Caribbean College Students' Perceptions of Sibling Relationships:
The Role of Culture and Identity

Kamesha S. Miller, Caitlin Morazzini, Rachel Green, Hannah Baptiste, Nicholas P. Palumbo[1,2], Ganie B. DeHart[1], Ph.D.

[1]State University of New York at Geneseo; [2]University of Rochester

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research examines the sibling relationships and cultural identity processes of Caribbean college students. Emergent themes were examined using thematic analysis. The findings revealed the Caribbean family dynamic influences sibling relationships, cultural identity development, and through parenting styles, familial values, and differential sibling expectations.

INTRODUCTION

The project will qualitatively examine Caribbean college students' concepts of cultural identity sibling relationships. Specifically, this research project has four main purposes:

1. to better understand the nature of Caribbean college students' concepts of cultural identity and sibling relationships during the period of emerging adulthood;
2. to paint a qualitative picture of sibling relationships from their early memories through emerging adulthood;
3. to analyze and better understand early relationship quality in cultural identity and emerging adulthood;
4. to examine and contextualize the relationship between cultural identity and sibling relationships of Caribbean college students in emerging adulthood.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

Participants were four college students, two women and two men, ranging from ages 18-24 who all self-identified as Caribbean (three being first-generation; one being foreign-born) with at least one sibling. Participants were recruited through the State University of New York at Geneseo-specific e-mail list serves, Caribbean student organization, and by word of mouth. An electronic questionnaire asking for students' demographic information was required prior to eligible participant selection.

Data Collection and Preparation

At the time of recruitment, participants were given a demographics survey on information about their siblings and their/family's cultural background. At the arrival, participants were assigned an ID number. The ID number maintained confidentiality and was based off the year of their recruitment and their participant number.

Prior to the individual interview sessions, participants were informed about what the session would entail, including audio and video recording. The individuals signed consent forms regarding any personal and audiovisual data related to them. It was made clear that signing was voluntary and consent and/or involvement may be rescinded at any time with no consequences, whether it be before, during, or after the conclusion of the individual interviews.

The individual interviews were held via Zoom by at least two researchers. One researcher acted as a mediator who would read the questions, provide typed versions of each respective question for easy viewing, follow conversation, and ask follow-up questions while the other researcher took notes and made analytical memos. At the end of the session, each participant was monetarily compensated with a gift card.

This procedure was standardized and was reran for every individual interview, with the same researchers for each individual interview. All individual interviews lasted for a maximum of an hour. The video and audio recordings of the individual interviews were digitized then transcribed.

