

## Promoting Cross-Cultural Psychology Research in the Caribbean: Best Practices in Intersectionality

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*Given the Caribbean region's post-colonial history with entrenched and daunting challenges of: structural racism, patriarchy, and colorism as epiphenomenal outcomes, it is imperative that cross-cultural investigators using 21<sup>st</sup> century research paradigms honed and crafted from strengths-based approaches interrogate issues surrounding national, cultural identity, and cultural hybridity. Additionally, push-pull factors in migration, acculturative influences, psychological resilience, and coping strategies within non-pathologizing frameworks of inclusivity and intersectionality are fodder for empirical research. These holistic perspectives borrow from multiple perspectives in Black Psychology paradigm shifting as they reject and deconstruct Eurocentric models in explaining Black psyche and behaviors. The discursive frame around subaltern voices, is that, it deracinates "grand" theories, splinters and challenges hegemonic assumptions. Moving from the mechanistic, binary constructions placing a premium on only quantitative models with a concomitant devaluation of qualitative approaches, this author argues that the kinds of cross-cultural research that offers the most qualitatively-rich analysis is ethnography, as this approach embraces concepts of lived epistemological realities of participants. As a cross-cultural tool, it triangulates participant observations, interviews, and case studies. The ethnographic report generated from this data-gathering methodology and comprised of multiple sections, illuminates the following: the uniqueness of indigenous psychologies; provides important historical contexts; addresses issues of language, cultural rituals, and norms; and grounds the work within multidisciplinary perspectives offering more integrative, cogent analyses of cultural phenomena. Further, even research ensconced in knowledge-production for academic consumption should hue to the penultimate, translational goals of nation building, community flourishings, and human capital development.*

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### Promoting Cross-Cultural Psychology Research in the Caribbean: Best Practices in Intersectionality

In 2021, The American Psychological Association as well as the American Psychiatric Association issued apologies about their ubiquitous complicity in advancing dehumanization, zero-sum gain paradigms of racial hierarchy and structural racism through historic errors of commission and omission. In their recent internal reckonings, they organizationally pledged to move toward anti-racist agendas, and to actively promote unfettered equity through the alliterative

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three “r” words: “reconciliation, repair, and renewal” (p. 1). This paper, therefore, provides a model for the axiom, or fodder for the argument promulgated here, for the generation of an autonomous Caribbean Psychology within best practices of intersectional research ideas which expand and sharpen the capacity for more inclusive, global investigations. In alignment with the fulsome embrace and transparent valorization of indigenous psychologies, the APA’s apology essentially jettisons a “hegemonic science” of Whiteness. Heather McGhee’s scholarly work (2021) entitled, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Cost Everyone And How We Can Prosper Together,*” draws back the veil, providing concrete examples that elucidate not only the wholesale socioeconomic cost of racial antipathy, but the bankruptcy exacted on our moral compass when individualistic and misguided racialized interests fail to advocate for the collective liberation and solidarity of all of us.

Post-colonial and generative cross-cultural psychologists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, donning interrogative prisms cannot *uncritically* import Western perspectives which Berry et al. (1992) refer to as a kind of “scientific acculturation” into multiracial Caribbean spaces. Regional psychologists must embrace their stories, legacies, and assume full ownership of them, both in terms of strengths to support and elevate, but, with equilibrium, wrestle with some of the internal limitations thwarting nation-building and human capital development efforts. Supporting the foregoing, within this threaded vein, it is imperative to “guard against an *unexamined* exportation of ideas and methods developed in one culture to other cultural/linguistic communities” (Erkut et al. 1999, p. 206). Drilling down, this leitmotif of indigenous psychology contests or protests the intrusion of European-based psychological discourses that have no bases in pan-universalism or respect for global south paradigms (Berry et al. 2011).

Psychology is my disciplinary and intellectual home, but my academic publications have urgently bypassed silo disciplinary lanes into necessary, multidisciplinary lens (Gonsalves, 1986, Gonsalves-Domond 2020). As a preamble to my introduction and a contextual placeholder, I arrive at the quintessential threshold of this issue of promoting cross-cultural research on the Caribbean as an academician who has not only been shaped through the prism of my immigrant, diasporic, Afro-Jamaican experiences, but concurrently ferreting out meaning within overlapping and nested transcultural lens. *My eyes are trained on best practices of including excluded voices, and in grounding lived epistemologies.* A central thesis that I have deliberately embraced, is the view, that promoting research on the Caribbean, values the emic/community-derived approaches where any changes or improvements can best be achieved by elevating and championing plural, community-centered voices and stakeholders. This should optimally be achieved at the grassroots levels, marshalled as seedbeds to facilitate change, and incorporating a plethora of voices and inclusive humanity. Hazarding a generality, those at the privilege tip of Caribbean societies are often less motivated and invested in transformational changes because of the wide-ranging dividends exacted from the status quo of intersectional, institutionalized class and race-based hierarchies.

