Escucha Nuestras Voces/Luister Naar Onze Stemmen:
Afro-Caribbean Girlhood in the Dutch West Indies

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to examine how Afro-Caribbean girls from the island of Sint Maarten narrate, navigate and negotiate their girlhood experiences. As a Black woman from Sint Maarten, this project is important due to the lack of sociological scholarship surrounding Black girls in the Dutch West Indies. This project utilized a qualitative approach that involved interview participant photography and semi-structured audio and video recorded interviews with 9 Afro-Caribbean girls who were 14-, 16- and 17-years old living in Sint Maarten. I analyzed the interview data and interpreted it using a combination of Black, Caribbean and transnational feminist frameworks which I named Afro-Caribbean transnational feminism. This framework specifically centers the lives and lived experiences of the girls. The findings show that Afro-Caribbean girls in Sint Maarten navigate their social worlds by negotiating different aspects of their lives, including their hair, appearance and food consumption to in various ways resist heteronormative ideas in Sint Maarten. This data serves as an important starting point and experiential reference to understand Afro-Caribbean girlhood in the Caribbean broadly, and specifically in the Dutch West Indies.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to examine how Afro-Caribbean girls from the island of Sint Maarten narrate, navigate, and negotiate their girlhood experiences. As a Black woman from Sint Maarten, this project is important due to the lack of sociological scholarship surrounding Black girls in the Dutch West Indies. This project utilized a qualitative approach that involved interview participant photography and audio and video recorded interviews guided by a set of questions. There were 9 Afro-Caribbean girls who were 14-, 16- and 17-years old living in Sint Maarten who participated in the project. I analyzed and interpreted their responses using a combination of Black, Caribbean and transnational feminist frameworks which I named Afro-Caribbean transnational feminism. This framework specifically centers the lives and lived experiences of the girls. The findings show that Afro-Caribbean girls in Sint Maarten navigate their social worlds by negotiating different aspects of their lives including, hair, appearance, and food consumption to in various ways resist heteronormative views, which aligns biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and gender roles, in Sint Maarten. This data serves as an important starting point and experiential reference to understand Afro-Caribbean girlhood in the Caribbean broadly, and specifically in the Dutch West Indies.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father who passed away May 7, 2019 during the end of my first year in graduate school. Growing up he never failed to remind me that he "went all across the waters" just to get me and bring me here to the U.S. He named me Ocqua because on the first airplane ride to come see me after I was born, he looked out and over the water and it was so beautiful, the name Ocqua came to him. He wanted me to have what he thought would be better opportunities here in the U.S. I hope I have made you proud, Daddy.

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Listen Up: Sociology and The World Need Black Girlhood Studies

   The purpose of this research is to examine how Afro-Caribbean girls from the island of Sint Maarten conceptualize what it means to be a girl and to understand the ways in which they narrate, navigate and negotiate their girlhood experiences. This knowledge is important in providing a nuanced understanding of Black girlhood in the Dutch Caribbean. How Black girls navigate their social worlds during their girlhood years informs their outlook on their lives and the racialized and gendered structures in which they live. Co-creating knowledge with Black girls *for* Black girls is imperative in getting the message across to Black girls that they *are* knowledge producers. They always have been. Historically, research about Black girls has been a matter of 1) who is studying Black girls? White researchers. 2) Why are they studying Black girls? For their benefit. 3) Is it scholarship with the girls instead of *on* them? No. Professor and Black girlhood studies scholar Venus Evans-Winters (2019) advocates for scholarship about Black girls to come from a place of resilience rather than a deficit. "Writing and reading the lives of Black girls and women should be pleasurable and communal" (Evans-Winters 2019, 69). White scholars have taken up too much space writing about Black girls for their own benefit. As such, I aim to write about Black girls from a place of resiliency, love, and care. Most recently, the periodical *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* put out a call for papers for two special editions focusing on nonwhite girlhood and Black girlhood. The journal originally published its first issue in 2008; yet, it has taken twelve years to put out a call for papers for work about nonwhite girls specifically. This is a start, but instead of creating special issues that centers the lives of nonwhite girls, regular issues should include an assortment of articles on various topics about all girls. Likewise, *The American Historian* published an issue in March 2020 entitled The History of Black Girlhood. Because of the scope of the journal, the focus was

limited to the history of Black girlhood in the U.S. It is clear that conversations are being had, but it still remains that there is limited scholarship that utilizes qualitative methods in co-creating knowledge with Black girls in the U.S. and in the Caribbean that investigates the multidimensional experiences of Black girls and their social worlds. As such, this thesis project theorizes Black girlhoods in Sint Maarten through the ways in which the girls narrate, navigate and negotiate their girlhood experiences.

Review of the Literature

This project is in conversation with several empirical and theoretical literatures on girlhood, gender and feminisms in different contexts. This section of the thesis references both literary and scholarly works by Black women and is organized primarily for the ease of the reader. While headings herein may appear to situate scholars and their work definitively into a particular spatiality – scholarly or literary, I note here that placement of these works throughout the thesis is in no way an attempt to confine works to a particular disciplinary space/place. In fact, throughout this thesis I bear in mind what Caribbean- American professor of Africana studies Carole Boyce-Davies (1994) states when she writes "for Black women's writing, I believe it is premature and often useless to articulate the writer/theorist split so common in … discourses, for many of the writers do both simultaneously or sequentially" (32). The works referenced herein span a range from fictional, (semi) autobiographical to non-fictional writing/scholarship and have all been inspired and informed by the lived experiences of Black girls (including in some cases that of the authors) and the cultural histories of the U.S. and the Caribbean. These works cross various boundaries, especially language and culture. The review of literature begins with a very brief overview of girlhood studies as a field of study, Black girl and Caribbean girl centered research, fiction, and nonfiction, a brief summary of how I have

positioned myself within this research, Dutch Caribbean in context, Afro-Caribbean transnational theoretical framework and a discussion about why an intervention in girlhood is necessary.

Girlhood Studies

Girlhood studies has emerged as a theoretical and substantive area of scholarship in the past twenty-five years. Scholars who published girl-centered research prior to the 1990's were forced to analyze girls by pairing theories together from various disciplines "in order to make sense" (Kearney 2009, 1) of the girls, their lives and their experiences. The creation of a distinct field of study focused on girls, girlhood and girls' culture enabled scholars to "assess more fully how girlhood functions in various social institutions, a phenomenon which has significantly impacted educational, health care, and social services for female youth" (Kearney 2009). To move beyond this narrative of girlhood as a function *in* institutions, assessing how girlhood functions *for* girls, and how girls navigate and negotiate social structures during their girlhood is imperative in understanding girls during their teen years and their transition(s) into adulthood.

The various studies under girlhood studies tend to focus on white girls, their aspirations and their lived experiences in the West. In reviewing work that has been published on girlhood as well as scholarship on gender and sexuality, much can be found that centers the lives and experiences of white girls. The same cannot be said for scholarship that focuses on non-white girls such as Afro Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and Black girls. This is not to say that scholars are not co-creating knowledge with nonwhite girls because scholars like Sandrina de Finney (2015; 2017), Colleen Vasconcellos (2010; 2015; 2017), who currently has various forthcoming book chapters and articles on Jamaican girlhood and youth culture, Dominique Hill (2018) and Jessica Taft (2004; 2006; 2011; 2012; 2017), to name a few, are doing the work within and across

borders. The leading literature in girlhood studies continues to be challenged and scholarship on girlhood needs to continue to extend outside of the U.S.

For example, two of the most popular examples of work on girls, girlhood and girls' culture scholarship are Mary Pipher (1994) and Julie Bettie (2003). Pipher's (1994) work focused on the effects of violence and sexism on girlhood and futures of white adolescent girls and Bettie's (2003) work focused on the ways in which culture influences class as a performance as well as race/color, ethnicity, gender and sexuality of Mexican-American girls and white girls. One of the limitations regarding Pipher's work is that it does not take into consideration the different contexts surrounding girls' lives and the different identities that influence girls' lives. Bettie (2003) critiques Pipher's (1994) individualized and psychological analyses of her work. Though Bettie (2003) does a better job of analyzing the complexities of race, class, and gender girls navigate and negotiate during their teen years, she does this by comparing the race, class and gender performances of the Mexican-American girls to the white girls. Because white girls have been the *standard* to which other girls are compared to, this is a narrative that needs to be changed. The experiences of nonwhite girls exist and hold their own meaning without needing to be compared to the experiences of white girls. In my own research, I intentionally aim to present Afro-Caribbean girls' girlhood experiences as they are and not in comparison to any other girls in any other region.

Australian professor and a founding committee member of the International Girls Studies Association, Catherine Driscoll's scholarship is centered around white girls in western and westernized cultures (2002) and white Australian girls (2014). Professor of childhood studies, Lynne Vallone focuses her scholarship on the girlhood experiences of young Queen Victoria (1994), girlhood in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1995), and the history of girlhood for

white American girls in the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century (2001).

Girlhood studies was pioneered by scholars whose focus was on the experience of white girls and the experiences of nonwhite girls in relation to white girls. Girlhood studies has failed to consider the adverse effects of colonialism, racism, classism and many other "—isms" (Anzaldua and Moraga 1987) affecting non-white girls in different areas of their lives in different areas of the world. Young women of color writers in *Colonize This!* address how colonialism, imperialism, sexism and many other –isms impact different aspects of their lives (Hernández and Rehman 2002). *White* girlhood should *not* be used to understand *all* girlhoods. Rather, an intersectional approach is essential when the effects of race and gender are considered (Crenshaw 1989). Critical race studies professor Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) defines intersectionality as categorical and systemic oppressions that work together simultaneously. It describes the ways in which multiple oppressions are experienced by those at the intersections; Black women and girls specifically. At its inception, girlhood studies did not acknowledge the implications of race and how racism operates in the lives of nonwhite girls. As such *white* girlhoods should not be used to theorize all girlhoods as it leaves out aspects of nonwhite girls' lives that white girls never experience. This shortsightedness is what has influenced the creation of other distinct girlhood studies fields, especially Black girlhood studies.

In the 1980s, Black feminists had to fight to create space in the academy for Black women studies in efforts "to save Black women's lives," thus leading to the realization in 2010s, of the (in)visibility of Black girls in the academy in general, and girlhood studies specifically (Owens et al 2017, 116). The need for an interdisciplinary girlhood studies that centers the lives of Black girls and their lived experiences across various fields is imperative to not only understanding the complexity of Black girls but changing the narratives both inside and outside

of the academy about Black girls from people who do not understand Black girls. Girlhood studies failed to capture the creativeness of Black girls during a period in their lives that they find valuable as evidenced through the "many games, songs, dances, and other creative elements that constitute a material culture of Black girlhood" (Owens et al 2017, 118). Girlhood studies and girlhood scholars failed to see that Black girls are magic.

#BlackGirlMagic

In 2013, the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag was created on the social media platform Twitter by CaShawn Thompson, a Black woman and Washington, DC native (Jones 2019).[1] Since then, the concept of "Black Girl Magic" has become ingrained into the Black community, used to acknowledge, compliment, uplift, and celebrate Black girls and women. The #BlackGirlMagic hashtag has connected Black girls and Black women from around the world and has encouraged the empowerment of other Black girls and women. This is evidenced through the commenting of #BlackGirlMagic on photos and videos of Black women and girls, who may or may not know each other in real life, on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. This is a deliberate sign of uplifting Black women and girls and to serve as a "reminder of our power and our unique beauty, internal and external" (Jones 2019). For this project, it is important to note that Thompson's girlhood is what influenced the hashtag. Thompson's childhood was filled with believing fairytales told to her by her parents, and like bell hooks' (1997) who writes about the merging of her realities and fantasies not far removed from reality, Thompson came to understand and appreciate how "reality and fantasy were often blurred" (Jones 2019). This influenced her concept of magic and it is a reality that Black girls are indeed magic in the ways they are able to

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1. The hashtag was first used by someone else prior to Thompson, but Thompson was the first Black woman to use it specifically in reference to "Black girl empowerment" (Jones 2019).

overcome the obstacles of systemic racism and sexism in their everyday lives. In this way our mere existence is magical and the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag transformed from a hashtag to a "movement that changed how we speak about Black girls and women" (Jones 2019). As such, I use #BlackGirlMagic in reference to Black women writers, authors and scholars who have produced and are producing scholarly and literary works that focus on Black girls' and women's experiences.

<u>Black Girl Centered Research</u>

Applying theories of girlhood to all girls is looking through a filtered lens of whiteness that does not focus on but distorts the realities and nuances within and across girlhood experiences of nonwhite girls. The vision and analysis will be terribly whitewashed. Scholars who have pioneered the study of Black girlhoods have paid attention to the nuances of Black girlhood and have been careful in their documentation of the knowledge co-created with Black girls. The pioneers were in part influenced by their personal histories as well as the many Black women writers who had produced key scholarly and literary works that dealt centrally with Black girlhood well before *and* since the establishment of girlhood studies. The following sections will discuss Black girl centered research and literature in the U.S. and the Caribbean.

Twenty years prior to girlhood studies as a field of study, sociologist Joyce Ladner (1971) was the first sociologist to co-create knowledge with Black girls as a researcher and analyze their girlhood experiences in the context of their social worlds rather than comparing them to white girls. In *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman*, Ladner (1971) centered Black girls as knowledge producers in the U.S. She mapped the ways in which race and class prematurely forced girls, who were living in a housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, into womanhood. Her work illustrates the fact that there is not a clear boundary set between where

girlhood ends, and womanhood/adulthood begins (Ladner 1971). This transition so to speak is shaped by girls' childhood experiences.

Similarly, Rebecca Carroll (1997) amplified the voices of fifteen Black girls, though she interviewed fifty, between the ages of eleven and twenty from twelve different U.S. cities. In the foreword to Carroll's *Sugar in the Raw: Voices of Young Girls in America* written by Ntozake Shange, Shange acknowledges the fact that existing as "colored, woman, and alive" is an anomaly and the mere presence of Black girls requires negotiation (1997). For each chapter of the text, Carroll (1997) shared a first-person account of the girl's narrative. In doing so she was able to pay apt attention to *what* the girls had to say, rather than summarizing their narratives in the voice of the researcher. This method also decreased the chances of misinterpretation on Carroll's part of what the girls had to say and they had much to say on the topics of race and class to misogyny in hip-hop culture and the politics of Black hair.

In the Caribbean, historian Colleen Vasconcellos has begun documenting the history of Black girlhood in Jamaica. Her work focuses on the changing nature of girlhood in the colonial Anglophone Caribbean (2010; 2015; 2017). Vasconcellos' scholarship is important in documenting the histories of girlhood for future generations to read, connect and expand. In my research with girls in the Dutch Caribbean, very little history of women and girls has been documented (Cuales 1998). There are very few examples of scholarship about Caribbean girls that focuses on their experiences during their childhood years beyond Caribbean literary works including fictional and semi-fictional texts. For example, Mary Cobbett (2013) whose research centers on gender, sexuality and education with a particular focus on girls in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, focuses on girls' performance of gender in Antiguan schools. Her research is important in examining how girls in the Caribbean are able to resist heteronormative ideas of

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biological sex, sexuality, gender and gender roles. Cobbett (2013) discusses three broad types of gender performances she observed in the girls' school and was intentional about producing scholarship that centered girls in the area of gender research in education where "boys and masculinities have been a dominant focus" (251). The dominant focus on boys and their underachievement in school leading to male marginalization has been challenged by Caribbean feminists such as Figueroa (2002) and Lindsay (2002) but Cobbett (2013) aimed to fill in the gap to include qualitative research about girls' experiences in school. Cobbett (2013) consisted of qualitative interviews with girls and observations of the girls in a school setting to examine the ways in which the girls were able to "resist the normative gender-sexual order and the consequences of conformity/non-conformity" (251). Though Cobbett (2013) has helped bridge the gap in this qualitative research about girls', extending it even further to examine gender performances beyond school and into other aspects of girls' social worlds is necessary in better understanding girls and the ways in which they navigate their social worlds. It is this gap in which this thesis project aims to address with references to Afro-Caribbean girls in Sint Maarten.

