

Full Length Research Paper

An Examination of Indo-Trinidadian Females' Identity Beliefs: Implications for their Centered Leadership

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Discussions around the development of Caribbean women have, to a great extent, marginalized Indo-Trinidadian with scant anecdotal evidence of their leadership potential and identity beliefs. I sought to examine Indo-Trinidadian women's identity beliefs and how this is linked to the concept of leadership. The underlying theoretical framework of this qualitative methodology study was Centered Leadership (Brash & Cranston, 2011). The questions posed were, *what are the beliefs as regards Indo-Trinidadian females' identity and how do such beliefs reflect the subscales of Centered Leadership?* Most of the 50 participants belonged to the 18 to 36 age range with 20 of them possessing high school certificates, 19 Indo-Trinidadian females lived in North-East Trinidad, and 12 were salesclerks. All participants displayed high levels of self-efficacy, 80% indicated that they used positive methods of eliminating stress and they felt empowered emotionally, physically, and mentally. In responding to questions about their belief in freewill, 84% of respondents indicated that they favored free-will over destiny. Four participants who lived in other countries indicated that they did not have any major issues assimilating a new culture. Moreover, 10 of the participants verified the findings. Indo-Trinidadian women's identity and belief systems closely matched the five stages of Centered Leadership: (a) meaning; (b) framing; (c) connecting; (d) engaging; and (e) energizing.

Keywords: Centred Leadership; Indo-Trinidadian Women; Identity Beliefs

Introduction

The foremost authors of Indo-Trinidadian issues have indicated that there is a paucity of extant literature on their contemporary identities and belief systems. Kanhai (1999) and Mohammed (1994) indicated that Indo-Trinidadian women's experiences have continued to be described from a masculine perspective. According to Kanhai, Indo-Trinidadian women remain marginalized by the dearth of information on the various ways in which they have developed.

Mohammed (1998) underscored this development in Indo-Trinidadian women who found their voices and become large contributors to society. She noted that:

Over the last few decades we have seen the growth of a large, articulate and economically secure group of women. They come from all ethnic categories, including women of Indian descent the majority of whom were hitherto allowed only limited education and were forbidden to work outside the home (p. 7).

This identification with nurturing the home was highlighted when Hosein (2011) interviewed rural Indo-Trinidadian women (1996 to 1998) who were over 80 years of age. Hosein concluded, "Household chores and maintenance of the home were crucial factors in the daily rounds of the Indian female" (p.

103). This is no longer the case as Mohammed (2012) indicated when she charted the paradigm shift in the perspective of the Indo-Trinidadian female in the following manner:

From the earliest concept of the *jehagin* or the sisterhood of the boat which surfaced during the nineteenth century, to the more submissive concept of the *dulahin*, or the caste-centred one of *maharajin*, there emerged a changing set of symbols and ideas such as *matikor* and *bindi* that have currency today and whose meanings have complicated the simple stereotypes and apolitical notions once attached to Indo-Caribbean femininity (p. 1).

The strides made by Indo-Trinidadian women in finding and asserting their voices can be evidenced by the current achievements of the Indo-Trinidadian Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad Bissessar and other Indo-Trinidadian exemplars such as Patricia Mohammed, Gabrielle Hosein, and Rosanne Kanhai inter alia. The problem remains that there is minimal evidence of the "wide-ranging activities of Indo-Caribbean women and the multiple ways in which they had developed were hardly manifest in written texts" (Kanhai, 199, p. xii). The need to substantiate the invaluable contributions made and being made by Indo-Trinidadian women is indubitable.

In a similar vein, Mehta (2004) indicated that Indo-Caribbean women view themselves through Afro-centric lens which Mohammed (1994) viewed as the *creolization* of the Indo-Trinidadian female. Furthermore, Mohammed (1994) viewed Indo-Caribbean women's identity as being placed through the dichotomous male/female dyad, "Indian womanhood is depicted through the eyes of the male and defined only in terms of her relationship to the male" (p. 171). According to Mohammed (2012), Indo-Trinidadian women "were considered outside of the mainstream struggle for female equality and equity" (p. 2). This study offers the Indo-Trinidadian participants an opportunity to give voice to whom they have become and links their development to the theory of Centered Leadership posited by Brash and Cranston (2011).

There is not only a scarcity of information on Indo-Trinidadian females but even less on them as leaders. A google search conducted on August 25, 2014, found one article on leadership relating to Indo-Trinidadian females and that was linked to the current Prime Minister of Trinidad, Kamla Persad-Bissessar. The findings of this study add to the limited body of existing research on Indo-Trinidadian women and leadership.

Literature Review

Centered Leadership

Centered leadership evolved from Brash and Cranston's (2011) desire to find a leadership style that best portrayed their abilities as women. In their exploratory qualitative study of successful women in leadership, they investigated the theory of centered leadership and how it most accurately typified contemporary female professionals. They stated, "Centered leadership did not arise in a vacuum. When we searched for answers to why the women we interviewed shared certain traits and behaviors, we began with well-established thinking on management and leadership" (p. 286). They espoused five capabilities of centered leadership. They are: (a) meaning; (b) framing; (c) connecting; (d) engaging; and (e) energizing.