Individual Interview Questions

- What does Caribbean culture mean to you?
- Did your parents or siblings act as role models to help maintain or strengthen your understanding of your culture?
- What do you think your parents' thoughts are on sibling relationships in your culture? (think about changing the wording of the question)
- How have your parents affected your relationship with your siblings?
- Could you tell me about how your cultural values changed since you moved to America?
- Can you elaborate on your childhood and whether or not you had a different experience compared to your siblings?
- Who do you feel parented you the most? And why do feel this way?
- What roles have your siblings specifically played in your life?
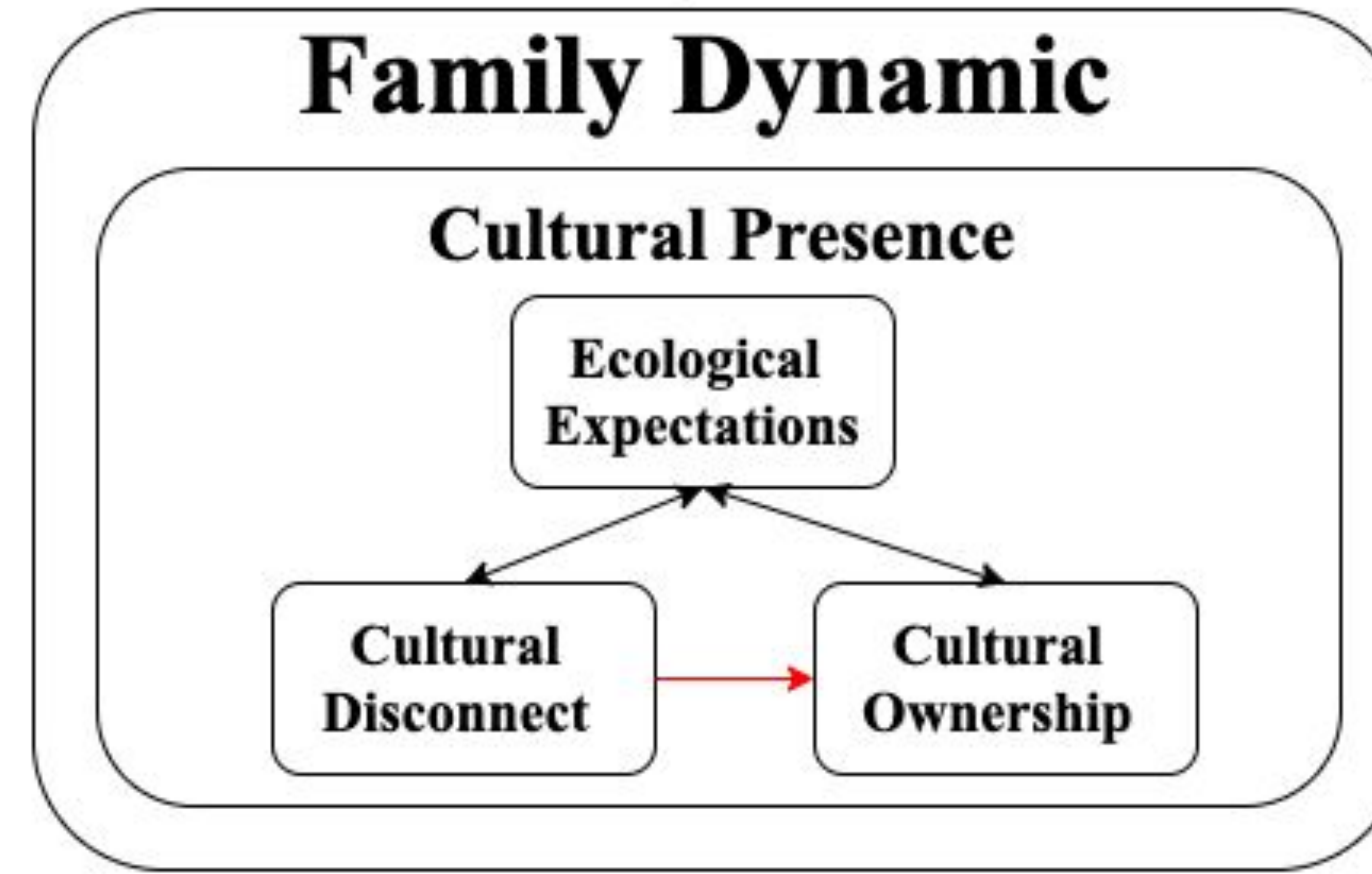

Figure 1. The conceptual model illustrates interrelationships between emergent themes across three thematic levels of analysis: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary.

Analytic Strategy

Data Analysis

The methodological approach for the present study was qualitative interpretive phenomenology (Benner, 1994). The approach of this study used the process for thematic analysis posited by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a structure, in which to situate the inquiry of this present research. The specific analytic approach employed in this study was thematic analysis.

Coding Procedure

Phase 1:
Each individual interview transcript was coded. Upon reviewing all four transcripts, it was determined that exploratory coding would be the most prudent method prior to first-cycle coding to select for the most appropriate coding method (Saldaña, 2013, pp. 63-64). During this exploratory coding procedure, the researchers tested two types of coding methods: initial and in-vivo coding.

Phase 2:
Once done, the first-cycle coding was performed using initial and in-vivo coding methods. This was a calculated decision made in order to allow the participants to tell the researchers what their sibling relationships meant to them and how they were perceiving their sibling relationships and identity development.

Phase 3:
Following the first cycle coding methods, and in following the guidelines for Thematic Analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006, pp. 86-93) all of the codes were collated into "potential themes," the researchers refer to this collated group as thematic categories.

Phase 4:
Thematic categories that emerged from the codes. The thematic categories were constructed during group sessions in which a minimum of four researchers evaluated and sorted codes into evolving categories. This was done to pull together and meaningfully group data into units of analysis that would inform hierarchical theme-building.

Phase 5:
Thematic categories from all individual interviews were evaluated individually by magnitude and relevance to the proposed research question in order to uncover salient themes. Themes that consistently emerged across the four individual interviews were then compiled into one dataset. The most prominent of those were then able to be visualized in a conceptual module (*Figure 1*).