Though very little research can be found on the lived experiences of Afro-Caribbean girls in the Dutch West Indies and the inquiries into the many aspects of their social worlds, there has been progress. Historian Chelsea Schields who in her forthcoming (2020) publications: "Conjuring Futures: Culture, Commonwealth and Decolonization in the Dutch Caribbean, 1948-1975" in the *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques,* "Insurgent Intimacies: Sex, Socialism, and Black Power in the Dutch Atlantic" in the *Radical History Review, Closer Ties: Sex and Sovereignty in the Dutch Caribbean* and *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*, seeks to expand the conversation about gender and sexuality in the Dutch Caribbean. When we consider the history of colonization and slavery that has rendered Black

women and girls as invisible and nonhuman (Wynter 2015), writing about girls' lives is essential to changing narratives and improving the experiences of Black girls in the so-called Global South. As such, understanding how Afro-Caribbean girls from Sint Maarten conceptualize their girlhood identities and their experiences navigating a colonialist culture is an important scholarly intervention in the field of sociology and (Black) girlhood studies, broadly speaking. This addition is one step closer to bridging the gaps in research and closer to creating a field of girlhood studies that is robust and representative of the many experiences of *all* girls. Without documenting and understanding Afro-Caribbean girls' experiences of girlhood, our knowledge of girlhood, gender and sexuality is incomplete.

The contributions of Ladner (1971), Carroll (1997), Vasconcellos (2010; 2015; 2017), and Cobbett (2013) in the area of girlhood have been essential. Their work serves as evidence that Black women, women of color and academics and writers in other geographical regions outside of the U.S. have been writing about the concept of girlhood. In expanding research about Black girls in both the West and the so-called Global South, the experiences of Black girls in different regions within these large geographical spaces need to be included. As has been evident through the academic background of scholars writing about Black girlhood, Black girlhood has a place in various disciplines, rightfully so. While the scholarship within qualitative research studies regarding the lived experiences of Black girlhood appears to be limited to girls in specific places within these regions, there are several U.S. novels and Caribbean novels that focus on the experiences of Black girls and Caribbean girls such as Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, Julia Alvarez's *Before We Were* Free and Shani Mootoo *Valmiki's Daughter,* among others. These novels focused on race, color, class, gender, sexuality and politics specific to the region. These women writers wrote

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novels about Black girls, Caribbean girls and their experiences as well as imagining their lives in a way that Black girls and Caribbean girls in real life could connect with.

<u>Black Girl Centered Literary works</u>

The Bluest Eye, Sula, and *The Color Purple,* were published in 1970, 1973, and 1982, respectively. *The Bluest Eye* is narrated from two perspectives, a first-person account by one of the main characters, Claudia, and a third person account by the author. The main story is of a young Black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who prays for her eyes to turn blue so that she will be as beautiful and beloved as all the blond, blue-eyed children in America (Morrison 1970). She believes that blue eyes will make people treat her better and see her as beautiful. She notices that all the white children are treated differently and attributes this to their physical appearance. Pecola's girlhood is impacted by racism, sexism, classism and structures within the Black family. She was impregnated by her father and the thoughts of community members ranged from "Well, why did she not fight him?" to "Poor, girl" rather than tackling the issue of how patriarchal domination and pervasive anti-Black racism could lead to the conditions in which a father was allowed to enact such violence on his daughter, and the silencing of her mother. The taboo within Black families surrounding rape, molestation and incest contributed to the outcome of Pecola's life, thus rendering her and her lived experiences invisible to society. Morrison (1970) illustrates how the effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality can be passed down through generations. Likewise, Morrison (1973) captures race, class, gender, and sexuality through the lived experiences and friendship of two Black women, Sula and Nel, from girlhood to womanhood (Morrison 1973). She highlights the importance of same-sex friendships and the ways in which those friendships change as the girls navigate the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Similarly, in *The Color Purple* Alice Walker addresses the nuances of race, class, gender, and

sexuality through the girlhood experiences of two sisters, Celie and Nettie (1982). Walker (1982) illustrates how the intersections of Celie's identity and her lack of perceived beauty affect her lived experiences. Celie found herself in situations that were beyond her control and was prematurely ejected into womanhood.

Caribbean Girl Centered Fiction

Annie John, *Before We Were* Free, and *Valmiki's Daughter* were written in 1997, 2002, 2008 respectively. In *Annie John*, Jamaica Kincaid (1997) writes about a young girl of the same name growing up on the island of Antigua. Annie John recalls many of her childhood memories from mischief to girlfriends and the stories she was told of her mother and father's childhood to her interaction with her peers at school. Kincaid (1997) captures the complexities of mother-daughter relationships, gender, sexuality and what it meant for a young girl being launched into "young-ladyness" (35). Alvarez (2002) illustrates the complexities of politics and how they affect families through first-person narration of a young Dominican girl. The story was influenced by the experiences of Alvarez's life in la Republica Dominicana. This transnational novel is one that could have taken place in "any of the many dictatorships in Nicaragua, Cuba, Chile, Haiti, Argentina, Guatemala, El Salvador or Honduras" (Alvarez 2002, 132). As a historical fiction novel based on real life events, Alvarez (2002) used this as a technique to keep the memories alive of those who died because many of their testimonies of the Dominican dictatorship were not written down. She realized the importance of documenting life events for past and future generations. Moodoo (2008) pushes the gender normative boundaries as well as class, culture and sexuality in the narratives of the main characters, Valmiki, the father, and Viveka, the daughter. Valmiki and Viveka's uncomfortable life experiences are made this way because of the Indo-Caribbean community's construction of gender and identity and the practices

that still regulate their bodies, which did not allow them to be their true selves and in more ways than one, pushed them to hide the secrets of their sexuality and gender identity (Moodoo 2008). The individual experiences of fictional characters, especially young girls, in Caribbean novels are experiences that have been influenced by real life experiences and history, thus allowing girls from different cultural backgrounds inside and outside of the region to connect with the characters and their experiences. As an example of various cultural Caribbean experiences regarding politics, girlhood, race, class, gender and sexuality in the Hispanophone and Anglophone Caribbean, these novels illustrate the complexity of diversity in the Caribbean. Fictional literature from Dutch Caribbean authors that focus on Dutch Caribbean girls include similar complexities, but my access to these literatures were restricted.

There is some Dutch girlhood literature by Dutch Caribbean authors such as Curaçaoan author, actress, and educator Diana Lebacs known for her children's literature and for writing in both Papiamento[2] and Dutch. However due to language barriers I was unable to read these texts as they have not been translated in English or Spanish. While I was able to translate the limited book, details provided by Good Reads[3] and Abe Books[4] online, it is notable that in trying to translate the book summary into English, Papiamento was not recognized as the language used by the author but rather Finnish. Papiamento is an endangered language and there is little optimism about the future for the language even if they were to stimulate education using it (Desimone 2016). This lack of enthusiasm surrounding the use of Papiamento in the Dutch

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2. "Papiamento is the creole tongue of cultural and national reality of most islands of the former Dutch-Caribbean archipelago" and Dutch remains the language of "sound colonial education" (Desimone 2016).

3. World's largest online repository of book recommendations.

4. Online shop for new and used books, art, and collectibles.

Caribbean is associated with its working-class origins and those who have assimilated to the Dutch language are celebrated and associated with ascending to a middle-class status (Desimone 2016). As such, writers from the Dutch West Indies including islands that are no longer a part of the Netherlands Antilles[5], specifically Aruba, Curacao, and Bonaire, find themselves often stuck between writing in Papiamento and Dutch. Bearing the barriers detailed above in mind, the translations I was able to access of Lebacs' (1971) *Sherry, Het Begin van Een Begin* (Translated from Dutch: *Sherry, The Beginning of the Beginning*) reads "Sherry is a girl from the Netherlands Antilles, a country looking for her national self. Sherry studies, falls in love, works in a socially active group, and encounters racial conflicts all the time" and "Sheritsa remembered how she used to stand in front of the mirror and wondered deeply why she was so Black. She loathed the dozen stiff braids that her mother braided from her hair and then arranged according to a certain pattern. In her daydreams she kept fantasizing about some miracle cure that could lighten her skin. Escaping the confines of the island and the supervision of parents, Sherry enjoys her student life in Holland. Returning to Curacao doesn't seem very tempting, but after four years she can no longer avoid the decision". Based on these translations, the novel appears to center the life of a Caribbean girl, politics, relationships and race.

Pausing to discuss the above difficulty in accessing available texts about Dutch girlhood experiences is important to this thesis because it is indicative of some of the limitations – in this case language – one encounters when choosing to do research in the Dutch Caribbean. Valuable literary contributions to the sub-region can become lost or overlooked when language barriers are encountered. The nuances of language get lost in translation. For example, having to choose between either Papiamento or Dutch has its limitations especially when one considers the

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5. See *The Context: The Dutch Caribbean section*

historical significance of writing in Papiamento as a form of class resistance to postcolonial

education (Desimone 2016). Translating to and from Papiamento will help bridge the gaps

between those like myself who do not speak Papiamento but have various ties to the Dutch

Caribbean and those who are holding on to the language but want to connect to other islands

(Desimone 2016).

A project worth mentioning here which seeks to expand the reach of Caribbean

intellectual and artistic work, including works from the Dutch Caribbean is The Small Axe

Project ("Small Axe Project"). This project consists of four platforms—S*mall Axe, SX Salon, SX*

Visualities, and SX Archipelagos. SX Salon specifically is a:

> Digital forum for innovative critical and creative explorations of Caribbean
> literature, broadly defined. Caribbean creative writing has always wrestled with
> the idea of an aesthetic form that engages regional and diasporic understandings
> of our changing realities. ("Small Axe Project")

SX Salon publishes interviews, literary reviews, discussions and poetry and prose by

Caribbean writers ("Small Axe Project"). The October 2016 issue focused on translating

fiction and poetry.

Black Girl Centered Nonfictional Scholarship

In contrast to these fictional literary works, bell hooks' *Bone Black: Memories of*

Girlhood (1997) is a nonfiction memoir with an imaginative twist and Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl[6]"

from her collection of short stories *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) is an autobiographical poem

of the loaded and accusatory advice given to her as a child by her mother on how to be a *proper*

girl. hooks (1997) prefaces the book with a quote by James Hillman, "our lives may be

determined less by our childhood than by the way we have learned to imagine our childhoods".

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6. Originally published in The New Yorker in 1978.

The book is mostly about hooks' life; however, she creates her story by stitching fragments of her childhood with fragments of the dreams from her childhood as she considers them to be one in the same. bell hooks was inspired by Morrison (1970) and states that "most of all [Morrison] gave us Black girls who were critical thinkers, theorizing their lives, telling the story and by so doing making themselves subjects of history" (1997, xii). Kincaid (1983) shared with us the advice she remembered receiving from her mother during her girlhood years. Much of the advice therein mirrored the complexities of women and girls' roles and gender performances within the gender systems of the Caribbean which is the focus of Caribbean feminist V. Eudine Barriteau's scholarship (2001; 2003b; 2004). Documenting and acknowledging the richness of Black girlhood in these literary works are relatable to Black girls and women in various ways. They can see fragments of their story- their girlhood- alive on a page, in a book. In acknowledging this, I echo Evans-Winters (2019) sentiments about the future of documentation and Black girls:

> I imagine a world where Black girls and women are not stuck only reading other people's stories, fictitious childhoods and perceptions of social life. We deserve a diversity of representations of the theoretical, perceptual and lived experiences of people who live, worship and play like us. (69)

#BlackGirlMagic Prevails

In spite of and because of the focus on white girls in girlhood studies and the invisibility of the aforementioned Black and Caribbean literary works within girlhood studies, the scholarship on Black girlhood continues to grow thanks to Black girlhood studies pioneering scholars Ruth Nicole Brown (2009; 2013), Venus Evans-Winters (2005; 2019), Oneka LaBennett (2011), Colleen Vasconcellos (2010; 2015; 2017) and Mary Cobbett (2013). While making significant strides forward, the work of Brown (2009; 2013), Evans-Winters (2005; 2019), and LaBennett (2011) remains limited to Black girlhood within the geographical and fictive borders (Anzaldua and Moraga 1987) of the U.S. and to the experiences of Black girls

living in urban environments. The work of Vasconcellos (2010; 2015; 2017) and Cobbett (2013) remain limited to the Anglophone Caribbean as well as limited to historical girlhood and girls' experiences in school respectively. These scholars have demonstrated the need to study the experiences of Black girls and Black girlhood, not from a deficit but a resiliency lens (Evans-Winters 2005), and that space should be created and maintained for the celebration of the many facets of Black girlhood (Brown 2009; Hill 2018). The global extension of this scholarship is important to examine Black girls' experiences outside of the geographical boundaries of the U.S. and the Anglophone Caribbean.

In the Caribbean, feminists such as Patricia Mohammed (1994; 1998), Rhoda Reddock (1993; 2001; 2007), V. Eudine Barriteau (2001; 2003b; 2004) have been producing research about the experiences of women and the impacts of colonialism on contemporary gender relations throughout the region. Reviewing the work of leading, as well as nascent Caribbean feminist scholars, the majority of the research appears to be on the Anglophone, and to some extent the Hispanophone Caribbean. To help bridge these gaps in the extant research, I have chosen to use an Afro-Caribbean transnational feminist framework to discuss Black girlhood in the Dutch Caribbean. Black girlhood studies is a sub-study in Black feminisms and though Black girlhood studies is a great place to begin this research, it is western centric. Black girlhood studies and Caribbean feminist theorizing is a necessary intervention in examining the intersectional lives of girls who reside in the so-called Global South. I use Black feminist theorizing to center the lives of the girls, but also acknowledge its geographical limitations. Because of the colonial histories of the Caribbean and the ways in which Caribbean feminisms are specific to the region, U.S. centric Black feminism cannot be taken outside of its construct. Further, I utilize a transnational feminist approach as I am aware of my position as a Caribbean

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born, American raised girl/woman and understand that I need to pay apt attention to the various border crossings, both literally and figuratively, that occur as I am doing this research. Paying attention to how socially constructed (geographic and non-geographic) borders according to cultural, feminist, and queer theorist Gloria Anzaldua "are set up … to distinguish *us* from *them"* *(*1987) is paramount when engaging in this type of research. As such, this combined framework allows me to be attentive to borders by situating myself in this research through reflexivity (Hall 2016). Having been raised in the U.S., attended college, and "conducting research" in the place where I was born comes with a kind of otherness. I am an outsider/insider (Lorde 1984) who did not grow up fully immersed in the culture but hold onto memories from my childhood. I am aware of the potential interviewer and interviewee power dynamic in the co-creation of knowledge this thesis project may have produced (Jokela-Pansini 2018). During the interview process I informed the girls that we are producing this work together and I am making it available for people both inside and outside of academia. As the researcher, I understand that my role contains much power from the methods that I used to how I present their narratives in theorizing Black girlhoods in Sint Maarten. In telling the girls' stories I do my best to present their stories in a way that does justice to what they have shared with me. I believe that each girl that participated in this project represents one of the many possible ways that I could have been (personality, aspirations, demeanor, etc.), if I had stayed in Sint Maarten. In thinking about my own transnational girlhood between the U.S., Sint Maarten, and la Republica Dominicana, using a transnational lens influences my use of different languages in the title and throughout the thesis, similar to Anzaldua's use of different languages throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). In transnational feminist theorizing and as mentioned above, language is one of the divisions that must be crossed toward feminist solidarity building (Mohanty 2003).