Meaning according to Brash and Cranston (2011), "what inspires women leaders, guides their careers, sustains their optimism, generates, positive emotions, and enables them to lead in creative and profound ways" (p. 11). Meaning denotes motivation and allows the individual to propel himself/herself to do better. Meaningful purpose according to Brash and Cranston "transcends everyday goals you open yourself up to long-lasting happiness" (p. 22). Meaning defines successful leaders. Meaning foment happiness and emotional and psychological well-being which Brash and Cranston viewed as critical to successful leadership. The four practical aspects of happiness are: (a) happiness is motivating; (b) happier teams are more creative; (c) leaders who exude happiness are more effective; and (d) happiness improves physical health, as well as stamina and resilience. Brash and Cranston urged individuals to find what makes them happy because that unleashes their potential.

Brash and Cranston (2011) stated that framing is the individual's ability "to sustain herself on the path to leadership and to

function as a leader, a woman must view situations clearly avoiding downward spirals, in order to move ahead, adapt, and implement solutions" (p. 11). Framing reinforces meaning. Brash and Cranston suggested that framing is a choice. The act of framing involves "unlearning deeply embedded behaviors-including snap judgments that constrain your views on situations, other people, and yourself. This ability to frame reality positively is a powerful capability and learning how to do it is part of your leadership development" (p. 67).

An active part of framing entails optimism. An optimist views criticism as constructive and challenging and an opportunity to grow. Optimists are proactive and "may find that they can apply their positive framing more consistently to help others see more opportunity" (p. 72). In practicing optimism, Brash and Cranston posited several ipse dixits, among these were: (a) make adaptability your skills; (b) make reframing a conscious act; (c) feedback can help you grow; (d) be cool under uncertain conditions; and (e) it is the journey not the end result.

Connecting, according to Brash and Cranston (2011), occurs when "Women leaders make meaningful connections to develop sponsorship and followership, to collaborate with colleagues and supporters with warmth and humanity" (p. 11). Women are more natural at connecting than men which is evidenced by research which shows women as sharing more communal roles than men. Brash and Cranston espoused *quid pro quo* as a fundamental element of connecting. They insisted that reciprocity forms, builds, and sustains relationships. This is the *sine qua non* of connecting. They suggested a network mapping exercise to determine how individuals should become connectors. They segued that connectors lead through others.

Engaging, opined Brash and Cranston (2011), occurs when "successful leaders take ownership for opportunities along with risks. They have a voice and they use it. They're also able to face down their fears" (p. 11). Engaging is the fourth process along the continuum where it all comes together. This happens "when you choose to cross an invisible line from being a person to whom things happen to becoming a person who makes things happen. It literally means breaking the bounds that circumscribe your career and your life" (p. 187). They advised in the engaging stage that women need to listen more than talk, they need to make their own luck, they need to remember that they are in control and need to take that step toward self-development and becoming more centered leaders. Women are able to weather the storm and adapt to new realities.

Energizing is the ability "to succeed long-term and to accommodate family and community responsibilities, women learn to manage their energy reserves to tap into flow" (Brash & Cranston, p. 11). The most essential aspect of energizing is being able to understand what makes an individual stop and go. Brash and Cranston suggested a list of questions to self-evaluate what makes women tick under the following broad categories: (a) basic stamina and drive; (b) mental activities; (c) emotional moods; (d) relationship to others; and (e) core values.

Brash and Cranston (2011) advocated various activities to re-energize the individual. These include: (a) learn yoga and build a simple exercise; (b) take a walk; (c) play your favorite music; (d) bring fresh flowers to work; (e) perform an act of kindness. Women should also minimize drains, know that physical strength builds resilience, build recovery into their day, and be open to experience flow.

The authors determine flow as “the phenomenon that happens when your skills are well-matched to an inspiring challenge and you are working toward a clear goal” (p. 8). This “flow which Brash and Cranston (2011) espoused can be found in earlier literature on employee immersion whereby Csikszentmihalyi (2008) suggested that the optimal experience is flow which is a state of consciousness characterized by absorption which occurs when: (a) goals are clear and attainable; (b) there is strong concentration on a focused topic; (c) intrinsic motivation is prevalent; (d) there is equity between ability and challenge; and (e) there is immediate feedback. In such a state of consciousness, individuals experience deep enjoyment, creativity and involvement in life. Individuals become so engaged in what they are doing that they lose track of time.

Based on data correlated, Brash and Cranston (2011) found that their concept of centered leadership was valid across the sample for North America and Western Europe. Their research further validated the implementation of centered leadership at any stage in the career. Brash and Cranston also found a correlation of centered leadership to performance and satisfaction. They discovered, “a higher percent of the people who scored the highest on use of centered leadership practices report high success, satisfaction, and performance versus those who scored the lowest on the same practices” (p. 298). The researchers also found that centered leadership built up women’s strength. Their findings illustrate that “professional women practice centered leadership skills a bit more than their male counterparts” (p. 300).