Adding credibility to the foregoing, Thompson (2016) asserts that “[T]he Caribbean region is included among parts of the global community whose

psychology stories are conspicuously missing from the discipline's historiography" (p. 17). In the conduct of cross-cultural research, there is a need to widen the aperture, as this is congruent with 21<sup>st</sup> century realities, with the *readjusting* calculus of national impacts. Additionally, let me state that this critical and constructive discourse is situated in the context of having pioneered and taught *Cross-Cultural Psychology* and a capstone *Black Psychology* courses over the past two-and-a-half decades. The overarching frameworks of my positionality as a college professor for 43-years have furnished me with invaluable prisms into my pedagogy, and in meta-reflections on mechanisms of how to translate ideas into a blueprint for the conduct of interdisciplinary psychological research on the Caribbean (Gonsalves-Domond 2021).

The Caribbean is an exciting admixture or collage of cultural and ethnic plurality, comprised of more than 7000 individual islands dotted over one million square miles. The region is comprised of 12 sovereign and 12 dependent territories in over 200 miles of Caribbean Sea. The Caribbean archipelago, although undergirded by similar transatlantic narratives of the savage enslavement of African peoples, is not monolithic given its plural colonial histories. However, as Comitas and Lowenthal (1973) accurately notes, "we see ourselves as closely linked." Derek Walcott in his 1992 Nobel Prize speech speaks of an "Antillean experience" that overlay a regional set of experiences. However, the fact is, the Caribbean experience is by no means monolithic given the infusion of contract laborers from India, China, and the Iberian Peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its aftermath (Mintz, 1981). These socioracial and ethnic heterogeneity have exacerbated fissures and created fault lines under colonial rule with its deployed stratagems of divide-and-conquer. Echoing a similar sentiment, Lamming (1985), a well-respected, Bajan intellectual in a brilliant essay entitled, *The Intellectual in the Caribbean* illuminates the argument that the study of, and interpretation of the Caribbean should be "regional in character." He is demonstrably spot-on about regional variations among: Anglophone, Francophone, Spanish, and the Dutch Caribbean. Presciently drilling down on the concept of regional identity, Lamming asserts the animating imperative, "Scholarship should therefore be committed unapologetically to the forging of a *regional consciousness* in every territory to make it impossible, with time, for anyone of that region to be regarded as an alien by any part of that region" (p. 18). Yet, an equally important, cautionary, counter-narrative is one advanced by Jackson (2005) about the dangers of yoking disparate domains of Caribbean experiences such as Afro-Creolization with Indo-Creolization especially as it relates to Guyana.

Historically, cross-cultural investigations of the Caribbean region were conducted primarily by cultural anthropologist working in the area of family studies. The predominant focus was on Black, working class families viewed through the lens of deficit-deficiency models. Attendant foci were on psychopathologies and paternal absences. There is a paucity of published findings on Indo-Caribbean, Syrian-Caribbean, Lebanese-Caribbean, Chinese-Caribbean, and Euro-Caribbean women, men, and children. Therefore, epistemological experiences have to be grounded in diverse sociocultural and ethno-political realities. It is important to note that cross-cultural psychology as a hybrid area of

specialization emerged out of the historic crucible of World War II, and therefore guided by global-European experiences (Berry et al. 2011).

The Caribbean region remains under the COVID-19 pandemic threat, has some of the heaviest disease burdens, and the greatest investment needs on myriad levels (Sam-Aguda et al. 2022, Umakanthan et al. 2022). Chimanda Adichie, a Nigeria writer in her iconic 2009 TED video warns against in her presentation, *The Danger of a Single Story* that single stories encroach on the dignity of a people, “flatten their experiences,” perpetuate stereotypes, and permit power hierarchies—that is, people in positions of power to control singular narratives they promulgate and enforce. Promotion of cross-cultural research, and in my view, eschewing and disrupting the dominant binary about basic vs. applied research to a more respectful combination in the Caribbean, expand the stories and epistemological understandings of our plural, cultural, racial, gendered, and socioeconomic realities.