As such, in using an Afro-Caribbean transnational feminist framework in this research, I present *un pedacito de mi vida* using the languages that both/and sides of my family speak, English and Spanish.

Un Pedacito de Mi Vida
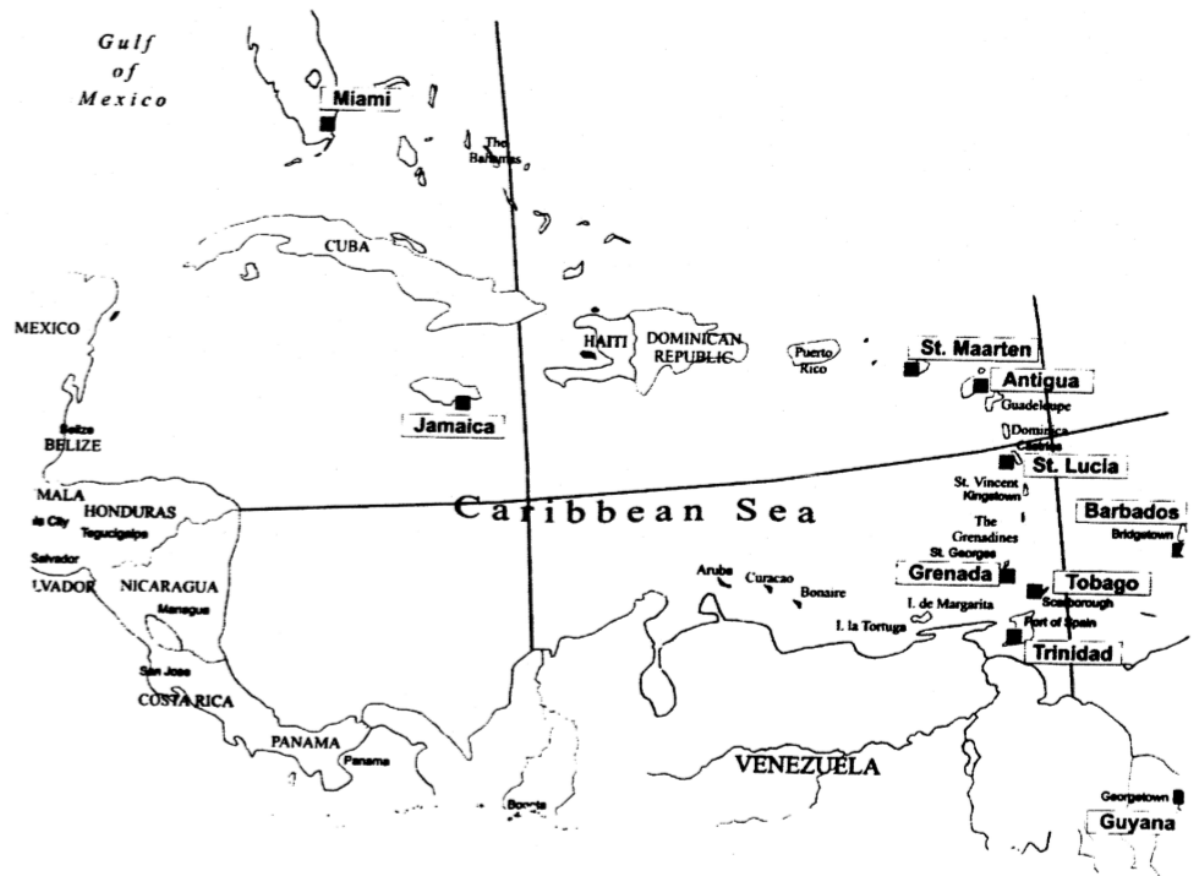
Figure 1: Geographical mapping of the West Indies.

Being an Afro-Caribbean girl taken away at four years old from the only fa*milia* and *gente* that I knew and brought to the U.S., a foreign place with none of mi abuela's *comida* or her White Diamond[7] scent, left me yearning for the memories of what I once knew. At the age of four, memories of mi abuela's homemade *pan*, warm bottles of *leche* brought to me in bed still

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7. Her favorite brand of perfume. My dad would buy it for her and send it to her, from us, on her birthday every year in January.

half asleep and the little blue mint candies I would steal out of her *bolsa* were already engrained into my young brain. How could I not long for the things I once knew in Sint Maarten? In professor of education Judit Moschovich's (2015) excerpt in *This Bridge Called My Back* she asks:

> Would an American woman [girl] move to another country and not hold dear her memories of childhood places and people? Would she not remember with longing some special song or food that she has no access to in her new country? And would she not feel her communication limited, no matter how well she learned her second language, because some very deep emotional things can only be expressed in one's native tongue? Or would she speak to her parents in her newly adopted language? (76)

In many ways, I became the American woman, but continue to miss what I once intimately knew in Sint Maarten and la Republica Dominicana. Because my father did not speak Spanish, although I do remember countless Rosetta Stone material piled in his office, I was forced to speak English and only spoke Spanish when mi abuela would call me. This is how I got here.

I was born in Philipsburg, Sint Maarten, Netherlands Antilles in 1994. Mi mamá es de la Republica Dominicana o San Pedro de Macoris o Santo Domingo o de lo que los Dominicanos de Sint Maarten llama con cariño, 'Santo.' *My mom is from the Dominican Republic or San Pedro de Macoris or Santo Domingo or as Dominicans in Sint Maarten call with affection, 'Santo.'* My father is from Hopkins Park, Illinois or Kankakee or Chicago because no one knows Kankakee, let alone Hopkins Park, but *everyone* in Sint Maarten and Santo knows C*hicago*. From birth to age four I lived con mi abuela y tía, my mom's mother and sister, in Sint Maarten. I was unable to start school there because my mom "did not have her papers." In other words, she was not a citizen. My mom was able to work jobs in Sint Maarten that paid her "under the table" (in cash), but she had returned to Santo after I turned one year old. When I turned four, she was not able to sign me up for school. She asked my tío, her brother, who had his papers in Sint

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Maarten, to claim me as his child so that I could begin school. He declined, leaving the opportunity open for my father to receive custody of me. My father convinced mi abuela that he would save enough money for me to go to college and that I would have better opportunities in the U.S. than in Sint Maarten, which was only partially true. I would have been able to attend college either on the island, in Holland[8], in Santo or really anywhere else of my choosing. Mi abuela was reluctant to let me go into the sole custody of my father because "Un hombre no debe criar a una hembra sola." The literal translation is that *a man should not raise a female alone.* Mi abuela's words had their own implications but she believed that *a man should not raise a daughter on his own.* As mi abuela put her own lived experiences into consideration, she knew that she "No tenía los recursos necesario para criarte", *she knew that she did not have the resources necessary to raise me,* because as she reminded me at twenty-four years old, "tu familia es *muy* pobre", *your family is very poor*. Mi abuela believed that my father had more resources (dinero) to give me a better life. My family may have been poor, but yo no recuerdo missing any meals or ever going hungry. Mi abuela made the decision, because I was living with her in Sint Maarten and my mom had returned to Santo when I turned one, to let my father receive custody of me. By the time I had turned four, my mom was raising my two younger brothers in Santo. Mi abuela gave the OK and my mom completed the necessary paperwork. I was brought to America in October of 1998.

I lost much of my verbal Spanish, but the memory of the language has always been ingrained in my brain. I understand more than I speak, and I limit my speaking to family-only because it helps me feel more connected to them, especially mi abuela. And because my Spanish

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8. Sint Maarten is a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and many consider Holland as a place to further their studies. Holland is usually the word used for the Netherlands.

is not considered "good" Spanish, I do not feel comfortable speaking with others who are not family. Throughout the years until the age of twelve, my father would take me to Sint Maarten or Santo. Growing up in the U.S., I never failed to tell any and everybody that I was 'Dominican.' Now, at twenty-five years old I consider myself a Spanish descendant, West Indian, and Caribbean though my identities shift and merge as I am more Caribbean in the U.S. and more American in Sint Maarten. My "non-Black" name also precedes me into the room, but when I physically enter, you know that I am not white. My mom named me Gerlyn (after a white actress in a movie my mom loved while she was pregnant with me) though I think the correct spelling of my name somehow was lost in translation from Dutch to Spanish as my Dutch birth certificate says "Gerlyn" and on all of my baby pictures my mom wrote "Jerlin." However, my father named me Ocqua. I am Ocqua to all of my childhood friends and family, Ocqua-Jerlin to my mother, and Gerlyn to everyone in college and beyond. Mi abuela y familia would tell me "No olvides de dónde eres. Tú eres Caribe." *Don't forget where you come from. You are Caribbean.* I never have; and I never will. Throughout my girlhood in the U.S., I always wondered what I would be doing in Sint Maarten or Santo. As an adult in graduate school, the girl in me still wonders how I would have "turned out" if I would have stayed in Sint Maarten or if my mom would have taken me to Santo with her. This inquiry of my own life is what has brought me to this research project.

I believe that every girl in Sint Maarten represents the many possibilities of who I could have been. Thus, engaging with the girls and answering the question of how girls in Sint Maarten narrate, navigate, and negotiate their girlhood experiences is a personal one for me. Throughout this thesis, my memories will continue to (re)appear as I share with you the girls' voices. For me, they help me (re)imagine my own lived experiences as well as understanding that Black girls

come in all different attitudes, shades and abilities from different cultural backgrounds. In using the following frameworks, my goal is to understand the ways in which the girls make sense of their girlhood experiences through, 1) narration which I have defined as how they talk about their experiences, what they choose to talk about and the words they choose to use to describe it, as well as their nonverbal cues; 2) navigation which I have defined as how they move through different spaces both physical and intangible; and 3) negotiation which I have defined as the actions, decisions, and compromises they have taken and continue to take, and which have created and continue to create their girlhood experiences. I also acknowledge that there are instances where discerning actions which the girls describe as either a narration, navigation, or negotiation is not as clear cut, and that there are some actions which fall into more than one category. Each section in "What The Girls Had to Say" is preceded by two photos taken by the girls that are representative of the people, places and things that represent to them what it means to be a Black girl in Sint Maarten. These have impacted them and have influenced who they are today and who they are becoming tomorrow.

The Context: The Dutch Caribbean

There is very little scholarship on the Dutch West Indies and what little that does exist focuses on international affairs, tourism, and politics. There is some scholarship that focuses on race and ethnicity— as in Gert Oostindie (1996), a Dutch history professor who focuses on race and ethnicity in the process of nation-building in the Dutch West Indies— and gender. However, there is still a cursory neglect on this part of the region in developing scholarship beyond international affairs, tourism, and politics or seeing such phenomena as intertwined with the lives and lived experiences of the people who occupy these spaces daily. Likewise, the scholarship has been limited to specific Dutch experiences in two of the three Caribbean constituent countries

(formerly known as the Netherlands Antilles[9]) in the Kingdom of the Netherlands: Curacao and

Aruba, thus excluding Sint Maarten, the third Caribbean constituent country. Sonya Cuales

(1998), who was a feminist in the Dutch Caribbean focused on history and gender in the region,

stated:

> The Netherlands-Antilles have a distinct character within the region. They are not
> always viewed as part of the Caribbean, possibly because of the long-standing
> links with Holland. The islands and peoples are considered Dutch in appearance,
> behaviour and thinking, although we see ourselves as Antillean and Caribbean.
> (86)

Since Cuales' (1998) observation, the Netherlands Antilles no longer exists as the constitutional

status of the islands' have changed. However, the islands still have strong ties with the

Netherlands as the people did not change, the constitutional status changed. To date, I have not

found any information that challenges her statements. For me, Cuales' (1998) description of the

peoples of the Netherlands Antilles helps summarize my sentiments. When I am back home in

Sint Maarten I am very much American in behavior and thinking, but even my American

behavior and thinking is influenced by my Spanish and Caribbean heritage. As such, I note the

cultural background and influence of each girl. The island consists of over ninety-two

nationalities residing on both the Dutch and French sides of the island. To echo Cuales (1998),

Mohammed (1998) acknowledges that Cuales "searches for some of the history of women and

gender in the Netherlands Antilles and suggests that much of this knowledge still needs to be

uncovered by future activists and scholars" (2). Because the history of women's lives in the

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9. The former Netherlands Antilles consisted of Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba, Curacao, and Sint Maarten. As of October 10, 2010 Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten along with the Netherlands make up the four autonomous countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba are autonomous special municipalities of the kingdom (BBC.com).

Dutch West Indies were not well documented, my hope is to co-create knowledge with the girls in the present that can inform future generations.

Feminist Theoretical Traditions: Toward an Afro-Caribbean Transnational Feminism

> Feminism cannot be monolithic in its issues, goals and strategies, since it constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. While gender subordination has universal elements, feminism cannot be based on a rigid concept of universality that negates the wide variation of women's experience. There is and must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women and define by them for themselves. -Sen and Grown, 1987

Black feminist theorizing centers the lives and experiences of Black women and girls who because of their marginalized status must learn to understand their world from the vantage points of both "outside in and from the inside out" (hooks 1984; Collins 2000). Caribbean feminists such as Barriteau (2001; 2003c; 2004), Reddock (2007) and Mohammed (1994; 1998) to name a few largely examine the ways in which gender relations has been impacted by the historical legacy of the Caribbean plantation system and the processes of indentureship, European colonialization, postcolonialism and U.S. imperialism. One must appreciate however, that not all Caribbean feminists are Black and because of the historical processes mentioned above, Caribbean feminists come from different racial/ethnic backgrounds which inform their feminism. Transnational feminism bridges the physical and intangible gabs both between and among women and feminisms. It pays close attention to and encourages border crossings to strengthen female solidarity. These are three distinct types of feminisms that have always been in conversation with each other. Because of the intersections of their identities, Black feminists, Caribbean feminists, and transnational feminists can be and use any combination of these theories in their own research, at any time practicing them simultaneously (Davies 1994). This section is organized to discuss Black feminism, Caribbean feminism and transnational feminism.

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Black Feminism

During the 19th century in the U.S., both Black women and white women were at the forefront of the first wave feminist movement at its inception before Black women were relegated to the margins of the movement by white women (Davis 1981). The white feminist could not separate her racism in the fight against sexism. Likewise, the second wave feminist movement in the 1960s continued to exclude Black women as white women fought to get out of the home and work. Black women were already at work as most of them did not have the luxury of being a stay-at-home-mother (Beal 1969). Essentially, the economic realities for Black women were quite different than white women. The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977) acknowledged the following:

> Although we [Black women] are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women. (5)

According to Black feminist, Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Black feminism is "a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community" (7-8). This feminism is not just inclusive of women and girls of color but also continues to raise the consciousness of the various oppressions that affect all women.