Method

Williams and Heikes (1993), proponents of the qualitative methodology, “argue that they give a voice to women whose life experiences have been silenced or ignored by more standardized survey research techniques” (p. 280). A qualitative interview was selected to engender in-depth information on Indo-Trinidadian women’s thoughts and feelings. According to Kvale (1996) and Mc Namara (1999) interviews provide in-depth information from participants and allow them to give details of their experiences while providing factual information. Turner (2010) espoused, “interviews provide in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic. Oftentimes, interviews are coupled with other forms of data collection in order to provide the researcher with a well-rounded collection of information for analyses” (p. 754).

An informal conversation style was implemented with the use of open-ended questions for an improved understanding of participants’ views. Appendix A contains the questionnaire used. Fifty participants completed this open-ended interview.

Furthermore, verification of the data collected was conducted individually to determine participants’ perspectives on the changing role of Indo-Trinidadian women. Ten of the 50 participants agreed with the findings as regards to participants’ development of self-efficacy, resilience, and participants’ emotional, mental, and physical empowerment.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

All 50 participants gave informed consent and were told of the confidentiality of the information and assured that data would be reported cumulatively. They were asked for comments on their: (a) self efficacy; (b) empowerment; (c) attitudes: free will versus destiny; (d) beliefs: traditional versus modern and for those “transnational identities”: (e) assimilation and integration of a new culture; (f) sense of alienation in the adopted land; (g) inner turmoil and loyalties to native land; (h) yearning to return to the native land; and (i) return to native land and disappoint or happiness. They also gave demographic information such as age, occupation, educational level, and where they lived.

Interviews lasted 10 to 15 minutes. Some participants who lived in other countries and lived far away opted to answer questions via e-mail and by telephone. Participants gave permission at the onset and the researcher transcribed interviews. No names were required of participants, nor were they expected to give specific information such as actual addresses. Questions four and five were based on individual’s self-efficacy. These self-assessment statements were: (4) *I feel confident that when a problem arises that I can solve it* and (5) *I don’t feel/ feel disadvantaged being an Indo-Trinidadian woman that I am at a disadvantage/advantage living in Trinidad*. These yes/no questions did not leave room for expansion on the part of the interviewees but indicated their level of self-efficacy.

Questions six to 12 focused on emotional, physical, and mental empowerment. Question 13 dealt with resilience and 14 to 20 encompassed questions based on freewill and destiny, and tradition versus modernity. The second section of the interview included questions on experiences living away from the native land and issues with assimilation, integration, and acceptance of the new culture. Convenience and snowballing sampling strategies were employed. The researcher identified participants who were willing to share their experiences and feelings as Indo-Trinidadian women and who gave informed consent.

Research Questions

Research questions are significant because they set the tone for the entire study. The research questions which guided this study were, *what are the beliefs as regards Indo-Trinidadian females’ identity and how do such beliefs reflect the subscales of Centered Leadership?* The following data analysis will be used to answer the aforementioned research questions.

Data Analysis

Step 1: Data were read and re-read. Step 2: data were analyzed based on the purported themes. Step 3: themes were reviewed and anomalies were noted. Step 4: findings were synthesized and

summarized. A categorical-content perspective was employed to analyze the data.

Findings

Participants' Ages

Fifty Indo-Trinidadian women were interviewed ranging from ages 18 to 64 years. The large cross-section of ages allowed for increased understanding of how Indo-Trinidadian participants of differing ages see themselves and their situation. Participants were divided into five age groups as seen in Figure 1, consisting of 18 to 25 years, 26 to 36, 37 to 45, 46 to 54, and 55 to 64 years. Figure 1 shows the different ages of participants' interviewed with an average age of 34.88 and a standard deviation of 13.44.

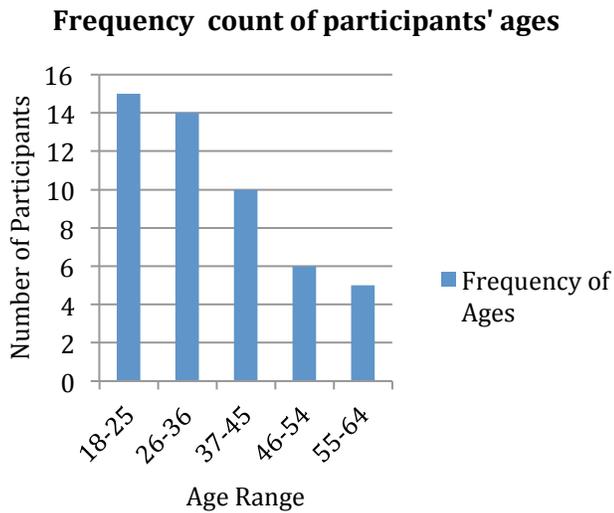


Figure 1. Graph showing ages of participants.

Participants' Educational Level

Participants' educational levels were varied. Twenty of the participants interviewed possessed "O" level qualifications which is the expanded certification on leaving secondary school at ages 16 to 17. Fourteen participants possessed undergraduate level qualifications. Five Indo-Trinidadian participants held graduate degrees. Noteworthy, is that the 64 year-old Hindu Indo-Trinidadian woman interviewed only had a primary school education. This showed a cultural inclination among traditional Hindu families in the past era to place little emphasis on the education of their daughters. Mohammed (1988) resonated "Education at first was mainly for boys. It was thought unwise to educate your girls" (p. 20). Such traditions were brought from India and no longer perpetuate in contemporary Indo-Trinidadian society as most participants in this study indicated. However, one 35-year-old interviewee indicated that she possessed a primary level education because she had dropped out of secondary school. This was the exception rather than the rule. She did not wish to explain. She simply stated, "I had to drop out of school for personal reasons."