As we vacate the earliest sets of investigations in cultural anthropology to current cross-cultural research, robust and ambitious attempts to validate indigenous psychological spaces surrounding the region came in the 2016 edited work of Drs. Jaipaul Roopnarine and Derek Chadee’s, *Caribbean Psychology: Indigenous Contributions to a Global Discipline*. A generative volume, it engages in the necessary, paradigmatic shift in knowledge production, consumerism, agency, and ownership; Ava Thompson, the first contributor in that edited volume asserts, Caribbeanists must “interrogate our own psychological traditions” (Roopnarine and Chadee, 2016, p. 1). Caribbean Psychologists, and here I am utilizing an intercultural referent have “double-dutched” alongside their African-American counterparts to center their voices, and continue emancipatory work (Pardlo 2007). Additionally, it is incumbent on Caribbean scholars to write their own psychobiographies as well. Adler and Singer (2023) in their recent co-edited, special issue in the *Journal of Personality* offer “counter narratives to the dominant discourse” of change agents, but failed to include any Caribbean-American, Caribbean, or Pan-Caribbean change agents to highlight.

Black Psychology is the forerunner of Caribbean Psychology. Black Psychologists in the United States began a robust, interrogative relationship with Eurocentric psychology in 1968 when 58 professionals attending a Conference in San Francisco protested the racism and blatant lack of inclusion in the American Psychological Association. They formed ABPsi, the Association of Black Psychology to reject the APA’s jaundiced view of the Black community (Parham et al. 2011, Belgrave and Allison 2019). A core component of their grievances is that, “APA ignored the opportunity to take a formidable stand to address poverty, racism, and social concerns affecting African, APA-Americans” (p. 2, 2021 Apology document). The philosophical foundations of Black Psychology expounded by Nobles (1972) in a still-relevant article entitled, *African Philosophy: Foundations for Black Psychology* stated in his first paragraph that Black Psychology is “more than the experience of people living in ghettos or having been forced into the dehumanizing conditions of slavery” (p. 47). He advanced what was then a “new” narrative, and what remains a clear-eyed imperative that Black psychology must be grounded and steeped in an African philosophy. He writes, that Black Psychology’s, “unique status is from the positive features of

basic African philosophy which dictates the values, customs, attitudes and behaviors (sic) of African in Africa and the New World” (p. 47).

### **Best Practices in the Conduct of Cross-Cultural Psychological Research about the Caribbean**

This paper now puts in sharp relief, a blueprint in the best practices in the conduct of Caribbean research in psychology. It is noteworthy, that as the author ponders a smorgasbord of informational sources, a wide net is cast for inclusion of documents, reports, working papers, policy documents that are designated as “grey research.” Curating these resources have value, as one builds scholarship outside of traditional academic machines in what is still perceived as novel areas of research. Dr. Jaipaul Roopnarine, an eminent developmental psychologist and Caribbean scholar refers to the need for “decolonizing psychology curricula worldwide” (Jaipaul L. Roopnarine, personal communication, July 1, 2022). Aligning with that strategy, Caribbean and African-American psychologists are echoing and manifesting that promising complexity for change. Contextually, Caribbean research is fecund; it also ascribes to what I refer to as “terra incognita,” the unknown and unpacked territory in areas of research. The dire need to intentionally privilege and foreground theories based on authentic epistemologies of diverse Caribbean peoples is incontrovertibly urgent and timely. The author’s view, is that, the collective arsenal of research on this region must be reflective of mapping multiple identities based on island specificities, integrate cross-disciplinary notions with attention to layers of intersectionalities. Operationally, “[A]n intersectional approach ...views race, class, and gender as categories that interact with systems of social and power relations in society. Intersectionality conceptualizes these categories as mutually constructed and fluid, continually shaping and shaped by dynamics of power” (Erkut et al. 1999, pp. 446–447). So, in essence, this kind of research is generative, advocacy-focused, and models intersectionality; it must reflect both contemporaneous, post-colonial realities and global south imaginations, while feeding the continuous loops of development into re-imaginings.

