

*TRANSFORMING LIVES, TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES,  
TRANSFORMING THE NATION...ONE STUDENT AT A TIME*



## **'Racialised facilitative capital' and the paving of differential paths to achievement of Afro-Trinidadian boys**

Dr. Ravi Rampersad

[ravi.rampersad@my.costaatt.edu.tt](mailto:ravi.rampersad@my.costaatt.edu.tt)

College of Science, Technology and Applied  
Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT)

# Context on Afro-Trinidadian boys and achievement

- Winston 'Gypsy' Peters, 1997 calypso 'Little black boy go to school'
  - Pathologically links black masculinity and culture to:
    - Educational failure, criminality, unemployment, drug abuse and destitution
- Errol Miller's (1980s onwards) thesis on the marginalization of the black male, perhaps the first academic articulation of a 'crisis' of black masculinity
- 2003 Budget debate mainstreams the discourse on failing black boys based on a 2000 World Bank report which drew heavily on the Jules (1994) report
- Social commentators began to speak of an emerging black underclass

# Context on Afro-Trinidadian boys and achievement

- Public discourse simplistically labels black boys as the lowest achievers, tied to deficit thinking constructs related to:
  - Deficient cultural values
  - Single mother homes
    - Feminisation of society & education, lack of male role models & discipline

## The context of race in Trinidadian discourse

- Trinidad follows an 'ostrich approach' to racial matters, "that is, they all stick their heads deep into the social ground and say, we don't have races here. We don't have racism here" (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2008), we are all Trinidadians.
- Pigmentocracy is the reality of race in Trinidad
  - A system of social stratification which marries skin colour with social class. There is the creation of a social pyramid where the higher up you go the lighter the skin colour.
  - In the context of Trinidad, middle and upper class status is concomitantly associated with whiteness and lighter skin, while darker skin is associated with the working class. In a measure these terms become interchangeable.

# What is racialised facilitative capital?

- Capital is understood as the facilitative vehicle for social accumulation, access or ownership of the 'right' capital can be the difference between social advancement and social stagnation
- The concept of racialised facilitative capital stems from a marriage of the Sociology of Bourdieu and Critical Race Theory (CRT)
- However, it is a reading of capital as political as opposed to neutral or democratic that allows for its reformulation as a racialised process in the context of Trinidad. Capital is understood as racialised when we take into consideration that Trinidadian society is pigmentocratically structured

# The study

- Two schools indicative of the dual system of Prestige vs Stereotyped Gov't Schools
  - St. George's Boys RC – prestige, middle class
  - Pinehill Boys Government – stereotyped gov't, working class
  - Participants: Afro-Trinidadian boys (8-10 yrs), parents, teachers
  - Methods: observation, individual interviews and group work

# How does racialised facilitative capital affect education?

- Skin colour does not have a direct affect on education as it would in an apartheid type system
- Skin colour has a cumulative 'social class effect' on education through access to prestige education, this is related to:
  - Employment of parents
  - Residential patterns
  - Education of parents
- This is seen to operate interdependently in the forms of capital:
  - Social
  - Economic
  - Cultural

# Social capital and the social weight of skin colour

- Social capital relates to the benefits from being identified or connected with particular social groupings; family, skin colour etc
- Lighter skin ascribes certain potentialities:
  - Attractiveness, competence and intellectualism.
- Darker skin ascribes a different set of potentialities:
  - Incompetence, unattractiveness and untrustworthiness.

# Social capital and the social weight of skin colour

- *"Sir I was a little whiter than this yuh know, it's the sun get me so"*
- *"Dar... umhh.... a little dark skin sir, brown eyes, black hair"*
- *"Fair skinned...slim....average height...."*

# The racialisation of economic capital

- Economic capital relates to wealth and command over economic resources
- Research in the Americas reveals historical and contemporary patterns where lighter skin groups are able to accrue more economic capital as compared to darker skinned groups reflected in patterns where:
  - As skin colour becomes lighter educational attainment increases
  - Lighter skin people are more likely to be employed as professionals and in higher status and higher paying jobs
  - Income levels increase as skin colour becomes lighter

## Whose culture has capital?

- Cultural capital is the accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities that facilitate advancement within society, particularly in the education system
- This is political as the cultural capital of some are deemed legitimate and normative as compared to others
- Diane Reay's concept of psychic landscapes of social class – she suggests that it is class thinking and feeling that generates class practices – in the context of Trinidad this also follows with pigmentocracy

## Whose culture has capital?

- *Teachers at Pinehill (stereotyped gov't school)*

*"the society they grow up in, is all about society and this society does not show them that academics is worthwhile.....everything here is a party and a jam"*

*"She's always here"*

# Whose culture has capital?

- Confidence and knowledge to navigate the education system:
  - Knowledge of the best schools and how to access them
  - Developing working relationships with schools

## Characteristics of parents at both schools

	<b>Skin Colour</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Residence</b>	<b>Education</b>
St. George's				
<b>Adrian's mother</b>	<b>Light</b>	<b>White-collar worker</b>	<b>Middle-class suburb</b>	<b>University</b>
<b>Maxwell's mother</b>	<b>Light</b>	<b>Housewife</b>	<b>Upper-class suburb</b>	<b>Prestige secondary</b>
<b>Gary's grandmother</b>	<b>Medium brown</b>	<b>Senior worker</b>	<b>Middle-class suburb</b>	<b>University</b>
Pinehill				
<b>Moses' mother</b>	<b>Dark brown</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Pinehill, working class</b>	<b>Primary (incomplete)</b>
<b>Marcus' mother</b>	<b>Dark brown</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Pinehill, working class</b>	<b>Gov't secondary</b>
<b>Nicholas' mother</b>	<b>Very dark brown</b>	<b>Service sector</b>	<b>Pinehill, working class</b>	<b>Gov't secondary</b>

The five colour categories used were; very dark brown, dark brown, medium brown, light and very light (See Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 766)

## Conclusion

- Racialised facilitative capital is put forward here as a theoretical platform to interrogate the intersections of race, gender and social class as they relate to education in postcolonial settings.
- It provides a nuanced way of appreciating the dynamics of racialised structures such as pigmentocracy in terms of the interplay of structure and agency.
- In the end it measures an act of social justice as it addresses deficit thinking models and anecdotally inscribed discourses on black boys and achievement and moves it away from perspectives centring on deficient cultural values and single mother homes to wider racialised structural processes.

Ravi Rampersad (2012): 'Racialised facilitative capital' and the paving of differential paths to achievement of Afro-Trinidadian boys, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, DOI:10.1080/01425692.2012.740814