Results of this survey indicated that such tendencies have altered. One 35-year-old participant indicated that her Muslim father pushed her more than her brothers to become educated so that she would not have to be dependent on anyone. She stated, "I grow up in a Muslim household but my father was harder on me when it come to school because I am a girl. He said he wanted to make sure no man would take advantage of me so he needed me to be educated so I can provide for myself" (personal communication, August 5, 2010). This is in contrast with Yousef's (2011) case study of a Muslim female student who was expected to take time off from her studies to take care of her new born baby brother and return to her studies after a year.

Three of the participants interviewed did not finish secondary school. Among these three, were a 63-year-old and a 19-year-old pregnant women. The 19-year-old did not wish to share why she had to cut short her education. The 63 year-old indicated that in her era, Indo-Trinidadian females were not allowed to go to school. She stated, "In those days, the boys went to school and the girls stayed at home and took care of the house-hold and the younger brothers and sisters." Figure 2 shows the ratio and levels of educated participants.

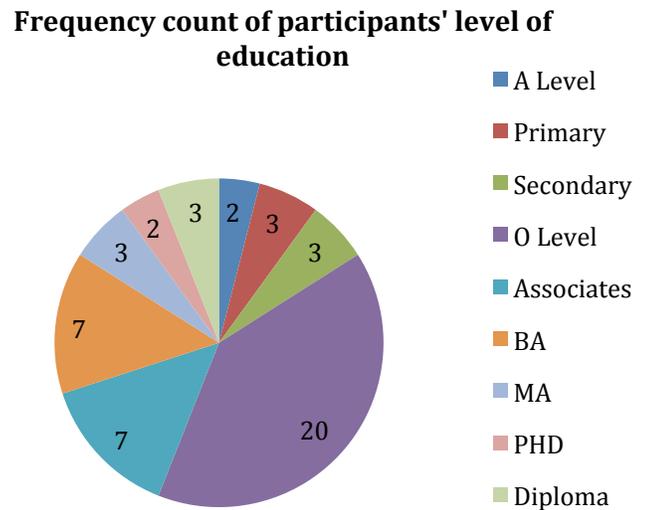


Figure 2. Pie chart showing participants' educational level.

One 50-year-old participant sent a follow-up comment on the interview via e-mail exemplifying how the interview questions affected her. She stated, "I think it's great and certainly allowed me to reflect on my journey and readjust accordingly" (personal communication, August 4, 2010). Another participant who was somewhat hesitant to be interviewed at the end of the interview stated, "It was a pleasure responding to your questions" (personal communications, August 4, 2010).

Participants' Location

Figure 3 exhibits the number of participants and the areas where they lived. Seventeen participants lived in the north-west with 19 interviewees commuting from the north-east to work in the

north-west of Trinidad. Seven participants came from South and seven from Central Trinidad. Since 31 out of the 50 participants lived in suburban and rural areas in Trinidad, one would have expected to find more subservient thinking among the participants.

Frequency count of regions in Trinidad where participants lived

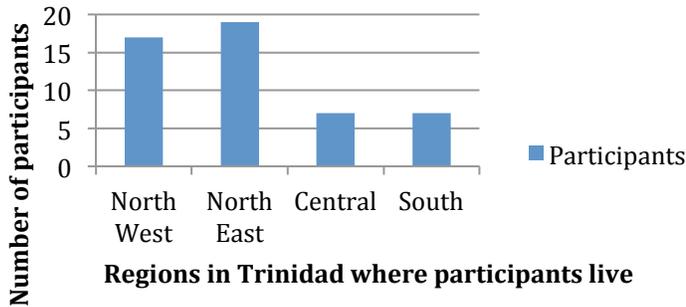


Figure 3. Graph showing frequency count of regions in Trinidad where participants lived.

Participants’ Occupations

Twelve salesclerks and seven managers agreed to participate in the interview process. Six teachers gave their voices to reconstructing the identity of the Indo-Trinidadian woman. Three women were self-employed, four were unemployed and others ranged from business analyst to retired. Figure 4 clearly depicts the various occupations of the women interviewed.

Frequency count of participants’ occupations

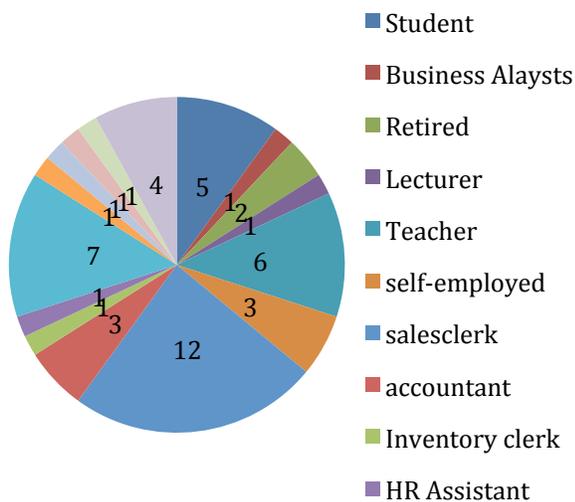


Figure 4. Frequency count of participants’ occupations.