Further, the work of the preeminent scholar and sociologist, Dr. Patricia Hills-Collins (2022) in her published work entitled, *Black Feminist Epistemology* provides a pathway for the conduct of research within an Afrocentric approach, and by extension guidance on Caribbean research. Dr. Hills-Collins examines Black female positionality and experiences as critical to knowledge-production. She advocates that Black women scholar-activists view the world as holistically interrelated, using tools of intersectionality *as opposed* to separate, distinct or compartmentalized views in knowledge acquisition. Her arguments are that as conversations with participants become curated, centering the issues and grounding the work on different problematics of socially constructed variables of race, social class, and gender, one must then proceed on an egalitarian basis. Further, anchoring research in historical analyses provides veritable sure-footedness. Although not rejecting quantitative analyses, Hill-Collins does not

privilege these methodologies; she proffers the notion that the kinds of work academic Black scholars perform, mostly ethnographic, a triangulation of observations, case study analyses, and interviews lend themselves to qualitatively-rich descriptions aligning with humanism-existentialism as philosophical lens. Orality, emphasis on collective survival, and emotional vitality are all strengths of the Afrocentric and Caribbean diasporic traditions that find threaded connectivity with research on the Caribbean. Researchers ought not to assume hegemony over the people we understand. Participants are not “subjects” as that very semantic usage denotes and connotes unequal, colonial, or differential power relationships.

Understanding privilege, power, gender relationships, colorism, social class, and social inequalities are all part of the frames that must be incorporated into Caribbean analyses and cross-cultural psychological research. Hills-Collins asserts that, Black women in particular must be studied from Afrocentric and womanist perspectives. Although points of overlap are found here, the finer points of departure, are that, Caribbean indigenous diversity with its multiracial, multiethnic region must be intentionally interwoven to reflect distinct, unique, and specific epistemological realities. Caribbean literary studies add critical and confirmatory analyses as well to new paradigms in Caribbean psychological research (Hodge 1979, Davies and Fido 1994, Wynter 2003, Ramlochon, 2020). Given the multicultural and multi-lingual diversity in the region of not only Africans, but Indians, Chinese, and Middle Easterners, research lens should be incontrovertibly broadened to include and center those unique cultural, socio-religious historiographies and approaches in Caribbean research.

The importance of centering and the dangers of marginalization are noted. One such example is salient. A significant political revolution occurred in 1979 when Grenada under the leadership of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop’s *New Jewel Party* shifted ideologically to the left. Using deconstructive, feminist lens of analyses, Lambert (2020) in her book, *Comrade Sisters: Caribbean Feminist Revisions of the Grenada Revolution*, adds a detailed, veritable, cautionary tale about the missteps and blind-spots of a social movement in which patriarchal hierarchies, marginalize, decenter, and diminish radical, female voices. Lambert’s work and others support best practices in social movements about the importance of solidifying community-based, progressive leadership in national development couched in layers of inclusivity. Multi-gendered and multiracial inclusive coalition-building in leadership structures in the Caribbean must be part-and-parcel of the blueprint for long-term, sustainable change.

Distilled from the region’s history is a cascading set of multicultural experiences, based in part on slavery, colonial, postcolonial, contemporaneous and sovereign histories. Therefore, an authentic knowledge-production strategy must interrogate vestiges of the subjugated past, invert Eurocentric, canonical beliefs and assertions, and eliminate uncritical allegiances to models that are anachronistic, misogynous, classist, reductionistic, and/or myopic. In fact, knowledge-production especially when conducted by culturally-rooted researchers with a deep structural understanding and respect embraced by a culturally relativist approach can yield qualitatively-rich data (Gonsalves-Domond 1985, 2002, Gonsalves and Bernard 1983, Berry 2008, 2013, Berry et al. 1992).

Moreover, the explicit corollary, is that, Caribbean Psychology is intersected with multiple cognate disciplines, several of them include: history, economics, anthropology, African diasporic studies, Caribbean literary studies, sociology, public health and epidemiology. These accentuate the finer points of explicating the complex nature of human experiences. Cross-Cultural Psychology research in the Caribbean must be interdisciplinary and multilayered; it can never be unidimensional. Additionally, Caribbean psychology must also embrace all of the languages of the region to enhance regional access: English, Spanish, Dutch, Creole (Kreyol), and Papiamentu. Language is inextricably linked with culture and cognition.