In her 1989 essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," Kimberle Crenshaw, a Black woman, coined the term *intersectionality*. Crenshaw (1989) argued – like Black feminists before her such as Frances Beal (2008) in "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female[10]" and Nikki Giovanni (1968) in "Woman Poem" – that the experiences of Black women

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10. Originally written by Beal in 1969.

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are multidimensional and cannot be adequately analyzed using unidimensional analyses (139).

She described intersectionality as a way to analyze discrimination and oppression. Because a

Black woman's subjectivity includes being both *Black* and *woman,* she can experience both

racism and sexism at the same time *and* her experience with sexism will be different than a white

woman's or Black man's experience because of these intersections (149). Thus, Black feminism

acknowledges that the intersections of sex, race, ability, gender, class, nation, religion and other

identities create different lived experiences. Though the term has been misused since its adoption

by and within different professions, Collins and Blige (2016) state that most people would accept

that in general intersectionality is:

> A way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and
> in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and
> the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally
> shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes
> to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given
> society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social
> division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and
> influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better
> access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (2)

Utilizing Black feminism in the framework for this project allows me to analyze the responses of

Afro-Caribbean girls through an intersectional lens. In doing this, it is equally important that I

am reflexive beyond the intersections of my identities *and* the identities of the girls because we

are more than the lists of categories. "Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of

continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation acknowledgement and explicit recognition

that this position may affect the research process outcome" (Berger 2015, 220). This is achieved

through the telling and documenting of our personal histories and stories which is crucial in

doing this work.

Professor Inken Carstensen-Egwuom (2014) who uses racism-critical, feminist and post-colonial approaches in her qualitative research states "reflexivity includes continuous attention and reflection upon the social practices of positioning and differentiation in the field (including the positioning of the researcher) …" (265). As I examine my own life and experiences in doing this work with the girls, it is a part of the co-creation of knowledge process. "Allowing personal experiences to challenge and extend pre-determined understandings of power, inequality and difference is firmly supported by the epistemological foundations of intersectionality" (266). The ways in which I have positioned myself in this project helps me to take seriously the lived experiences and self-descriptions of the girls while at the same time considering my "subjectivity and bodily experience" (Carstensen-Egwuom 2014, 267). Because Afro-Caribbean girls in the Dutch Caribbean have yet to enter the scholarship within Black girlhood studies, I am intentional about how I am bringing them into this bigger conversation.

Caribbean Feminism

Caribbean feminist theorizing concerns the ideologies of gender which exist in various contexts throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. Caribbean feminist and theorist V. Eudine Barriteau's work has focused extensively on gender systems in the Anglophone Caribbean specifically. Barriteau (2001) theorized Caribbean gender systems as the environment or conditions under which women have made significant achievements such as an increased presence in the labor force and the public sphere but are still impeded upon by societal and structural limitations which continue to aid in a hierarchal gender system. The policies that have been created to stimulate growth and development in the Caribbean have allowed women to make some material progress such as attain higher education and housing through state sponsored programs; however, these policies have done very little to change the ideological

perception about women's status in society and get at the root of women's oppression(s) in the Caribbean. According to Barriteau (2004) it has never been about "women's freedom but more about what needs to be done to reduce the obvious inequalities between women and men in public" (441). As such Caribbean societies are still grappling with issues of women's autonomy and authority over their bodies and lives (Barriteau 2003a; Barriteau 2003b). Though Barriteau focuses on the Anglophone Caribbean, her theorizing is applicable to the heteronormative structures in Sint Maarten that the girls have to navigate and negotiate, as both the Anglophone and Dutch Caribbean have similar histories with colonization.

Caribbean feminists like Rhoda Reddock (2001), Patricia Mohammed (1998), Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen (1993; 1994) and Gemma Tang Nain (1991) are in agreement that Caribbean feminism is largely Afro-centric and argue for a change to a broader feminist discourse which focuses on each racial category of woman present in the region. Regarding the quote that prefaces this section, feminism is not monolithic, this is evidenced through multiple Black feminisms and Caribbean feminisms which focus on different aspects of structures, processes and practices that affect the different areas of their lives and crossing various boundaries that include identities is what transnational feminism(s) address. The Caribbean includes Black, indigenous, white, East Indian, Chinese and other populations (Reddock 1993). The nuances of their experiences matter. This holds true for the Dutch Caribbean which is why it is important to do research with Caribbean women and girls in a way that acknowledges the ways in which their race, cultural backgrounds, a*nd* nationality(ies) work together in creating their lived experiences. Though this is the future vision for Caribbean feminism, this project focuses on the lives of Black girls in Sint Maarten and acknowledge their different cultural backgrounds but focuses on their collective identities as Sint Maarteners.

Black women in the Caribbean were historically "constructed as loose, immoral, loud, independent and sexually available" (Reddock 2007, 4-5). This construction being derived in part due to the development of a plantation society (Beckford 1972) in the region based on European racism and gender norms that privileged white women as the pinnacle of femininity (demure, pure and modest) and caricatured Black women in ways that excused white men in these colonial societies for rape, sexual assault and exploitation of Black women's bodies (Beckles 1989). These stereotypes of Black women in the region have persisted throughout the end of enslavement through the introduction of indentureship (to some Caribbean islands) and East Indian and Chinese women into the gender hierarchy and the development of their relationship to white femininity (Mohammed 2012); the postcolonial period; and today where there are still lingering effects on how Black women and girls are perceived in the region (Barriteau 2003a; Hosein & Outar 2016) as well as their girlhood experiences. To better appreciate how Afro-Caribbean girls conceptualize what it means to be a *girl* growing up in a region that has historically constructed their bodies and experiences in the aforementioned ways, it is important to foreground that the girls in this study are influenced by the racial/ethnic/cultural nuances that have developed in the Caribbean over time and their specific experiences living in different individual Caribbean island states (e.g., mixed, Indo/Afro descended, Jamaican, Surinamers and Curacaoans to name a few). Therefore, their experiences will be different a*nd* similar because of their experiences and their identity as Sint Maarteners.

Transnational Feminism

 A transnational feminist framework helps bridge gaps such as, but are not limited to, geographical, linguistic, space, place, identity and class (Mohanty 2003) between Black feminisms and Caribbean feminisms. Transnational theorizing reminds me to pay apt attention to

these fictive and literal borders. The divisions that can arise in doing this kind of work is influenced by how I am perceived by the girls. For this project, I use transnational feminists M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1997) definition of transnational:

> 1) a way of thinking about women [girls in this case] in similar contexts around the world, in different geographical spaces, rather than as all women across the world; 2) an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples, rather than as a set of traits embodied in all non-U.S. citizens (particularly because U. S. citizenship continues to be premised within a white, Eurocentric, masculinist, heterosexist regime; and 3) a consideration of the term *international* in relation to an analysis of economic, political, and ideological processes that would therefore require taking critical antiracist, anticapitalist positions that would make feminist. (xix)

This particular definition acknowledges the nuances of identities and power relations within and across women's lives in their specific geographical spaces. As a Dutch Caribbean born, U.S. raised Black woman, transnational feminism urges me to think, understand and consider other girls/women in different geographical locations. Crossing these various borders is a matter of choice, not permission and how these borders are crossed is influenced by how the borders are perceived. Anzaldua (1987) describes borderlands as follows:

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its residents. (3)

Sint Maarten is an island that shares land with the French, Saint Martin. There are four ways to enter the French side from the Dutch side freely. Two-thirds of the island is Dutch, and three-fifths is French territory. The island is thirty-seven miles in circumference, approximately thirty-seven thousand residents, with over ninety nationalities. Many residing in Sint Maarten come from other Caribbean countries to be with family or work in order to make more money to send back to their home country. For example, while getting my hair done last summer, a local

hairdresser shared with me that she came from Santo to Sint Maarten so that she could send money back home to her mother and two children. The exchange rate of dollars or the guilder to pesos is significantly better than working in Santo exclusively. Moving to Sint Maarten, for some, is an economic decision. The physical boundary in Sint Maarten demarcates the Dutch side from the French side. Other boundaries include the fictive boundaries that demarcates the rich from the poor and the documented from the undocumented. There are language barriers among those who are unilingual, but also individuals who can cross this barrier if they so choose as many are considered multilingual speaking Spanish, Dutch, French, English and Creole. Though the Caribbean is geographically one *region* close attention must be paid to all types of boundaries.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1994) in his discussion about cultural identity and diaspora, contends that on his trip visiting the French Caribbean he:

> … saw at once how different Martinique is from, say, Jamaica: and this is not mere difference of topography or climate. It is a profound difference of culture and history. And the difference *matters.* It positions Martiniquains and Jamaicans as *both* the same *and* different. (227)

As such, Hall's work (1994) encourages me to keep in mind that though these girls are growing up on the same island, their cultural backgrounds will also play a part in how they conceptualize what it means to be a girl growing up in the Dutch West Indies. In using an Afro-Caribbean transnational feminist framework, I acknowledge the intersections of race, gender, culture and the effects they have together and separate on girlhood experiences.

Girlhood: Why an Intervention is Necessary

American scholar Charlotte H. Bruner (1988) contended that though we cannot assess the extent to which women's movements and the sexual revolution have influenced world literature, African and Caribbean literature in the eighties is evidence that the idea of girlhood was

emerging and proved to be significant enough to be extended to fictional literature (324). Though Bruner (1988) discusses French novels on girlhood, she states that "wherever girls are considered unimportant, mere reflections of wiser males, useful to society only as menial workers or begetters of children, their stories are assumed not worth telling" (338). Girlhood is always *happening* with or without documentation from researchers. For Black girls, their documentation, through their memories and their stories are worth being told. Black girls should not be assumed to be passive actors in their own lives and they *all* have a story worth telling. They will have similarities, but they are all different. As such, it is important to understand that girlhood experiences are multifaceted and girlhood studies should represent that.

Black Girlhood

When I collected the data for this project, I remember asking the girls if they had ever heard of *girlhood* and the unanimous response was "no." I then asked if they had ever heard of *childhood* and then I further explained that it is *not* gender specific, whereas, *boyhood* and *girlhood* are specific in reference to the gender binary. Though this is how I explained it to the girls, Black girlhood is much more nuanced than my initial description. Black girlhood specifically in a U.S. cultural context has been defined by pioneer, Ruth Nicole Brown (2009), as "the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female" (x). Brown uses a hip-hop feminist pedagogy in theorizing Black girlhood. In *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy,* Brown (2009) argues for the creation of a girlhood that puts Black girls at the center rather than trying to *fit* Black girlhood into the leading discourses on girlhood studies such as "Reviving Ophelia" and "Girl Power" (x). Brown (2009) considers her work to be activist driven scholarship and this is exemplified through her work with the Black girl-centered program Saving Our Lives Hear Our

Truths (SOLHOT) (x). She was inspired by her own reflexivity. She realized that her memories

of girlhood were very much influenced by music— "Black girl songs" — hip-hop specifically

(xiii). Brown (2009) defines hip-hop feminism pedagogy as "the practice of engaging young

people using elements of hip-hop culture and feminist methodology for the purpose of

transforming oppressive institutions, policies, relationship, and beliefs" (7). For me, Brown

(2009) was able to queer[11] girlhood studies in a way that sheds bright lights on the lived

experiences of Black girls in raw form where the girls could come and learn, show confidence in

themselves, be *bootyful,* create meaningful connections, get your boogie on, be themselves, find

a big sister, learn from women, where women can learn from girls, make friends and so much

more. Brown (2009) was intentional in creating a space for Black girls by Black girls and Black

women.

In Brown's second book, *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*

(2013), she begins by stating that "Black girlhood makes possible the affirmation of Black girls'

lives and, if necessary, their liberation. I understand this affirmation of our lives and liberation to

be free from being confined to small spaces, to not take up *so much space*, to dress a certain way,

talk a certain way, because "at the end of the day," our experiences matter (2). Brown (2013)

puts a focus on a visionary Black girlhood embodied in SOLHOT and the creative potential of

Black girlhood as a theoretical framework.

In a different approach, Evans-Winters (2005) focuses on Black girls and their

experiences in the classroom. Evans-Winters (2005) "attempts to avoid frameworks that depend

on lenses of deficiency and hopelessness" which tend to be the central focus in urban education

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11. Imagining possibilities outside of the heteronormative society and outside of the
sexuality and gender context (Murray 2015).

research (5). Resiliency is about the strength and ability for these girls to bounce back from adversities and Evans-Winters (2005) adds stress and problems to this general definition (20). As such, she uses a resiliency lens that advocates for, empowers, and teaches Black girls (Evans-Winters 2005, 5). Her positionality within this work is important in her analysis of her data. Zola, Issis, and Nicole, the girls she interviews, are from her hometown, Haven, Illinois. Evans-Winters make a conscious effort to wear professional clothing because although she relates to them in more ways than one (similar backgrounds and family life), she needs to also draw the boundary between researcher and peer. In so doing, this is her way of being "Black girl reliable," as a concept termed by Black feminist and professor of education Dominique Hill (2018). Being "Black girl reliable" consists of "three key ingredients": "demands" that you must be able to see yourself in the girls you work with and them being able to see themselves in you; "requires" that the spaces we are creating and holding for Black girls is a space "expansive, imaginative, and thoughtful enough" to celebrate Black girls, and "requires intimacy with Black girls and the self (Hill 400). Hill (2018) defines this intimacy as "an affinity and empathic sentiment with and toward (200). I used Hill (2018) to justify this project in the methodology section and it was my intention to remain "Black girl reliable" throughout and beyond this project, however I was only partially able to fulfill Hill's concept.

The pioneers of Black girlhood have laid a foundation with the intentionality of creating scholarship in the academy about Black girlhood as well as a celebratory space for Black girls that focuses on the girls as active actors within their lives and their lived experiences rather than passive actors. One of the limitations of the scholarship currently available for Black girlhood is the dominant hip-hop feminist pedagogy and focus on popular culture. Black feminist and Black girlhood scholar Treva Lindsey (2013) uses a hip-hop feminist theoretical framework to discuss

how popular culture depicts African- American childhood generally and the "limitations and progressive possibilities of popular visual culture representing African-American girlhood and adolescence" specifically (22). She acknowledges popular culture and public culture's importance for empowering Black girls while acknowledging the abiding limitations in "mass, digital, and social media" (22). Black girlhood studies within the context of the U.S. is a great beginning but needs to be taken outside of the U.S. for further analysis. The research has focused on Black girls in urban areas and the theories within Black girlhood in the U.S. cannot be used to theorize Black girlhoods outside of the U.S. Though there are similarities between slavery in the U.S. and the Caribbean, "subsequent historical developments in the Caribbean have made for differences in gender, class, and race relations in the Caribbean from that of Black men and women in the U.S. where Black feminist thought largely originates" (Mohammed 1994, 138). A look into the literature on Afro-Caribbean girlhood in the Caribbean can show the limitations of generalizing Black girlhood across borders.

