immigrant youth in the United States, Massey and Sanchez (2007) found the same contrasting effect although they too did not ask for comparisons. In response to being asked to show “what the concepts ‘Latino’ and ‘American’ mean to them” (p. 84), Latino youths’ responses communicated a view of Americans as cold and impersonal versus Latinos, who were viewed as friendly and people-oriented. These study findings taken together suggest that having an ‘other’ may lend clearer definition to oneself but may also exaggerate differences.

Conclusion

It is important in this globalized era to understand how adolescents perceive their local culture as well as any remote culture(s) to which they are exposed. This preliminary study sets the stage for future research; however, findings suggest that Jamaican adolescents on the island may have fairly distinct construals of the local Jamaican culture in which they are enculturated, and (European) American culture to which many are becoming remotely acculturated based on long-distance intercultural contact. Knowing the most salient aspects of each culture for acculturating adolescents can allow for more specific predictions for and targeted analyses of acculturation-related changes.

Footnote

¹ Dancehall culture refers to the values, rituals, lifestyles, and identities associated with dancehall music, a popular subgenre of reggae music, which largely originated in inner-city Kingston in the 1980s but now boasts a large fan base across socioeconomic classes in Jamaica and in other countries such as Japan. For detailed descriptions of dancehall culture beyond the scope of this paper, see Cooper (2004), and Hope (2006; 2012).

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