Yousef et al. (2013) identify in their chapter entitled, *Fieldwork and Data Collection* the usual qualitatively-rich methodologies. They include atypical methodologies such as finding archival data to shape meaningful conversations. The operational definition of discursive analysis is “a methodology employed in collecting naturalistic data on a range of texts types, including narrative, media, communication, political speeches” (p. 84). It is worth repeating here that, ethnography provides content-laden data, and can illuminate pathways to promote lofty and explicit goals such as group-actualization and the maximization of potentialities. The combined methodologies permit by their very nature “closeness” to the people studied in a shared psycholinguistic space, and can help build a ladder-up and literature of strength-based Caribbean behaviors and cultures. The engineering of superordinate, societal goals can forge solidarity among diverse interests or what Heather McGee refers to as a *solidarity dividend*. Further, in inserting a perspective that is decidedly humanist-existential, research that is rooted in transformational progress with applied, translational orientations to the arc of social justice can potentially serve not only as a singular guiding principle, but indeed, a most collective one for Caribbean nations.

It is imperative that cross-cultural investigators using 21<sup>st</sup> century research paradigms honed and crafted from strengths-based approaches interrogate issues of national and cultural identity, push-pull factors in migration, acculturative influences, psychological resilience and coping within non-pathologizing frameworks of Afrocentricity (Palmer 1995). *The challenge, as I reflected on this topic, was not what to study*. There are myriad variables and researchable issues that traverse the developmental trajectory from in-utero issues up to and including the psychology of aging. I would argue that any area of inquiry across the lifespan, from enhancing more positive pregnancy outcomes, parental ethno-theories, to studying gerontology, death and dying would contribute to national development.

I struggle to “weigh for prioritization” the importance of the following research and abandoned the task at least for the moment. Here’s my take on recommendations for critical features of Caribbean research. *This is an evolving document and work in progress and should not be perceived as definitive*.

We are still in the midst of the 21<sup>st</sup> century COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing existential crisis of climate change. As two co-occurring humanitarian crises, the Caribbean region continues to struggle to obtain vaccines, boosters, medical supplies within fragile, medical infrastructures. Psychology, as part of the multidisciplinary panoply of fields such as public health and epidemiology can

research best practices in the following: disseminating vaccine information, and can lean-in on ways to overcome vaccine hesitancy and misinformation. Epidemiology and statistics can be effective tools used by public health research campaigns to validate or assess vaccine efficacy and to provide predictive models of risks.

Further, it is my belief that basic and applied research are mutually reinforcing, but, in the Caribbean, I would argue that the need to build and create a portfolio for greater *applied research* given the evolving nature of our regional spaces and the dire need to upgrade the social and material realities of Caribbean people across the region are invaluable in the through-line to national development (Lambert et al. 2007, Lambert et al. 2013, Taylor et al. 2020). The foregoing statement dovetails with the paradigm shifting in public health. Referred to as ethics-in-practice, this branch of philosophy examines the nexus of goodness and value to how core values might inform research. In essence, this kind of research bypasses the quotidian aspects of development to the active pursuit of nation building and human capital development. The author fully supports an additive model, as the listing of research is by no means exhaustive. Best practices within intersectional frames for the conduct of cross-cultural psychology research include the following ten recommendations:

1. research that connects to national development and humanitarianism, and thereby, from social justice imperatives improve the quality of lives and mental health status of Caribbean folks through interrogations on sexual identities; ways of building self-esteem, culture-specific syndromes (i.e., “seeing duppies”), help-seeking behaviors, diagnosis, clinical practice, and the efficacy roles of traditional , ethno-medicines, and ethno-spirituality (i.e. Obeah, voodoo) to name a few;
2. work that deconstructs flawed assumptions, eliminates cultural illiteracy, ethnocentrism, patriarchy, misogynoir, elitism, and reduces intragroup, intergroup prejudice and stigma;
3. work that fosters collaborations across global spaces and inter-regionally and throughout the diasporic Caribbean experience to reduce health care disparities and improve reproductive health, and maternal-child issues at the judicious intersections or fulcrum of public health and epidemiology;
4. generative thinking that provides pathways to increasing respect for oral traditions, promoting culturally competent, mental health providers, and by extension service delivery models of mental health-positive psychology;
5. psycho-philosophical work on the role of humanism in shaping optimal individual and community development within paradigms of cultural identity development;
6. multifaceted work that interfaces with a Public Health Research Agenda especially with WHO, UNICEF, Amnesty International, and Women Development Agencies. WHO has established Millennium Goals worth