Afro-Caribbean Girlhood

Scholarship on girlhood in the Caribbean is even more limited than Black girlhood in the U.S. Afro-Caribbean girlhood studies consists of research on girls and their education, gender, and sexuality like Cobbett (2013) and Mckenzie (1986). The discourse on girlhood in education is usually in comparison to boys in the Caribbean and as such, little remains known of "girls' qualitative experiences of school" (Cobbett 2013, 251). Cobbett (2013) puts into perspective three broad types of gender performances used by the students themselves to 'Other' girls who did not conform to normative ways of 'doing girl': 'beauties,' 'geeks,' and 'men-john' (251-252). Cobbett (2013) describes the ways in which the girls use these names to describe other girls, themselves and what I theorize as how they narrate, navigate, and negotiate these gender

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performances in school. Because education is a large part of many girls' childhood in the Caribbean, understanding the different experiences within an educational context is important in how the girls understand themselves. Cobbett (2013) also finds a correlation between the type of school and social class the students in her study belong to. In contrast to Cobbett (2013), McKenzie (1986) purpose was to record the girlhood memories from adult women *about* their educational experiences to better understand the difficulty they had in accessing opportunities and seeing what programs they would be able to access now (104), evidence that girlhood experiences affect and inform womanhood experiences. Though my study focused on race and gender, class appears as a factor that contributes to the lived experiences of the girls. Overall, it appears that scholarship on Caribbean girlhood is centered around experiences in school. As such, it is unfair to measure Black girlhood in the Caribbean based on Black girlhood scholarship in the academy. Afro-Caribbean authors of fictional Caribbean girlhood literature have been producing #BlackGirlMagic and continue to do so, even as Black girlhood studies does not appear to be a salient topic of study in the Caribbean.

<u>Dutch Girlhood</u>

The scholarship on girlhood in the Dutch West Indies or on Dutch girlhood in general has a very narrow scope. The range of this scholarship focuses on girls from the Dutch West Indies living in the Netherlands or Dutch girlhood specifically in the Netherlands and not the Netherlands Antilles. This scholarship does not include girls who are living in the Dutch West Indies. Professor of education Mineke van Essen (2006) focused on Dutch upper- and middle-class girls and education. He believed the school days were related to the girls' identities of girlhood. van Essen (2006) was concerned with how and when the girls entered the adult world. This particular inquiry is important, especially for girls who have different duties both in and

outside of their homes, like taking care of their siblings or an ill family member. Like Ladner (1971), van Essen (2006) recognized that girls *leave* girlhood and *enter* womanhood/adulthood differently. Theoretically, girlhood is not an aspect that can be *left*, but rather expounded upon (Brown 2009). This ultimately depends on the girls' lived experiences.

Martina Althoff (2013), a Dutch criminologist, explores the concept of intersectionality when analyzing crime committed by Antillean women and girls in the Netherlands (394). This particular study was intended to analyze court files of the women and girls to try to find an explanation for their crimes and patterns in their struggle with their identity. This scholarship distances, both literally and figuratively, Afro-Caribbean girls born in the Netherlands Antilles (synonymous with Dutch West Indies) from the Netherlands in looking at their criminal activity and the geographic space in which they are coming to and from. My interest differs from these scholars in the fact that I want to capture the nuanced girlhood experiences of girls from Sint Maarten to shine light on the positive aspects of their lives, though there may very well be some experiences that are not positive.

As I have explained above, my use of an Afro-Caribbean transnational feminist framework allows me to position myself in this work as a Caribbean-born, American-raised woman whose own girlhood experiences are transnational. The importance of using this framework allows me to pay special attention to the geographic and fictive borders (Anzaldua and Moraga 1987) of Black girlhood. Black girlhood studies scholarship has created a foundation in understanding Black girlhood specific to the U.S. As such, it has also pushed me to inquire about Black girlhood outside of this context. I understand that I cannot analyze Afro-Caribbean girlhood without an understanding of the combination of Black feminism, Caribbean feminism, and Transnational feminism because of my positionality. I have shown the ways in which

girlhood and Black girlhood studies have been investigated. As such, this has led me to inquire

about the lived experiences of Afro-Caribbean girls in the Dutch West Indies to understand how

they narrate, navigate and negotiate their girlhood experiences in Sint Maarten.

A Different Approach to Afro-Caribbean Girlhood Knowledge

I travelled to Sint Maarten and stayed for three months from May 2019 to August 2019.

To recruit girls for the project, I handed out flyers to students who were wearing their school

uniforms and walking in Philipsburg. I spoke with and presented the research proposal to the

principals of two schools, sent digital copies of the flyers to girls on Instagram, and utilized the

snowball effect method. One of the principals recruited students who she thought would be

interested in participating. The principal and I set up a meeting for me to come to the school and

present the information to the girls she chose. I gave the girls the child assent form and parental

permission form to take home to their parents. With their parents' permission, the girls who were

interested reached out to me.

The interviews were held at three locations (two restaurants and a school office) that were

chosen by either the girls or their parents. After the first interview some of the girls shared

information about the project with their girlfriends and encouraged them to participate. In the

end, I conducted face-to-face audio and video recorded interviews with nine (9) Afro-Caribbean

girls, fourteen to seventeen years old. The original goal was to interview fifteen to twenty girls,

but I did not receive such a response, although I contacted over fifty girls and many of them said

they were interested. The interviews were audio recorded so that I could later revisit the

interviews and transcribe them. I took notes during the interview but wanted to focus on the

conversation with the girls. The interviews were video recorded so that I could include fragments

of the interviews in a short video documentary. Historically, feminists in the Dutch West Indies

have relied on videotaped interviews as their methodology. Cuales (1998) stated that "feminists in Curacao have relied on the oral tradition to videotape interviews with women" (89) so I felt it appropriate to continue this feminist tradition with the girls.

This project consisted of two semi-structured interviews, research participant photography, collages, a Black girlhood celebration and a short video documentary. However, the analysis of the data collected in this paper focuses solely on the first interviews and includes research participant photography from the second interviews. The collages, celebration and documentary are not analyzed, but will be used for future papers and presentations. The first interview was a conversation guided by questions about the girls' girlhood experiences growing up in Sint Maarten. At the end of the first interview the girls were given digital cameras with the following prompt: "take pictures of people, places, and things that represent to you what it means to be a Black girl". The second interview was also guided by questions and the girls explained the contents of the photos and a description of what each photo represented to them. To end the project, we had a girlhood celebration event where myself and all of the girls who participated got together, had pizza, cupcakes and drinks, listened to music (a playlist with some of their favorite songs) and created collages of the pictures they took. I printed out physical copies of their photos and bought craft materials and poster board paper for the collages. I filmed the girlhood celebration as much as I could as I was also creating my own collage with them. The girls were gifted the digital cameras they used to take photos.

I chose these methods as ways to make the girls literally *be* and *feel* a part of this co-creation of knowledge about Black girls in Sint Maarten. Historically, these methods have been used by Caribbean feminists such as Gladys do Rego's video entitled Mi sa Kon bo ta Sintibu (I Know How You Feel) on sexuality and Marie Allen and Jeanne Henriquez's research about the

daily lives of women in the Dutch Caribbean (Cuales 1998) which consistently utilized audio interviews, photography and video recording of interviews as ways of tracing reliability. In so doing, I remain true to the way the girls talk and throughout sharing the story of Black girlhood in Sint Maarten, I keep the linguistic representation real too. On language and feminist discourse Jean Elshtain (1982) discusses the importance and power of language and meaning within a feminist discourse. In my opinion, to transcribe the interviews that failed to capture the accents of the girls and sentence structures the girls used would be taking away from their narratives. As such, throughout the entire process of this thesis project, I did my best to hold myself accountable for not distorting the voices and experiences of the girls.

These methods were alternative ways to physically remember the stories of the girls. Irma McClaurian (2001) discusses Black feminist decolonizing and the importance of creating innovative, non-empirical, qualitative methodologies that do not reinstate a Eurocentric center. As such I am partly holding myself "Black girl reliable," and creating scholarship w*ith* girls, not *on* girls (Hill 2018). As I previously mentioned, I was only partially able to fulfill Hill's (2018) concept of being "Black girl reliable." I saw myself in the girls, but Hill (2018) states that it is required that the girls also see themselves in me. There was not a proper way for me to measure the ways in which the girls were able to see themselves in me. As an outsider/insider, how I was perceived by girls in our interviews is not explicit. I did not ask them or rather I was too afraid to ask because it was very possible that the girls did not see themselves in me, a Black girl *from* the U.S. who neither sounds like them or the "Americans" they know (one of the girls stated that I did not sound "American"). At first, I was afraid that if they did not see themselves in me, then the work I was doing would be invalidated. Our common identity as Black girls, which is more so a commonality of being identified as Black by others, a "common identity that has been

imposed" (Jordan 1982) and understanding the concept of being Black differently, did not, does not, and never will mean that we have or had a connection on that basis.

An Afro-Caribbean transnational feminist theorizing recognizes that to "require" that the girls *see* themselves in me in order to remain "Black girl reliable" is to deny the fact that all Black girls are not the same and that every Black girl will not see herself in another Black girl. Such theorizing recognizes the transnational nature of conducting feminist research such that it makes possible the ability for me, a Caribbean born, American raised woman, to reach across nuanced borders of identification and be content with seeing and sharing the things the girls and I may or may not have in common rather than require them to identify something about themselves in me. Evans-Winters (2019) explains this beautifully as she shares the different girlhood to womanhood/adulthood experiences of her and her best friend, Ruth. She liked Ruth and they both shared many girlhood experiences together, but they were so different, and she was surprised that their friendship remained a friendship. Before, during and after completing the interviews, I worked diligently to be and remain "Black girl reliable," however, as defined by Hill (2018), it was not a concept that I could follow through with outside of the U.S. My identity or being perceived as an American by the girls was more salient than my perceived connection to my West Indian roots. In expanding Hill's (2018) concept of "Black girl reliable," I would add to the requirements the key ingredient that being "Black girl reliable" requires that whether or not you see a part of yourself in the girls or they see themselves in you, you still choose to do the work with them because they matter, period.

Using photography as a method was inspired by my love of art and my hope for the girls to physically be involved in the research. There is a long and violent history of commodifying the Caribbean through buying and selling an imaginary created by material technologies (i.e.

camera), (Bascomb 2014). According to professor of African American studies Lia Bascomb (2014), "The advent of photography, and especially the Kodak camera, imaged the islands of the Caribbean in a new way, documenting the relationship between residents' work, tourists' leisure, and the complicated structures that held them in place" (193) further distancing, displacing, and dislocating the island's inhabitants from and within their geographical space. By having the girls capture their own images, creating their own photography, they are counteracting the historical imaginary created. They are not selling or buying the imaginary that was created for them but capturing their own true realities to be drawn closer, placed and located in the geographical space in which they unapologetically and boldly occupy. I want to (re)create the imaged Caribbean by documenting and (re)memorying the girls' narratives.

Historically, as Bascomb (2014) reminds us, there has always been a western, male gaze projected onto the Caribbean, where women have been the object and image occupying this gaze. Incorporating a short-video documentary as a method allows a piece of evidence of Afro-Caribbean girlhood to be visually created and documented all through a Black girl lens, both literally and figuratively speaking. The girls are at the front and center of this project. As such, I borrow feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's (1999) words when she states that:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/women. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.* Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motiff of erotic spectacle…she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. (837)

It is important to note that, as a white woman, Mulvey (1999) acknowledges that historically, in films (and in life, as films can depict different realities) the woman is the image and the man is the bearer of the look. Though Mulvey (1999) does not give examples of films with Black

actresses, Bascomb (2014) does recognize this. As such, I borrow and tweak Mulvey's (1999) quote and instead Afro-Caribbean girls are the image and the West is the bearer of the look, but the girls are in control of what the West *sees* and *hears*. In creating a short-video documentary, I am able to capture the girls' stories through their words and seeing them visually and with context leaves little room for any distortion because there can be many interpretations of bodies in still images when the context is unknown.

The culmination of the project was a Black girlhood celebration where the girls put together the pictures into their own collage. Visual artist, scholar and educator Kathleen Vaughn (2005) describes collages as "a versatile art form that accommodates multiple texts and visuals in a single work….as such, collage is particularly suited to a feminist, postmodern, postcolonial inquiry" (27). Sociologist, Wendy Luttrell (2012), who does work on critical childhood studies, uses photography and video to make visible the care worlds of boys' lives during their boyhood. Lutrell (2012) analyzes "the similarities and differences between boys' and girls' perceptions, participation in, and representations of their care worlds and how this shapes their identities" (186). Throughout the article, Luttrell (2012) uses the photos and videos as visual representations of the boys' and girls' care worlds and uses them to literally make them *visible*. Sociologist Marisol Clark-Ibanez (2004) uses photo elicitation (a way to gather knowledge or information from people) interviews and acknowledges that "participants can use photographs to provide a unique way to communicate dimensions of their lives" (1507). As such, I envisioned that the girls would be able to answer how they narrate, navigate and negotiate their girlhood experiences through the pictures they choose to take. What follows is the analysis and presentation of what the girls had to say. I focus primarily on the first interviews and incorporate the pictures that were taken by the girls to further illustrate Black girlhood in Sint Maarten.

A Look Into Black Girlhood In Sint Maarten

Before I share with you what the girls shared with me, it is important for you to meet each girl so you have the context for what will come. Each girl's experiences have shaped their outlook on their lives and allowed them to answer the questions I asked in particular ways. Each girl is different. The following section is the girls in their social worlds. The section after that is my interpretation and presentation of what they had to say. The major topics that occurred throughout the interviews were hair, appearance and food. Some girls had more to say than others but there were topics that recurred throughout different areas of the interview. Where one girl may have seen race as being salient in her life, another girl did not have the same experience.

Meet the Girls

Aimee.[12] Aimee is seventeen years old, an only child and just recently graduated from high school. She was born in New York, so she has dual citizenship—both American and Dutch nationalities. She self-identifies as *Blindian* (her mother is Black, and her father is Indian). She laughs a lot and loves to dance and sing. Aimee would describe herself as unique, very approachable, very creative and open-minded. Aimee wants to be able to give birth to children and also adopt one day. She stated:

> *Wow, ya know what? I get to create life and you see that? That's a superpower.*
> *You know women have like 7, 8 kids and I'm like wow you're- you're*
> *superwoman indeed.*

She dislikes the double standard in society that boys will just be boys, but if a girl was to do the same thing, they do not get passes like boys do. She dislikes that as a girl, she has to deal with unwanted attraction from the males. She wishes that girls would support other girls more, similar

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12. The girls chose their own pseudonyms. Their real names are not used to protect their identities.

to how the actors in her favorite show RuPaul's Drag Race support each other even though they are also competing with one another. Throughout our interview she laughed a lot and her favorite words were "period" and "pero" (*but* in Spanish). Aimee had a lot to share with me.

Anna. Anna is seventeen years old and is in fifth form which is equivalent to eleventh grade in the U.S. She is the youngest of seven children with two brothers and four sisters. She was born in Jamaica and came to Sint Maarten when she was fourteen years old. When asked what she likes the most about being a girl, Anna stated:

> *I guess what society sees me as. You're treated more, ya know, nicer and more pampered-ish. So, I guess I like dat.*

This reminded me of Kincaid's (1997) Annie John who said if she would have been a boy, she would have been treated the same as her brother, but because she was a girl, Annie John's mother would add hot water to her bathwater so it would not be so cold. In contrast to this, what Anna likes the least about being a girl is menstruation and

> *Bias from other ladies dat tink dey look betta den you in terms of physical appearance.*

She wanted me to know that she is independent, bold, believes in herself and is self-conscious. Anna's favorite movies are Black and emotional movies and she enjoys watching Netflix for fun.