Participants’ Self-Efficacy

In their responses to questions on self-efficacy, Indo-Trinidadian women displayed high levels of self-confidence and empowerment. They also indicated that when they set a goal and it seemed that they could not achieve it that they continued working toward achieving that goal. They exemplified resilience in attaining goals. They continued their goals albeit, these goals may appear almost impossible. One participant stated, “Sometimes I will decide whether the goal is worth it in the long run.” However, all women interviewed displayed self-efficacy by their responses to the questions. They showed motivation toward setting and attaining goals and resilience in trying to achieve these goals. They displayed a level of confidence in accomplishing goals. Another woman interviewed indicated that the role of Indo-Trinidadian women, “have evolved tremendously over the years but looking back the women of our culture quietly set the foundation for these changes into the way they raised their families, most especially the girls” (personal communication, August 4, 2010).

Participants’ Methods of Eliminating Stress

Moreover, Indo-Trinidadian women vocalized their sense of physical, mental, and emotional empowerment when they responded positively to questions pertaining to self-efficacy and resilience. Three out of the 50 women interviewed indicated that they were not comfortable with their body image. One 50-year old shared, “I don’t have time to think about my body and myself, I have to work and live” (personal communication, March 14, 2011). Most women felt they had sufficient control over their emotions. A few respondents said, “sometimes it is difficult especially during the pre-menstrual syndrome.”

Participants claimed that they eliminated stress in more than one way. Figure 5 shows the responses of Indo-Trinidadians ways of alleviating stress. Shopping and listening to music were the major activities helping Indo-Trinidadian participants to eliminate stress. These are activities which Brash and Cranston (2011) suggested energized females involved in the development stages of centered leadership. One participant stated that she talks to friends when she is stressed about something.

Frequency count of participants’ methods of eliminating stress

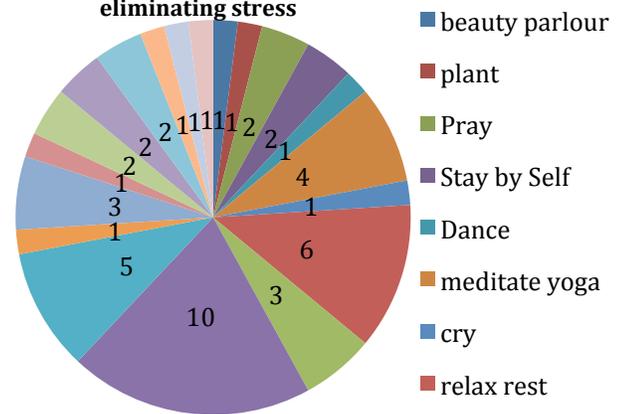


Figure 5. Pie chart showing methods of eliminating stress

Participants' Emotional, Physical, and Mental Empowerment

Except for 3 women, all women interviewed indicated that they rewarded themselves when they achieved an accomplishment. Shopping and buying clothing or jewelry for themselves were high on the list of extrinsic rewards. Three women 30, 50, and 19 years old did nothing to reward themselves. The 30-year-old indicated that she was too busy being a mother and did not make time for herself. She stated, "Girl, I have my children and I have only time for them and I can't find time for myself" (personal communication, August 5, 2011). This example is an anomaly. Note also that few Indo-Trinidadian women indicated that they had the tendency to "cry" or "stay by themselves" which Mohammed (1988) discovered in her interview with Droopatee Naipaul was the norm among Indo-Trinidadian women who were interviewed in that era.

All Indo-Trinidadian participants indicated that they did not adhere to any rigid religious dogma. Most of the women interviewed, stated that they practiced a different religion to that of their spouses. One participant stated, "I am not strict about my religion, I am a Christian and I am open-minded." Another participant stated, "I am in a Hindu/Muslim marriage and we celebrate both religious festivals." Another Indo-Trinidadian female involved in a Hindu/Catholic marriage indicated, "I am not strict in any one religion." Six participants were in Muslim/Hindu marriages and seven participants were in Hindu/Catholic marriages. Four women were in interracial marriages. According to Chari (2005) "Indo-Trinidadian women continue to challenge community norms by marrying men from the Afro-Trinidadian community" (p. viii).

Participants' Belief about Freewill versus Destiny

Given the traditional and archaic view of arranged marriages as part of the culture handed down from India and first and second generation Indo-Trinidadians, participants were vehemently against arranged marriages. They said not at all. One 50-year old participant stated, "No finding a partner on your own is better." Another participant stated, "We will always find the right person in the right place and time." Three women indicated that they acknowledged the value of arranged marriages and have witnessed the positive effects of arranged marriages. One 22 year-old participant stated, "My family will know better to choose someone for me so I think arranged marriages have a place in my life." However, most participants did not see it as necessary in this changing society where Indo-Trinidadian women are taking control of their lives and demonstrating freewill in all areas.

