

Abstract

Identity Achievement as a Predictor of Intimacy in Young Urban Jamaican Adults

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Intimacy has been acknowledged as a key component of psychosocial development and psychological health (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Erikson, 1959/1980; Sullivan, 1953). Theorists (e.g. Baumeister, 1986; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980) have postulated that a well-integrated identity serves as a precursor to intimacy. Given the importance of cultural norms and historical relativity in shaping a child's development, it has been questioned whether these theories developed in Western cultures and tested primarily on college students, are in fact true "psychological universals" (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). Studies (e.g. Brown & Chevannes, 1998; Leo-Rhynie, 1993) suggest high levels of distrust between men and women in the Jamaican society, with issues regarding the open communication of thoughts and feelings. It may therefore be reasonable to assume that Jamaican adults may score low on traditional measures of non-sexual intimacy. If this is so, it is important to understand whether it could emanate from issues re identity formation or otherwise. The study utilised a mixed methods approach. The sample consisted of 400 adults, age 20-34, from the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA). Respondents completed two questionnaires (OMEIS and FIS). Differences re the possible moderating variables of sex, SES, occupational and education levels were explored. Maximum variation sampling was used to select eight exemplar cases for in-depth study using interviews and personality assessment. The findings showed that this Jamaican sample had a significantly greater fear of intimacy ($M = 87.59$, $SD = 21.80$) than the US norm ($M = 78.75$, $SD = 21.82$; $t(527) = 4.00$, $p < .01$, two-tailed). Higher identity achievement was associated with a lower fear of intimacy ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$); however, SES was found to have a main effect on intimacy level, rather than a moderating effect on the identity-intimacy predictive relationship. The findings contribute towards understanding the applicability of Erikson's model in the Jamaican population, and will aid in the diagnosis of personality disorders.

Keywords: Michele Strudwick-Alexander; Jamaican adults; identity achievement; intimacy; socioeconomic status; Erikson; mixed methods