Brittany. Brittany is sixteen years old, is in fifth form and is the oldest of two children with one brother. What she likes the most about being a girl is the options to wear dresses, pants, skirts whereas,

> *Boys just wear pants and girls have more variety of products for hair, showering and other hygiene products.*

As a girl, Brittany dislikes gender roles. She dislikes when people say

> *You're a girl, you're supposed to do this, you supposed to do dah. Probably because it's two thousand, almost 2020 not 1960-something.*

Hey, I think she is on to something! She wanted me to know that she loves sports, loves her family and friends and her favorite subject in school is math. Brittany describes herself as kind, supportive and caring. Her girlfriends describe her as funny, strong-headed and bold. She considers her parents and the cast from the show *The Real*, Lonnie Love, Adrienne Bylone, Gina May, and Tamera Mowery, to be her role models.

  Felicia. Felicia is seventeen years old, is in fourth form and is the oldest of three children with one brother and one sister. She was born in Suriname, formerly known as Dutch Guiana, and came to Sint Maarten when she was six or seven years old. She has traveled to different countries during her childhood and loves it. She wanted me to know that she is very artistic, loves to travel and likes to have fun. Felicia describes herself as caring, helpful and trustworthy. Her girlfriends describe her as caring, shtoopid[13] and fun. Some of her role models include Beyonce, Bob Marley, Maya Angelou and Oprah. She can keep secrets and could have classified information and she would never share it. I suggested she apply for the FBI.

  Kianna. Kianna is sixteen years old, is in fifth form and is the oldest of two children. She was born on the French side of the island, Saint Martin. Kianna loves the fact that as a girl she can do fun and girly things like get her toes and hair done, buy clothes and be around her girlfriends. When asked what she likes the least about being a girl she stated that she did not have anything that she did not like about being a girl. She describes herself as beautiful, hardworking and determined. She is headstrong and determined when she puts her mind to something. Her girlfriends describe her as mean (but she likes to call it straightforward) and

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  13. A spelling of "stupid" and is Black vernacular used in phrases like "Girl, you stupid" and can mean a number of things depending on the context. In Felicia's case, her friends would consider her stupid and this is synonymous with crazy. Affectionately crazy.

funny. Throughout the interview Kianna is very expressive and smacks her lips[14] a lot to make sure I get her point about whatever and everything that she is saying.

Khloe. Khloe is fourteen years old, a few weeks shy of her quinceañera[15] at the time of the interview and is in the third form. She is soft spoken and is the youngest of two children with one brother. What she likes the least about being a girl is her hair. She hates how much sand gets into her hair every time she goes to the beach. The other thing she likes the least is what she calls the Red Flag[16]. This was a popular answer among the girls. A typical day for Khloe consists of brushing her teeth, looking for food to eat and watching television. Most of the time you can find her at home. She believes that the typical days of other girls in Sint Maarten differ in the fact that they go out more. Khloe wanted me to know that she is nice, and she describes herself as funny, nice and friendly. She likes to swim for fun, loves basketball and considers her mom a positive role model in her life.

Loyalty. Loyalty is fourteen years old with lots of personality. She was born in Rhode Island and came to Sint Maarten when she was just a baby. She is the oldest of four children with two brothers and one sister. She is in third form and loves to sing. When asked what she liked the most about being a girl, she stated that she liked how she can change her hairstyles. When asked what she likes the least about being a girl, she stated that she disliked the size of her breasts. She wished that they were not as big, but she also stated that she loves herself and accepts how her body looks. Loyalty wanted me to know that she does not care what other people say about her and she loves to eat. She describes herself as Black, beautiful and smart. Her girlfriends describe

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14. A popping sound with her tongue and the roof of her mouth.

15. Spanish celebration of a girl turning fifteen years old.

16. Another term for menstruation.

her as funny, a person who does not care and always ready to square up. It took her awhile to realize that her Black is beautiful, but she changed her narrative.

Nirvana. Nirvana is seventeen years old and has completed high school. She was born in Curacao, a Caribbean constituent of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and is the youngest of six children with four sisters and one brother. When asked what she likes the most about being a girl, she likes all of the things that she can wear and all the hairstyles she can do. What she likes the least about being a girl is the way males treat females. Nirvana wanted me to know that she is a very social person, comedic, really friendly and easy to get along with. When I asked her, what are three words she uses to describe herself, she said outgoing, supportive and straight-up. Her girlfriends would describe her as disrespectful[17], stubborn and fun. Since Nirvana is finished with school, her weekdays consist of watching movies, sleeping and cooking. On the weekends she enjoys going to the beach with lunch, spending time with friends and going to the movies. She was excited about going out and taking pictures because it gave her a reason to go out on di road.

Zola. Zola is sixteen years old and very soft spoken. She is in the fifth form and is the oldest of two children and enjoys being a big sister. What Zola loves the most about being a girl is her hair. She likes all the different things that she can do with it. Echoing Anna and Khloe, her period is also what she likes the least about being a girl. A typical day for her consists of getting up to get ready to go to her grandmother's house because her mom has to go to work, grandma drops her off at school, stays there until 6:30pm and then goes home, does her homework and goes to sleep. On days that she does not have to go to school, she runs errands with her mom and

17. How girls are described who speak their mind freely and in Black vernacular, don't take no mess from anyone.

then goes back home. She believes that most of the girls in Sint Maarten stay at home when they do not have school. Zola would describe herself as funny, smart and beautiful. When I asked her how her girlfriends would describe her, she laughed and said weird, smart and creative. She really enjoys swimming.

The Girls and Their Social Worlds

In narrating their girlhood experiences to me in the interviews, the different contexts in which their Black girlhood were taking place, became clearer. Their social worlds are largely influenced by their education and consist of school, family, peers and social media. It is important to note that girlhood does not necessarily have a start and end point. Where girlhood ends and womanhood begins is more nuanced (Ladner 1971). Girlhood is a kind of fluid event and can come to an end for any number of reasons and situations (Ladner 1971; Kincaid 1997; hooks 1997). Nirvana referred to the summer as her last childhood summer. She stated that she enjoyed participating and it was a good summer project.

> *With this being my last- yeh this should be my last childhood summa- cuz I'll be eighteen next ye-uh it was nice to reflect on growing up cuz it really made me sit down and tink on what all influence me or like what all affected me growing up or like what all challenges I went tru bein' a Black girl in the community....*

For Nirvana, turning eighteen is a marker that indicates her leaving childhood and entering womanhood, though she can always *return* to her girlhood through revisiting her memories. For Loyalty, this project made her feel good about herself and reflect on her girlhood experiences thus far. When I asked her opinion of the project, Loyalty shared with me that she loved it. I asked her why and she shared with me:

> *Because! It made me open my eyes more to why am I a Black girl and sometimes I just stay home and I don't really explain myself why I'm a black girl and when I was looking tru da pictures and I was like getting my, ya know, getting my answers ready to explain the pictures and I was like "damn Imma-Imma well-good Black girl.*

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As such, reminiscing about their girlhood memories of the past as well as thinking about their present and future experiences, is better understood within the context of their social worlds.

The girls must navigate their social worlds and how they negotiate within the different aspects of their social worlds are largely influenced by how others perceive them in their social worlds. They are othered in different ways by their peers, their family, adults and strangers. This othering has been informed by heteronormative beliefs from people in Sint Maarten as well as society in general as social media crosses all borders. How the girls are treated in different contexts shapes how they see their world and their future. When it comes to their education, the girls are positive about their futures. The girls take their studies seriously; they all had an idea of how they will pursue higher education. Education is a physical setting, an aspiration, and a huge part of their social world. The girls aspire to do well in school, and it is where they spend the most time with their peers and friends. It is a place they regularly navigate, and certain encounters or situations must be negotiated in order to keep peace or stand up for themselves.

Education

Figure 2: Brittany's photo of her schoolbooks and papers.   Figure 3: Felicia's photo of wall art outside of school.

Education is a very important factor for the girls who participated in this project. Education as an aspiration plays a significant part in the decisions they have made and continue

to make during their girlhood years. I asked each girl what they wanted to be when they grew up and who or what if anything had influenced their decisions. They all knew what they wanted to be without hesitation. The professions were accountant, business data analyst, event planner and caterer, teacher, bank manager, psychologist, famous singer, pediatrician and an interior designer, exterior designer or architect. These professions include obtaining higher education as a necessary step to achieve their goals. All of the girls want to go to college and further their studies. The girls stated that they would like to study in Canada, Holland, Jamaica, Europe, Dubai and the U.S. Some would like to return to Sint Maarten after university and some would like to travel and live elsewhere. The profession that each girl is currently interested in has been influenced by family members, television and just their own personal interests. The girls are striving hard to get to where they want to be and throughout some of the interviews, some of the girls shared with me the expectations that others have of girls in comparison to the expectations that they have for boys and an expectation to go to school is at the top of the list. Education as an aspiration means that school will continue to be a part of their social world beyond high school.

School

The girls spend most of their time in school settings during their childhood. The girls usually are in school from August to June. Thus, they spend a lot of time surrounded by their peers. Navigating school for the girls is a place where they set their priorities, interact with their friends and learn. How successful they are in navigating school informs their future careers, goals and relationships. School also operates as a place where they receive the most scrutiny and judgement from their peers because of their appearance, personalities and friend groups (Cobbett 2013; Evans-Winters 2011). In capturing her school in one of the photos, Loyalty stated that

Yeh, that's weh the teasing started. Yeh, that's why I took a picchuh deh-uh.

As such, school as a space and place is where parts of their identities are negotiated. She goes on to state that

> *I took a picture of my school sign because that's where I go and that's where most of me being proud of being a Black girl started.*

Identities and awareness of those identities are developed at school. School is the most prevalent aspect of girls' social worlds that scholars have focused their research. Writers have also incorporated school experiences into their fictional and nonfictional literature storylines. For example, Bettie's (2003) comparative analysis of race, class and gender performance were analyzed through interviews conducted in a school setting and much of the girls' experiences involved school. Cobbett (2013) was able to theorize the gender performances of girls in a school setting and the "cost and rewards" of those performances (264). How others reacted to and/or influenced their gender performance negotiations were pivotal to navigating their peers in school. Likewise, in Kincaid's (1997) *Annie John,* Annie John acknowledged that most of her time was spent in school and many of her childhood memories that included relationships with her peers, teachers and mischief, happened in school.

Family

Family is a social world that children are born into. Family dynamics vary and change over time. They help set the course of one's life, their beliefs and values. Family members give advice—usually advice that they received from others in their life. The advice that they give, the support and encouragement, set the foundation for what the girls decide to do. During different questions throughout the interviews the girls brought up advice that they have received from adults in their life. The advice ranged from advice that they thought was beneficial and followed to advice that they did not follow because it went against who they are. The girls were also asked to name the people in their lives who they would consider a positive role model. Family operates

as a social world that the girls learn from and influence other aspects of their social worlds.

Moms and older sisters were particularly influential. Aimee stated that

> *I feel like my mom and I are really different but we're very alike at the same time. She's like a fun mom but she won't like, let me go sky diving. I want the people-person type of personality liker her. Um, and my mom also taught me when I was younger that ya know, I have to work for things and then she always told me that "You need to have your priorities first and then comes pleasure" or whatever.*

Like Aimee, Zola, Brittany and Felicia shared similar sentiments about their mothers being their role models and Nirvana has an older sister who has been very influential in who she has become. She states:

> *So, basicallly- I wouldn't say she raise me, but I was wit her a lot growing up. So, I was watching her make her bad choices, her good choices and like she basically guides me tru life as of right now because I not really close with my mudda as I am to ha. Especially cuz of the age difference. Because my mudda is making 61 next year. So, it's kind of like how do I talk to ha? I radda talk to my sista who just went tru it, ya know? So, she is definitely my role model. Definitely.*

Peers

Like family members, the girls interact with their peers on a regular basis and the setting in which this happens is usually at school and/or when they hang out with their friends outside of school. How they interact with their peers and which peers to interact with must be negotiated. There tends to be cliques and if you do not fit into any clique or into another clique that is not as popular, bullying will be something that the girls will have to both navigate and negotiate. Aimee did not explicitly say the word "bully", but she hinted at it. This was part of her response when I asked her what she liked the least about being a girl. Besides bullying, there is peer pressure that the girls must navigate and negotiate, primarily in school. As such, choosing the type of friends they hang with is important to them. Aimee believes that her friends represent who she is, so choosing friends with different similarities is important. Friends help the girls hold themselves accountable for reaching their goals.

<u>Social Media</u>

In the age of technology, social media is also a significant part of their social worlds. Phones are considered essential and different social media platforms and applications such as WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat allow them to stay connected with family and peers. YouTube is a form of social media where the girls are able to share a part of their lives with the world as well as learn from watching YouTube influencers. They are also able to create their own YouTube channels and share their talents with the world, which Aimee and Loyalty have already taken advantage of. Social media is a place where the girls can express themselves, get motivation from other girls on applications like Instagram and communicate with others. The girls' social worlds consist of education as the foundation, their peers, family and social media use. Their social worlds are not limited to these contexts, but for this thesis project, these areas of their social worlds are the ones in which they find themselves navigating. The next section will paint a clearer picture of Black girlhood through hair, appearance and food.

What They Had to Say

School, family, peers and social media are the spaces and places of their social worlds that provide the context for where their lived experiences *happen.* The following analysis of the data collection will be presented in the major topics that arose throughout the project– hair, appearance, and food. These are the representations of girlhood that appeared for the girls as they narrated their girlhood experiences. Through these aspects of their lives they are fighting against heteronormative attitudes in their daily lives that consistently remind them of not who they are but who they should be, what they should do and how they should do it. The photo that begins each section is a photo taken by two of the girls relating to the theme and represents to them what it means to be a Black girl growing up in Sint Maarten.

Hair

Figure 4: Brittany's photo of her hair products.   Figure 5: Kianna's photo of essential brushes for Black girl hair.

Hair. We have hair everywhere. Hair on our legs, on our arms, toes, knuckles, armpits,

head, face and in between our legs. Body hair operates as a natural protective device from dust,

other small particles and helps us preserve heat; however, it does not protect us from

discrimination, embarrassment or judgement. Though hair is a commonality among girls,

"racialized and gendered norms of beauty" (Lindsey 2013, 27) and in this case hair as beauty, it

influences a wide range of emotions connected to hair. Not everyone has an emotional

(de)attachment to their hair but if you are a Black girl, hair *can* and *will* put you through a series

of emotions. Though research on the topic of Black hair is largely U.S. centric, scholar Treva

Lindsey (2013) echoes Black women before her such as Ingrid Banks (2000) in *Hair Matters:*

Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness and Noliwe Rooks (1996) in *Hair Raising:*

Beauty, Culture, and African American Women, in that:

> Black hair, as both an industry and as a discourse, has a long and contentious
> history within the African diaspora, and specifically within Black communities
> that encounter white/Eurocentric beauty standards as aesthetic ideals. What
> becomes particularly salient in both historical and contemporary Black hair
> discourses is the processes black females utilize to achieve these hegemonic
> beauty ideals. Those who choose to maintain the "natural" state of their hair often

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confront the possibility of being ostracized and marginalized from prevailing standards of beauty that uphold long, straight hair as a universal ideal…. (27)

The topic of hair for the girls who participated in this research is a site of frustration, unfair school policies, self-expression, (lack of) confidence and inspiration. Hair and overall appearance were reoccurring in the responses to what the girls like the most about being a girl. They like the versatility of their hair. Different braid hairstyles and different color hair extensions are styles the girls use to express themselves. In order to achieve certain styles, a bit of frustration is inevitable.