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RESULTS

Our thematic analysis revealed three levels of emergent themes:

Primary Theme:
Family Dynamic - *Claim: Participants' experiences of their parental relationships, despite their shortcomings, often dictate the form of family dynamics and the development of their self-concepts. Caribbean College Students' self-concepts are further shaped by Caribbean culture and American values, while gendered and familial expectations often conflict with sibling interdependence.*

- "He is no good, at all. But, he was my dad." (p.3)
- "We didn't have like that independence and that independence wasn't like as valued so I think like when we were going to separate high schools separate colleges and even now we got even more closer because I feel like we had our own spaces where we can find ourselves we can um express ourselves and we can live our independent selves" (p.14)

Secondary Theme:
Cultural Presence - *Claim: Participants experience and express Caribbean culture through daily household or familial interactions through cultural morals, attitudes, interactions, and values.*

- "Caribbean culture to me is, like basically all the aspects when it comes to just, life in general, as far as like food, um music, like art and honestly like the country itself,"(p.1)
- "My mom she was a good role model at the time… Sorry, oh god. At the time she was like um, she was teaching me, she used to say stuff, 'how you gonna be a wife if you can't cook, clean or whatever?'" (p.2)

Tertiary Themes:
1. Cultural Ownership - *Claim: Participants' place of birth does not reduce or forestall their Caribbean values, identity development, or their unique relationship to their culture.*

- "Because like I wasn't born in the US even though I was really young. Like I always considered myself to be like Jamaican like if anyone asked." (p. 26)

2. Cultural Disconnect - *Claim: Participants' negative personal and familial experiences with problematic Caribbean values fosters discrepancies between evolving value-systems and traditional values instantiated within Caribbean culture.*

- "I'm more compassionate about it because you know like if you have like a culture that's telling you like you're-you have to like these characteristics then you know and also like there are resources that may not be available to like um many people who are in the Caribbean um and like you have like religion playing an aspect to it you have like you know actual financial barriers to it especially like um coming into the States." (p.4-5)

3. Ecological Expectations - *Claim: Caribbean College students' social ecologies create pressure to uphold external expectations and standards of desirability in the form of visual appearance and/or cultural expression.*

- "I've been there like literally 50,000 times, like, I like, somebody is telling me that I'm not Jamaican that's have never stepped a foot in a day in their life in the country that their parents came from." (p.2-3)

CREDIBILITY MEASURES

Negative Case Selection. During the final stages of the thematic analysis, the researchers began to label these cases within the data set and attached them to burgeoning themes in order to establish credibility of the data (Patton, 1999).

- "I honestly don't feel like my siblings um I don't know like I guess we were just like part in the culture but not I don't think like my brother had like a direct impact of my understanding of my culture they're just like kind of in it." *(Participant #003, Pp.5-6)*
- "Caribbean culture to me is, like basically all the aspects when it comes to just, life in general, as far as like food, um music, like art and honestly like the country itself." *(Participant #002, p.1)*
- "I guess they felt like they need more something to cling to then when you're actually born there, ya know." *(Participant #003,p.4)*

DISCUSSION

- Emergent themes revealed culturally-based teachings passed down from Caribbean parents, such as being close-knit, were initially ineffective. This had underlying connections to common Caribbean-based household experiences and interactions within their families, which shaped their sibling relationships.
- The data indicated that sibling relationships authentically developed later in life without being subjected to cultural pressures. This developmental process played a role in all other themes involving participants' relationships with their Caribbean culture.
- Our themes highlighted that cultural presence is prominent as it involves culturally-based experiences, familial interactions, and the participants themselves who discuss various aspects of cultural disconnect and ownership.
- Internal pressures and social forces within society, culture, family, and school create competing norms that may disconnect emerging adults from their Caribbean identity. However, despite these differential expectations, it does not hinder the import and intersection nature of Caribbean identity development while living in America.
- The findings from this thematic analysis highlighted that expectations and views divergent from their own value systems fostered cultural disconnect and minimized their cultural ownership. However, if the participants already possessed a strong sense of cultural ownership, the participants experience a greater sense of ownership when challenged by those outsides of their culture.

Future research. This study can further observe commonalities via group interviews of participants separated by culturally identified groups. Future research using focus group data would further strengthen these early findings and offer needed research to the scant literature on Caribbean sibling relationships and identity development during emerging adulthood.

Limitations. This study included data from a single source. Additional sources of data would offer opportunities for triangulation of data.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Kamesha S. Miller : ksm16@geneseo.edu
Nicholas P. Palumbo, M.S.: palumbon@geneseo.edu
Ganie B. DeHart, Ph.D.: dehart@geneseo.edu