One 22-year-old stated that she felt it was important because she may be blinded by love and not be able to see the faults of the individual as her parents would. She stated, "Arranged marriages have their value and I prefer that my parents choose for me because I feel that I would be too in love to really see the true individual" (personal communication, August 5, 2011). As an aside, arranged marriages still exists in some remote and not so

remote parts of Trinidad where Indo-Trinidadian women are coerced into marrying persons they do not know very well. One participant did express concern for a family who practiced such a tradition at the expense of its children's happiness. As this study is being written, there is a petition to increase the legal age for a female to be married in Trinidad from 16 to 18 years old.

Indo-Trinidadian participants no longer felt that their space in the home was in the kitchen and they did not feel that cooking, cleaning, and washing were gender specific tasks. They saw themselves as breadwinners in the family and equal to men. A 24 year-old participant stated that, "they are the breadwinners and they have made significant contributions to society and their family." One 25-year-old self-employed woman said, "Before, cooking and cleaning to serve husband, now is trying to make a living to help out the entire family" (personal communication, August 5, 2010). Another participant stated that she saw the role of Indo-Trinidadian women as "trying to balance family and professional life." A 31 year-old Indo-Trinidadian stated that she saw herself and other Indo-Trinidadian women as "having more freedom to do whatever they wanted to do." Another respondent stated that her role as a contemporary Indo-Trinidadian woman was, "greater and more respectful." An 18 year-old stated that the modern Indo-Trinidadian woman was, "independent and strong." Another participant saw today's Indo-Trinidadian women as, "empowered and autonomous." Contributing to the household and ensuring that they are finding themselves and growing are the staying power of current Indo-Trinidadian woman. Another 27 year-old participant stated that present Indo-Trinidadian women are seen in a "mixed light since some women are the traditional type and live in the more rural areas but others are bold and live in the more urban areas."

Most participants found that Indo-Trinidadian men are treated similar to the women. One participant explained, "It depends on the age group in question and to some extent the level of education of the persons. It seems that with a higher level of education equal roles are more accepted." However, three participants regarded men as treated generally better than women. In four instances, women in the South of Trinidad indicated that their brothers were treated better than they were. One participant stated, "Some men are treated better than women." Another participant stated, "the women have not reached equality. Indian men look down on Indian women." Another participant stated, "No, in my home, my brothers are treated better than I am treated." This feeling of being disadvantaged and pushed aside in favor of a male was expressed by one of the female Indo-Trinidadian participants in Yousef's (2011) case study. According to Janine (the participant):

But those things changed for me...before A levels when my little brother was born. That was the turning point for me. My father introduced us and said, "Okay, he has to call you *bibi*." And I liked that.I didn't fight against tradition anymore... I took a year off from A levels. Tradition became very important to me (p. 135).

All women believed that their destiny was controlled by a higher power. However, Many opined that they had free will as well and God was there to guide them if they so desired. The changing role of Indo-Trinidadian participants displayed more financially independent individuals grounded in modernization and progress. Many expressed the view that the current Prime Minister, Kamla Persad Bissessar, served as a role model to all Indo-Trinidadian women. Her strength, humble beginnings, and continued humility, spawn feelings of pride and kinship or the “*jahaji-bhain*” principle of affiliation and sisterhood (Pirbhai, 2010). One participant stated that she felt “more powerful now with the current Prime Minister as the role model.” A 30 year-old participant stated that today’s Indo-Trinidadian women feel “confident in themselves and that they will positively achieve something and be better in their lives with the Prime Minister.”

Indo-Trinidadian participants expressed strength, confidence, progress, improvement, and upward mobility as their current characteristics. Interviewees exhorted Indo-Trinidadian women to embrace their resilience, tenacity, self-efficacy, self-empowerment, motherhood, and family support systems to create and inculcate an identity personifying contemporary Indo-Trinidadian women. The bare-foot and pregnant image they see as being part of their ancestral past, a past they acquiesce but to which they do not adhere.

Manuel (1997/1998) stated, “diasporic identities are inherently unstable and complex entities, in which allegiances to contemporary and ancestral homelands are variously reconciled, weighted, or compartmentalized” (p. 1). Indeed the emerging voice and identity of the actual Indo-Trinidadian woman is powerful, self-affirming, and filled with self-esteem and self respect. Ninety percent of the women interviewed indicated that being financially independent has given them a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy. They saw themselves as successful, intelligent, self-confident, modern women in charge of their destinies setting their own standards and creating a new identity for Indo-Trinidadian women.

Participants’ Transnational Identity

Another aspect of Indo-Trinidadian women explored was that of the embodiment of transnational identities. Four participants lived for short or extended periods away from their native land. Their answers to the second section of the interview suggested individuals who could easily assimilate and integrate in another culture. According to these four interviewees, they learned to adapt to and adopt the culture of their new country. One participant stated, “people tend to click based on a variety of reasons, socio-economic, perceived class, religion and culture. One has to work at finding the right balance wherever one chooses to live.” They claimed not to have suffered any dilemma between the two diverse cultures. Creating transnational identities, these four women have engendered transnational spaces.