"Hairstyles serve as important cultural artifacts, because they are simultaneously public (visible to everyone), personal (biologically linked to the body) and highly malleable to suit cultural and personal preferences" (Weitz 2001). Black girls do not wake up in the morning and instinctively know how to do their hair. It is an aspect of their body that they must learn. Usually a family member is responsible for doing her hair until she is old enough and the age is both relative and subjective (Evans-Winters 2019). By this time the girls have begun to learn the hairstyles that they like which is influenced by how other people like their hair and how other people do not like their hair. When it come to her hair and being a Black girl Aimee states:

> As a Black girl I think it is very important for me to style my kinky textured hair because in da hair industry, kinky hair is considered to be hard to manage or just not brushable. I learned to do my hair because I could not cornrow to save my life. *laughs* But I figured out I have to do it like this and not this *does the hand movements for doing cornrows*.

Learning to take better care of their hair and do different styles is a step closer to accepting, embracing and loving themselves more. Society in Sint Maarten has defined what *good* hair is or rather what good hair is *not.* And although all Black girls do not have the same kind of hair, they

have learned what good hair is not and if you have kinky, coily hair, or 4c natural[18] hair, then

your hair is far from the standard of beauty. For example, Aimee states:

> *I'm not too sure this applies to the states or Europe or whatever. Maybe- I have to say because ya know- Black is very diverse. So, ya know, a lot of people- and some people have curlier hair patterns, some people have the kinkier like mines. I would say like people will say in Sint Maarten "oh, this girl with the curly hair type"- 3C hair, ya know if- and you know the word they have? It's "better" and I'm like "In what way!?" *laughs* I know she probably doesn't have split ENDS but like they're saying because of the curl PATTERN it's better. She's essentially more beautiful or- but again I'm trying to be like my dad, UNBOTHERED.*

Because the girls cannot change their natural hair texture without any chemical alteration, some

of the girls have embraced their natural hair by negotiating certain styles as a way to fight back

against the belief that natural hair is not beautiful. In the natural hair community, "baby hairs" or

"(s)laying their edges" (as Kianna calls it) has become popular by many natural hair and makeup

social media influencers. Kianna states:

> *Black girls all know the struggle of trying to lay their edges or getting the perfect style.*

Part of getting the perfect style means altering your hair in a way that others have agreed is

beautiful. Sometimes it takes copious amounts of hair gel, combs and brushes to get the perfect

edges. The girls can change their hair appearance as often as they want, and they take pride in

this. There is a certain kind of independence and self-expression that comes with being able to

decide if you want braids this week, twist out tomorrow or weave in the next day.

Black girls can be totally unapologetic when it comes to their hair. During the first

interview, Anna wore a bonnet to the interview. *This* is a political statement (Lorde 1984). It

could have meant a variety of things: one, she did not have time to do her hair before the

interview; two, she did not feel like doing her hair before the interview; three, her hair

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18. Describes hair texture and curl pattern, usually in reference to Black hair and POC.

appointment was scheduled for later that day; four, any other reason you can come up with. The interview was video recorded, and she did not have any concern that she was going to be recorded with her bonnet on. This kind of confidence can be found among many Black girls when it comes to their hair; however, this is not the case for all Black girls. Sometimes Black girls are limited in their self-expression through their hair because of unfair school policies.

Nirvana attended an international Catholic, majority-Indian school and she was one of the very few darker complexioned local Black girls who attended the school. I asked her if there were any challenges that she faced as a Black girl growing up in Sint Maarten and her response was going to an Indian school - her hair was a problem. Her hair was considered unkempt and her and her family needed to do something about it. The principal is a Black woman, most of the teachers are Black and most of the students are either Indian or Chinese. The warnings that she would receive about having to tidy up her hair came from Black women. Teachers who *looked* like her.

> *Um, well, going to a Indian school, my hayuh was a problem. Cuz everyone had straight hayuh, easy to manage hayuh. So, for example, my mudda used to plait my hayuh when I was younga. If my mudda decided she was going to tro my hayuh up in one, it woulda been "Oh, ya hayuh not nice, ya didn't put gel. Stuff like dah. Don't come like dah with ya hayuh tomorrow." Dat was one of da major challenges.*

She would get letters sent home to serve as a warning from her teachers. The Black administrators and teachers giving Nirvana the warnings had already ascribed to a European standard of *professionalism* and *success*. By giving Nirvana warnings about changing her hair, they were sending a message to Nirvana that her hair the way it grew naturally was a problem and needed to be manipulated to avoid punishment such as being suspended from school until her hair was *fixed.* I am proud to say that they were not successful in making Nirvana adopt their standard of appearance. Of course, to stay in the school Nirvana's mother had to make sure that

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her hair was acceptable for the school, but Nirvana noticed this and did not like it. Part of her negotiating a space that does not *approve* of her hair is to NOT manipulate her hair to be straight or tidy in the way the administration wanted once she was out of school. She did not allow them to convince her that her hair was a problem. Though her mother took heed to the warnings sent home from the school, Nirvana was still able to resist[19] the school's vision of *proper hair*. Black girl magic at its finest, again.

> *sighs* Dey, my mudda especially, she really always conformed to the rules. Like "OK, you get a warning? I gone make sure plait your hair tomorrow. No problem." Like dat. And I used to- well I was young so it wasn't like "But mummy why you plaiting, like leave my hair. It's my hair." But now I get olda it's kinda like "You really gone leave the school influence you like dah?" But, she always would listen to da teachas, always. Always.

Though Nirvana was the only girl out of the nine to discuss this particular challenge, the other girls may not have experienced this due to being at different schools or they may have had this experience but was not affected enough for it to be considered a challenge to bring up during the interview. It can be said that this kind of negative experience regarding their hair is an experience that other girls have experienced within school as well as other places such as places of employment (Weitz 2001). Outside of hair politics in school, Black girls receive a lack of support and hair discrimination in communities where they should feel at home, around people who look like them.

The girls who find support in the natural hair community, also find a hierarchy of beauty standards and lack of support within that same community. In this community, women and girls with natural hair have internalized the belief that "all hair is not good hair." An example of this has been to categorize different *types* of hair. The hair categories describe the curl patterns. For

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19. Stombler and Padavic (1997) suggest that small acts even if they do not lead to change to the broader system is still a form of resistance that can aid in creating change for the future.

most Black women the categories that are most popular are 3A/B/C and 4A/B/C hair types. The higher the number and letter, the kinkier and coilier the hair pattern. In a way, the beauty standard(s) within the natural hair community reinforce a mainstream beauty ideal that renders curlier rather than kinkier hair patterns as more acceptable and beautiful. In the girls' responses about hair, it was always tied with the beauty standard of having a particular grade of hair and lighter skin. Aimee acknowledged her awareness of the beauty industry's definition of beauty as portrayed through limited hairstyles or excluded shades of Black skin colors of their models and makeup. Kianna and Anna explicitly expressed that they think boys are responsible for creating this beauty standard because they are the ones who *choose* and prefer girls who have a thicker body, curlier hair, and lighter skin.

Appearance

I could say that the girls' physical appearance says a lot about who they are, but it is more accurate to say that society assumes many things about the girls' physical appearances. In the Caribbean, the socially constructed bodies of girls and women continue to enforce a hierarchical gender system that fails to recognize girls and women as autonomous beings (Barriteau 2001; 2003b). Brittany realizes:

> *How you present yourself on the outside, that's the first thing people see. People don't see, like, your personality, unless like- friends with them or you do some sort of kindness or something.*

Sint Maarteners associate certain attitudes and personalities with how a girl dresses, what she chooses to wear and what she chooses not to wear. Therefore, girls are judged on their appearance before they ever say a word. From a positive perspective, the girls are fascinated by the fact that they can switch up their looks in hundreds of ways. This helps them express themselves and feel good about themselves. However, a combination of skin complexion and

dress often leads to bullying from their peers and unsolicited attention from men. This bullying and attention, at times, encourages the girls to negotiate what they wear and how they wear it in order to safely navigate certain spaces. For example, Cobbett (2013) found that for the girls in her research, their gender performances are negotiations that were extensions of their understanding of gender and the freedoms associated with the girl/boy binary could have devastating social costs.

Skin Complexion
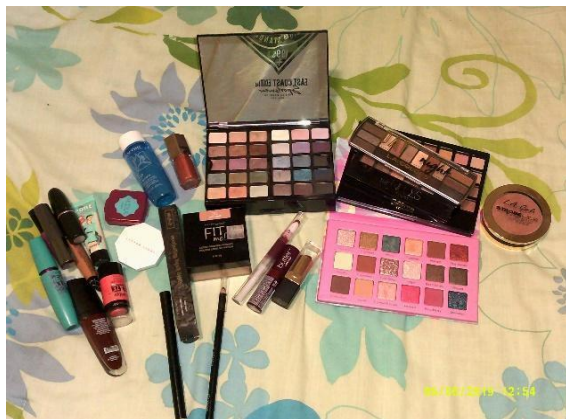
Figure 6: Aimee's photo of her makeup.   Figure 7: Zola's photo of makeup and hygiene products.
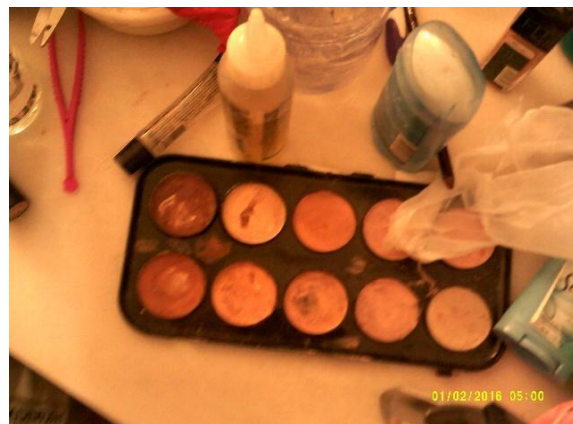
The girls were asked to name the race or color that they identified with. As a Black girl/woman coming from a space and place where race is very central to my identity, I had assumed that the girls would self-identify as Black, because elsewhere they *would* be considered Black. All of the girls except Khloe, who identified as brown-skinned, identified as Black. During the interviews a few of the girls pointed out to me that though they are Black girls, being Black is not central to their identity as it would be in the U.S because they are surrounded by Black people everywhere. For example, in Brittany's opinion

> *It doesn't really have challenges being Black in Sint Maarten because most people are Black.*

While most people in the Caribbean are Black it is important to note that race in Sint Maarten, and the Caribbean as a region developed differently than in the U.S. Historian David Lowenthal (1967) focused on the historical background of race and color relations in the British, French and Dutch West Indies as slavery was established differently than the Hispanophone Caribbean. These plantation societies where stratified with whiteness being placed at the "top" of the societal hierarchal pyramid and Blackness at the "bottom" with an often free "colored" middle class in the middle.[20] Professor of Caribbean history David Lambert (2005) writes for example of the complexities of this color system in Jamaica and Barbados;

> In Jamaica, a complex system of color gradations developed, with 'mixed race' people described as 'Sambo', 'mulatto', 'quadroon', 'mustee', 'mustiphini', 'quintroon' or 'octoroon'. The last two categories were codified as legally white and automatically free… there were also racial and color categories in Barbados, this 'mixed race' individuals identified as 'frothy', 'musty', 'yellow', 'light brown' and 'brown'. (80)

The color stratification in these Caribbean countries became even more salient after slavery in the Caribbean ended and more complex with the introduction of East Indians and Chinese labor to some countries. Proximity to whiteness became even more entrenched as a mark of status/class and a system of gradations of color based on the proximity to whiteness and away from blackness became entrenched in modern Caribbean societies.

Unlike the U.S., whites, who were outnumbered by "free colored" acknowledged them as "superior both to slaves and to free Blacks and gave them privileges according to their shade" (Lowenthal 1967, 588). The lighter the skin complexion, the more privileges they were afforded by whites. Therefore, simply being Black is more nuanced in the Caribbean and skin

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20. Five million enslaved people were brought from Africa to the British, French and Dutch West Indies and the offspring of white men and African women who were mostly considered "free colored" comprised twenty percent of the population at the end of slavery (Lowenthal 1967, 587).

complexion/color still matters and has implications within Caribbean society. My U.S. centric view of race blurred my initial understanding of why Khloe identified as brown-skinned, why Loyalty described my skin color as *red* and that, in fact, historically color has been considered a much bigger issue than race in the Caribbean (Lowenthal 1967). As such, their Blackness or skin complexion is not compared to whiteness, but rather girls who are "more redda den dem" (lighter in complexion). Historically, being more red entailed more privileges and in contemporary times, because of the remnants of this colonial and cultural history, red is associated with being prettier, more likeable and more attractive to boys. As such, the ways in which the girls thought about how it is being a Black girl in Sint Maarten varied in their responses. Some girls did not focus on the word *Black* in "Black girl" and this could be attributed to the fact that the majority of the island's population is Black. This could also be attributed to the reality that some of the girls did not want to talk about being a "Black girl" because of experiences they did not want to share. For others however, there was still a stark difference in their experiences with a strong focus on *Black* in "Black girl". The girls' experiences ranged from being bullied about their skin color to recognizing that boys preferred to date lighter skinned girls and from being treated differently by their own friends because of their skin color to recognizing a correlation between skin tones and beauty norms. In Kincaid's (1997) *Annie John*, Annie John admired a girl she called "the red girl" because to her, "the red girl" symbolized freedom. "The red girl" did not have to do things that Annie John did not like to do, such as pay close attention to her hygiene and Annie John likened this to freedom. Based on the literature I reviewed above, it could easily be inferred that the reality of "the red girl" for Annie John was influenced not just by her own gender and sexuality, but by how society conferred on people with lighter skin (or "red") status where they did not have to do certain things people of darker gradations were expected or required to do.

The ways in which the girls who have had negative experiences pertaining to their skin color have discussed the ways that they negotiate and navigate corrupt beauty standards. Girls with different complexions realize that there is a difference in what is considered beautiful and what is not. For example, in Aimee's response to what she likes the least about being a girl, she states that

> *Also, because ya know Black people we have all different shades, ya know. So, let's say ya light skin or- or ya know, um, that they are more beautiful than- but I feel like it depends on who the person is and this is mostly the younger generation saying this, but ya know, people who are more mature that are my age would say "No, dark skin is also beautiful" like, ya know, they would say that too.*

They also realize that they can believe mainstream ideas of beauty or look in the mirror and decide that they must counter this narrative by displaying a kind of confidence that shows that they know they are beautiful because they are beautiful and not in comparison to anyone else. Some of the girls realized that in their particular community, they are darker in complexion to other girls. Bleaching their skin is an option that has crossed their mind because of not fitting in and being the darkest one in pictures with their friends and/or family. Though this is one form of negotiation, not all girls who think about bleaching their skin follow through with it. Loyalty expressed to her mother at twelve years old that she wanted to bleach her skin and her mother kept reminding her that she was beautiful. What is important is what led her to this desire. She was being bullied at school about her dark skin from peers who were just as dark as her. When I asked her what she thought about her peers teasing her and their skin was just as dark, she said she did not know. Cobbett (2013) asked one of the boys in the classroom of one of the girls she was observing and she asked him why he thought the girl was bullied and he said "Because she doesn't have any manners, she don't give a care for nobody…" (261). When I asked Loyalty how she would describe herself she said she does not care what other people say about her and her friends would describe her as someone who does not care. Loyalty stated that she has been

bullied and recognized prior to entering high school, that high school would be a judgement zone. It is hard to discern what comes first, the bullying which influenced her decision to act like she does not care so others can leave her alone or did this negotiation *lead* to bullying? Or a combination of both? Loyalty's experiences with being bullied could have been a direct result of her negotiating a defense mechanism to protect her from the internalized racialized and gendered structure of high school.