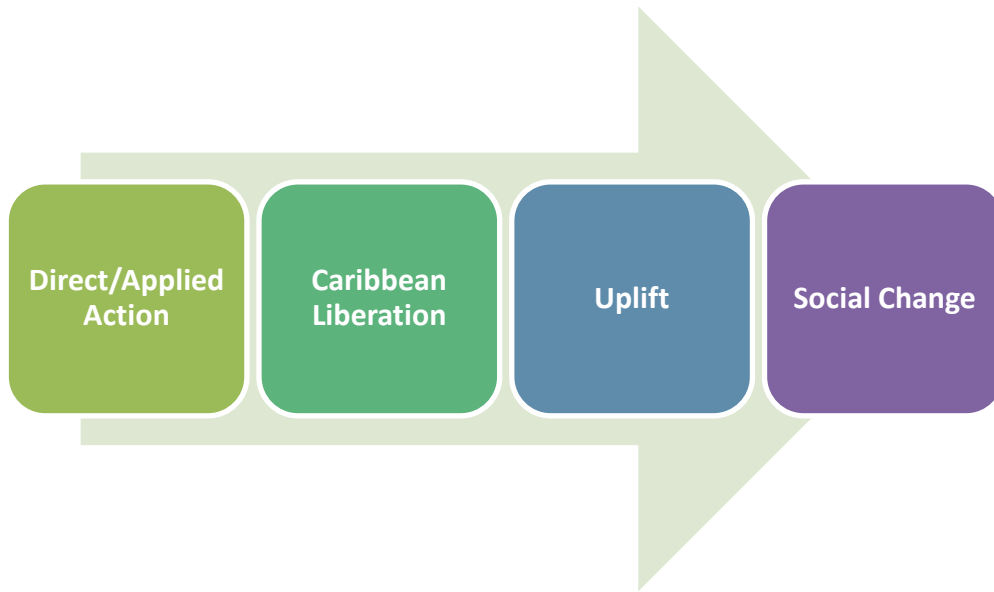
exploring such as reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, ensuring sustainability, removing barriers to disability, and eradicating poverty;

7. intellectual work that cross-fertilizes with all accredited Caribbean academic institutions, inviting researchers, scholar-activists to visit, teach, engage in research and conduct studies in the region expanding multiple narratives. We must in the momentum toward nation building assess the present state in the Caribbean. We must then proceed to utilize representative samples and stakeholders across the spectrum as to what change(s) would improve the quality of Caribbean lives across regional variabilities;
8. create innovations in researching culturally competent ways to implement changes and evaluate implementation efficacy. We have evaluative tools to achieve maximization of these outcomes;
9. promote shared work that connects Caribbean-American Psychologists in partnership and solidarity with the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi). Here, I envision special issues devoted to Caribbean Psychology and creatively generating ideas for improvement of African-descended people in the diaspora; and
10. work that connects cross-cultural psychology to Caribbean literature, literary studies, racial and self-identity, labor, dislocations, and liminality.

## **Conclusion**

Reshaping conversations and interrogations around the banality and toxicities of traditional research-gathering is what define this burgeoning area of Caribbean psychology. Further, best practices in intersectionality speak to holistic integration of all socially constructed variables in the co-creation and interchanges of lived epistemologies. There is a palpable urgency and a clarion call especially among scholar-activists to work assiduously in achieving better research and material outcomes for the Caribbean region as one strives to improve this vital region. The relationship between intersectional cross-cultural psychology research which yields direct/applied action can be correlated with Caribbean liberation and ultimately social change in this linear model (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Relationship between Cross-Cultural Research and Outcomes in the Caribbean



The importance of conducting psychological research in the region is inflective and catalytic; this is especially meaningful when conducted by dialectical thinkers who can pivot from narrow perspectives, are able to ponder the fulsome merits of diverse perspectives using tools of intersectionality, and by extension can insert themselves into national and regional conversations. The need to publish empirical work in Caribbean psychology builds upon existing and expanding frameworks, and fortify a legacy of publications and brain trust that serve to increase human capital development, cultural competency, and augment nation building for this and future generations of Caribbean people including scholars-activists.

In conclusion, intentionality in laying down the foundational cornerstones in the conduct of significant Caribbean psychological research with best practices can achieve systemic, positive changes in the region.

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