When asked about whether they had problems being understood in another country three women said no. One female indicated

that she sometimes had problems due to the difference in language from English to French. They embraced the culture by being open-minded and being true to themselves and their personalities without feeling alienated from their home land. One participant stated, “One has to be open minded to be able to assimilate without much pain. As with all new things it is a give and take. Why move to a new land if not willing to integrate to some extent.”

All experienced moments when they yearned to return to Trinidad but did not let it reach a point where they were not able to function. Two of the women returned; one after only a short stay and another after many years away. There was yearning to return to the known after living away for so long. However, the feeling of being connected and in one’s own space of comfort far outweighed that yearning.

Verification of Findings

Gómez, Juristo, and Vegas (2010) stated, “The verification of a previously observed finding is important. Being able to verify a finding provides some guarantee that it is not product of chance but that the observed phenomenon is stable or regular” (p. 1). Verifying findings is crucial in determining the extent of reliability, internal and external validity, and generalizability of the data. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, Spiers (2002) purported that “Verification strategies help the researcher identify when to continue, stop, or modify the research process in order to achieve reliability and validity and ensure rigor” (p. 17). They posited five verification strategies as follows: (a) methodological coherence, (b) sample must be appropriate, (c) collecting and analyzing data congruently, (d) thinking theoretically, and (e) theory development. “Member-check,” as indicated by Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, and Neumann (2011), enhances study credibility and participants’ involvement. Additionally, Johnson (1997) indicated that participant feedback is, “the feedback and discussion of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions with the actual participants and other members of the participants’ community for verification and insight” (p. 283).

Verification of findings was conducted with 10 of the 50 respondents who answered the open-ended questionnaire. Participants were made aware of the major findings of the study and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the conclusions. One 50-year-old self-employed respondent indicated, “Indo-Trinidadian women in town are more independent, and educated so I agree with what you say but I feel that in the country Indo-Trinidadian women would not be as independent” (personal communication, March 29, 2011). Another 55 year-old unemployed participant stated, “that is how Indo-Trinidadian women are now as compared to before.” She continued, “In the countryside, there are educated Indo-Trinidadian women who would understand the questions and the level of information expected but again this is based on their level of education” (personal communication, March 29, 2011). All participants agreed that Indo-Trinidadian women have emerged from passive acceptance to embrace self efficacy, self-empowerment, hope optimism and ultimately centred leadership.

“I think too many women are being abused and ill-treated by men” opined a 45 year-old Indo-Trinidadian female when informed about the findings of this study. She furthered, “men feel because they are men the woman should listen to them even when they cheat on you” (personal communication, March 29, 2011). Another 44 year-old manager posited, “I agree with the findings because Indo-Trinidadian women are stronger, more independent, and rely on themselves” (personal communication, March 29, 2011). A 34 year-old participant echoed similar sentiments on learning of the results of this study, “Indo-Trinidadian’s women strength is in not relying on men to take care of them and provide for them” (personal communication, March 29, 2011). A 19-year-old respondent agreed with the findings and stated, “My parents and education give me strength and Indo-Trinidadian women are finding that strength” (personal communication, March 29, 2011). A quote from the present Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago effectively sums up the journey of the Indo-Trinidadian woman, “my own small story of village girl to Prime Minister is simply a demonstration of what can occur when even some opportunities and better education are provided to girls and women” (*Trinidad Guardian*, March 15, 2011, p. 6)

Link to Participants’ Centered Leadership

Centered Leadership consists of five leadership capabilities: (a) meaning; (b) framing; (c) connecting; (d) engaging; and (e) energizing. Meaning involves purpose, motivation and happiness. In this respect, these 50 Indo-Trinidadian females displayed strong intrinsic motivation in attaining goals, eliminating stress, and seeing themselves as makers of their own destinies. They showed resilience by the tenacity they stated they possessed when trying to accomplish a goal.

Since the concept of Centered Leadership relates to professional leaders and some of these were leaders in their specific jobs, framing was not a very strong indicator in their responses. They did display the subscale of framing-optimism. They were optimistic about themselves and their role in society as contemporary Indo-Trinidadian women.

The questionnaire did not adequately respond to the concept of connecting. However, from their responses of talking to others when they are stressed, and even agreeing to answer the questions posed to them, the participants displayed connection according to Brash and Cranston (2011). In the subscale, engaging as defined by Brash and Cranston, these respondents exhibited high levels as they indicated that they believed in free-will and did not believe that their parents should choose their spouse. In this stage, from the responses given, Indo-Trinidadian women were weathering the storm and making their own luck.

The subscales of energizing as espoused by Brash and Cranston is that women possess stamina and drive which can be seen in these participants’ outlook in life. They were mentally, physically, and emotionally empowered based on their responses. Forty-seven participants indicated that they rewarded themselves for small and big accomplishments. This action gave them a

sense of achievement and also allowed them to persevere and set larger goals which reflected a high level of resilience, hope, and optimism which is related to aspects of Centered Leadership such as meaning, connecting, engaging, and energizing. Respondents were particularly energized based on the activities they participated in to eliminate stress. They walked, listened to music, meditated, danced, prayed, relaxed/rested, shopped, and planted in order to feel re-energized.

This also indicates that the interviewees were cognizant of what energizes them which is a valuable tool in developing Centered Leadership. Most Indo-Trinidadian women interviewed indicated that they set extrinsic and intrinsic goals and tried their utmost to attain their objectives. Above all, Indo-Trinidadian participants indicated that they always tried to uplift, love, praise, and respect themselves. Such strategies will lead to more actualized individual who reflects Centered Leadership.

Discussion

There is a tendency to stigmatize women based on ethnicity rather than what they have accomplished individually and collectively. Women who have not been able to transcend the traditional role as mothers and caretakers should feel empowered by the examples of the 50 Indo-Trinidadian participants in this study. There should be global sharing and sisterhood as women look to emulate positive qualities of resilience, self-efficacy, self-concordance, and increased self-awareness. These findings suggest that participants were more self-contained and exemplified high levels of optimism, hope, and resilience which lead to high levels of meaning, framing, connecting, engaging, and energizing all necessary elements in Centered Leadership. They set goals and tried to attain them to the best of their abilities and displayed high levels of resilience. They found constructive ways to eliminate stress. They capitalized on their strengths and were willing to work on their weaknesses. These participants all displayed aspects of centered leadership from meaning, framing, connecting, engaging, and energizing. They knew what worked and did not work for them and they chose optimism as opposed to pessimism. They displayed resilience in their approach to life and their tenacity in achieving goals.

Strategies for empowerment according to the women interviewed were education, resilience, self-efficacy, increased understanding of themselves and the concomitant, onerous, and conflated responsibility as mother and professional. Several Indo-Trinidadian participants stated that family and spousal support systems could be accredited to their success as individuals.

Recommendations and Conclusions

A recommendation would be that a more situated observation would have eliminated any tendency to create a positive impression. A younger age group would yield different results and comparing results with an older age group would illustrate the change and progress from one era to another. A comparison of urban and rural Indo-Trinidadian women’s perspectives would also provide insightful information. A larger sample size

may yield nuances in demographics such as age, religion, educational level, and marital status.

The 50 Indo-Trinidadian women interviewed indicated that they were proud, strong, resilient, empowered women who were willing to reward themselves for their achievements. They also stated that they felt in control of their destiny, did not wish to be seen as the archaic prototypes of Indian women, and felt financially and emotionally independent. They did not view themselves as products of a society but producers of the society. These findings corroborate the theoretical framework of Centered Leadership. The conclusions contained in this study expand the limited body of extant evidence-based research on Indo-Trinidadian women's identity beliefs and leadership.

Mohammed (2010) stated, "In the 1980s I wrote a paper called 'The Creolization of Indian Women.' I was talking about the way in which Indian women in Trinidad have turned the very weaknesses associated with them—submissiveness, subservience—into strengths" (p. 2). Mohammed saw the modern identity of Indo-Trinidadian woman as capitalizing on her tenacity, perseverance, passivity, and "cane resilience" (Mehta, 2010) and her education proves to be a powerful combination. The participants in this study demonstrate a new identity and belief system of the modern Indo-Trinidadian woman. Mohammed declared of the incumbent Indo-Trinidadian female Prime Minister:

So what I see with Kamla Persad-Bissessar is a coming of age, to use a cliché, and to reduce her victory only to 'the woman thing' is to deny the importance of race and how important this has been for Indians here and Indian women in particular. (p. 1)

Indo-Trinidadian women continue to use their very weaknesses as strengths to create a repertoire of skills, beliefs, and identities that challenge the quintessential concept of contemporary Indo-Trinidadian women.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire Indo-Trinidadian Women

1. Age
2. Occupation
3. (a) Education Level: O' level, A' level, BA, MA, PHD
(b) Where do you live?
4. I feel confident that when a problem arises that I can solve it.
5. I don't feel/ feel disadvantaged being an Indo-Trinidadian woman that I am at a disadvantage/advantage living in Trinidad.
6. When I enter a room where I know no-one, I make an effort to get to know people.
7. My outlook on the future is positive even if at the moment it does not appear to be.
8. How do you feel about your body image?
9. When it seems that all is lost and there is no other way. I lose hope/ do not lose hope.
10. Do you believe that you have control over your emotions?
11. When you are stressed, what do you do to eliminate stress?
12. Name one positive reward you did for yourself for achieving something?
13. When I set a goal and it seems that I cannot achieve it, I continue working toward this goal until I achieve it.
14. Do you believe in arranged marriages or should we each find our partner on our own or it is destined and we will find this person in the right time and place?
15. Do you believe that we have freewill over our destiny or that our destiny is controlled by a higher force?
16. Do you adhere to strict Hindu/Muslim/ Catholic practices?

17. Do you believe as Indo-Trinidadian women we are no longer barefoot and pregnant but embracing all aspects of the role as bread winner in the household?
18. Is there parity between the male and female Indo-Trinidadian community: (1) professionally and (2) social status?
19. How do you see the role of Indo-Trinidadian women in 2010?
20. How do you feel you have empowered yourself as an Indian woman?

If you migrated etc.:

1. Did you have problems being understood?
2. How did you embrace the new culture?
3. Did you experience any sense of alienation?
4. Did you yearn to return home?
5. Did you learn to accept the new environment?
6. If you returned home what were your thoughts or feelings etc.?
7. Did you have problems reintegrating into the Trinidadian society?