In both Loyalty's situation and the brief conversation Cobbett (2013) had with the girls' schoolmate, why and how girls are bullied depends on various aspects and from the perspective of the people involved. As such, the effects of bullying can bleed over and influence different aspects of a girl's life. However, constant reminders from Loyalty's mother encouraged her to reconsider how she felt about herself and not to let others influence her self-esteem. This is what Loyalty needed, but other girls who are currently at where she once was, may need other forms of encouragement because of other powerful structures at play constantly reminding her that she is *not* beautiful such as the (lack of) representation of women her color represented in beauty advertisements and commercials. Nirvana says that it is her confidence in her dark complexion that makes younger girls look up to her and give them the confidence to also feel good in their own skin regardless of how dark their skin is. Being able to see girls in real life, who are not social media influencers, confident in their skin is an important representation for the girls. Some of the girls believe that there is a "whole light skin situation". In short, this situation is an equation: light skin+curly hair=beauty. Not only is beauty not limited to a certain skin color or hair type for the girls, it is not just about looks but how a girl carries herself and talks to people.

Some of the girls like applying and wearing makeup. They learn from either a family member who is a makeup artist (MUA) or from YouTubers. Some consider it to be fun and

makes them feel beautiful while others feel insecure when they wear makeup. The application of makeup does several things. Makeup, even if it is just lip gloss, which is popular among the girls, is important to the girls in looking presentable to others. Makeup can hide blemishes and scars, make you appear lighter, make various statements depending on the "look" and complete an outfit. Makeup for the girls can operate at different levels. Social media influencers do a great job of influencing their viewers to *slay to the gods*[21]. Makeup can be another way for the girls to feel like they are reaching another level of girlhood/womanhood, but it can also act as a way to negotiate beauty standards.

Zola shared her sentiment that

I just feel like all girls should have some type of makeup in their house.

Zola did not start wearing makeup until recently turning sixteen years old. She likes to do her makeup as a hobby and she wears it in the house, not outside. Because she has just recently started wearing makeup and she is still learning how to apply it and achieve different looks, she has negotiated that she will wear it in the house until it is deemed presentable enough to wear in public. For the girls, wearing makeup makes them feel beautiful and this standard of beauty is reinforced by influencers on social media and others they see *slaying*. However, deciding when and where to wear makeup is a negotiation that takes place for a few reasons.

It is common for makeup to be associated with girls and in describing her opinions on makeup, it became evident that Aimee actually likes wearing makeup when she wants to and her "personally not liking to wear makeup" really means that she does not like how people have treated her when she has worn makeup in the past.

Having make up is like a big stereotype when it comes to being a girl. I am trying to actually improve my skills but that doesn't explain why. Um, I'm actually trying to learn

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21. Slang for looking good, especially after applying makeup.

how to do like eyeshadow stuff. I know how to do eyebrows. I've kind of mastered it now it's time to move on. But I don't wear makeup because I love being able to touch my face without ya know worrying about my foundation. Now, wearing makeup is definitely not a bad thing. I'm not saying that "oh people who wear makeup that's-that's bad. I just personally don't like it and I feel a little bit insecure when I wear makeup because I feel like I am always being judged for being a girl. I feel like when people just- when-even though I feel insecure about wearing makeup the reason is because people tend to look down on like being too girly. That's what I've seen and that's what I've experienced just like "oh like, you're wearing makeup? Like, oh Jesus, like oh god, no you're too girly, ya know? And um, sometimes I would like to wear makeup and like I would actually want to make an effort where I know I'm going out and I want my pictures to look a little extra, ya know? So, I wear makeup.

Makeup is associated with femininity and for Aimee the negative connotations that come with being perceived as "girly," influences when, where and how she wears makeup. These kinds of negotiations are influenced by heteronormative ideas of gender performances in Sint Maarten society. In regard to feeling insecure when other people judge Aimee for wearing makeup, Evans-Winters (2005) acknowledges that "some researchers attribute Black girls' high self-esteem to a dual consciousness" (44). Their security of self and self- esteem is influenced by their interactions with different social communities that share some part of their identities, such as peers (Evans-Winters 2005). How girls are treated within peer group communities can affect how they express themselves through their appearance. This may account for the contradictions within Aimee's explanation of why she does not wear makeup, but she likes to wear makeup and one of the reasons that Zola only wears makeup in the house. Aimee's sentiments regarding makeup, wearing it and being judged by it may be shared by other girls in Sint Maarten. She started by saying she does not like makeup and does not wear it to saying that she does wear it and likes it. This kind of negotiation is one where she had to negotiate with her true feelings about wearing makeup and to decide if how other people felt about her wearing makeup was going to trump her own feelings. This thought process is one that may be more common amongst girls in Sint Maarten *and* less talked about.
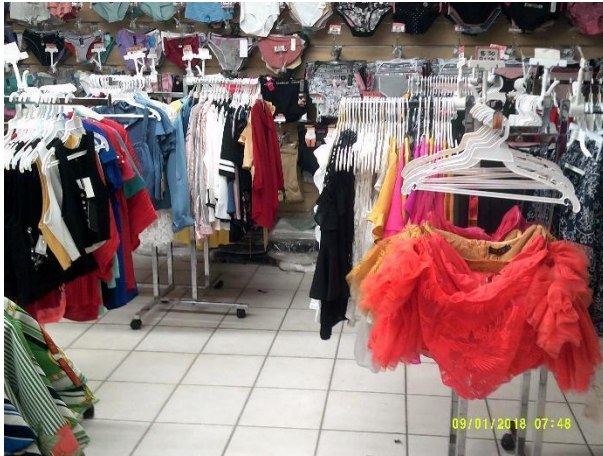
Dress

Figure 8: Loyalty's Photo of clothes in a clothing store.

Figure 9: Loyalty's photo of sneakers in a shoe store.

Similar to how girls wear their hair and makeup, how they decide to dress can represent their own personal style, confidence, self- expression and influence from their peers. When it comes to how they dress, some of the girls expressed that this aspect of their girlhood has brought some lived experiences that they would say is both one of the things they enjoy the least and the most about being a girl. The girls felt like they had more options with the different variety of clothes and shoes to choose from than boys. Statements can be made by what you wear, but navigating certain spaces calls for the girls to negotiate what they wear so they are not perceived negatively. How a girl dresses, or does not dress, may bring unwanted attention from men who feel like they are entitled to comment on their body. These encounters tend to be rude and disrespectful. The girls and how they dress are not the problem. Men and their inappropriate comments, gestures and gaze as well as the hyper-sexualization of young girls' bodies are the problem. (un)Fortunately, the girls are able to both negotiate and navigate this part of their girlhood in a way that although may be exasperating, it also allows them to resist beauty standards set by society (men) and express themselves the way they want to without apology whether it includes dressing *conservatively* (more clothes) or *provocatively* (more skin). The

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people who make up the Sint Maartener culture are the ones who create the social norms and decide what is conservative and what is provocative.

Girls tend to be treated differently by others depending on how they are dressed. Some people tend to hold the opinion that the less clothes you wear the less respect you deserve. What the girls wear or do not wear can lead to certain insults such as a slut, a whore or *easy*. Nirvana states that

> *Um, hmmm, anudda ting would be like how, um, depending on what all you show, people would look at you like a whore or whateva. That would be anudda ting too. Cuh, I feel like just because you show ya assets doesn't mean you're easy or ya know, stuff like dah.*

This perspective comes from both adults and peers, but mostly the latter. The more skin a girl shows, the more she is viewed as sexually active or *wanting* and/or *asking* for attention. Belly shirts, short shorts, short dresses, tight clothes and even clothes that are more conservative but accentuate curves are the kind of clothes that lead to judgment. There are different ways that the girls are judged. Adults will think that the girls should not be wearing clothes like that because it makes them look like a big woman or asking for attention. Felicia resists this heteronormative perspective in Sint Maarten society by wearing what she wants to wear and how she wants to wear it. She states:

> *Well, I mean I too said you could have like- you have them tight tight tight pants and they be like* [men/boys] *"Oooo, she got a phat ass!" It's like when I wearing my shorts, you betta don't holla at me.*

Black writer and essayist Kiini Salaam in her excerpt entitled "How Sexual Harassment Slaughtered, Then Saved Me" in *Colonize This!* states:

> Verbal assaults, invitations and compliments are opportunities for men [and boys] to demonstrate who is predator and who is prey. One catcall yanks a woman [or girl] out of the category of human being and places her firmly in the position of sexual object. (340)

Sint Maarten society assumes and accepts that girls should not dress in a particular way to refrain from catcalls rather than judging men for doing the catcalling, but Felicia refuses to negotiate what she will or will not wear because of others and instead she will negotiate what she will say to those who dare to comment on her appearance. On the other hand, same-sex peers judge other girls for a few reasons: they secretly like the way other girls dress and are jealous because they cannot dress like them, have adopted others' views on what a slut or whore looks like and jealousy from the attention other girls may get from boys. The issue with the male peers is that some boys think they have the right to comment on what a girl is wearing, and they may prefer to date "thick" girls. Generally, the girls agreed that compliments are nice and accepted, but when they cross the line of disrespect is when it becomes a problem. Simply walking on the road and being the target of catcalls and comments is annoying and the girls wish that they did not have to deal with that. Likewise, the jealousy among girls due to the way they dress, diminishes the idea of girls sticking together and supporting each other more.

Though the girls wear uniforms to school, the judgment still applies to how they wear their uniform, their hair and the kinds of shoes they wear. "Out on the road" and at school are places they must navigate and negotiate their final outfit when leaving the house on any given day. Cobbett (2013) recognized that because of the gender performances these serve as a "reminder that Caribbean girls are disadvantaged not only when they leave school, but within it" (264). My findings show slightly the opposite, that though they may be disadvantaged *in* school, they are just as disadvantaged *outside* of school. A girl will have to assess the situation, decide what is a*ppropriate* and then decide if she is going to wear what she wants to wear or *tone it down* because she does not want to be judged by other people. For example, Nirvana states that

both peers and adults judge the girls for how they dress. When she negotiates what she is going to wear she says that

> *It depends on the environment. It depends on where I goin' but majority of da time is the-yeh, I tink I not gone show as much skin because of how I would be looked at. Yeh.*

This kind of negotiation would include deciding to still dress in a cute outfit but one that shows less skin or wear an outfit that is still kind of cute but does not hug her curves or show as much or any cleavage in attempts to keep unwanted attention and potentially hands off of her body. This is trying to navigate a heteronormative and patriarchal space and having to be the person who does what she can to the best of her ability to prevent the actions of a man who may find himself attracted to her. There is an expectation that girls are supposed to wear dresses, heels, *cute* clothes and makeup; whereas, boys wear what they want to wear like sneakers and jeans. Girls are expected to *do* more when it comes to their appearance. The girls who participated in this project are aware of this and tend to resist the notions of what a girl is supposed to look like and how she is supposed to dress. If they happen to dress in the way that it expected, it is on their own accord.

Bullying

For the girls, school is a setting where they spend most of their time. When it comes to their education specifically, being supportive and smart are essential to their success. Experiences such as holding their girlfriends accountable to get good grades and make the honor roll each term was important to them. Kianna mentioned that each term her and her friends would make a goal to make honor roll for that term and if they did not make it that term then they would set the goal for the next term until they could celebrate the victory. This kind of support is imperative for Black girls who spend the majority of their childhood in a school system or learning environment where they struggle with acceptance and rejection from their

peers while learning and grappling with their own identity(ies). This support reminds them that they are not alone and that other girls are doing similar things. Unfortunately, this is also the same space where bullying takes place.

Physical appearance is very important for teenage girls. It is how they get to express themselves, flaunt their confidence and bond with their girlfriends by shopping, getting their nails done together and helping each other plan their outfits for certain occasions. High school marks the years of finding out who you are, finding your group of friends and navigating a space that judges who you are, what you wear and how you wear it as Cobbett (2013) has illustrated. Entering high school at twelve years old, Loyalty was negotiating appearance changes because

Ya know, it's high school. Everybody gone judge you and...yeh.

Loyalty says this as a fact that she had to simply accept. She is going to be judged by her peers and she cannot change that, but she negotiated that she could change her skin color. It is evident that high school years are when you figure out where and if you *fit in* with your peers. Cliques form and become rivals with each other. Bullying is a part of girlhood in which girls are either on the receiving end, giving end, or on the outside witnessing bullying happening to others. Cobbett (2013) concluded that the specific gender performances she observed from the girls included some form of bullying "whether it was sexual harassment, exclusion or ridicule" (264). Anna believes that one of the challenges that contributes to being bullied in Sint Maarten is the fact that other women and other girls think they look better than the next woman and girl due to their physical appearance.

> *Maybe her skin color, her hips, her boobs. *laughs* Yeh. The liiighter complexion. I think it's because well, I don't think that it's something that they implanted into their minds themselves, but what guys on the other hand have made them come to think of because well nowadays if you ask a guy if he would prefer a Black girl or a light skin girl he will go with the light skin one. So, yeh.*

The girls understand bullying as an issue that girls face in Sint Maarten. The girls define bullying as getting judged by your appearance and not for what is on the inside by your peers as well as sexual harassment from male peers. Getting *judged* can come in various forms like getting teased or picked on and making someone feel insecure about themselves. When faced with bullies at school, the girls who have experienced bullying have navigated this situation in similar ways. One way the girls deal with bullying is to ignore the bullies and eventually they stop because they fuel off of the energy that is given back to them. If the bullies know they have made you feel bad, then they feel like they have completed their mission. Another way to respond to bullies is to reciprocate the insults right back at them or to tell them that you already know what they are going to say.

> *When dey teasin' you, dey basically say the same ting ova and ova. So, it's like when dey cussin' you, you gotta be like "hol-up hol-up hol-up I know you gone tell me everyting already: I got Black skin, no-no butt, big breasts." Ya know, so it's like den dey don't have nuttin' to tell me, so.*

Loyalty has negotiated addressing the bullies and owning what they tell her. In this way, she shows the bullies that what they say no longer affects her. This kind of negotiation is one that appears to have the situation handled but may still affect her internally. Part of her reaction to the bullies is acting like she does not care, though this form of negotiation may in fact serve as justification for bullies to continue bullying her. For girls, this form of negotiation can act as a defense mechanism to preserve pride. I think that appearance has evolved as a priority for girls because they are in the presence of people who pay attention to what they wear and how they wear it. Surrounding themselves with friends with similarities helps to avoid the other critics.

Food

Figure 10: Aimee's photo eating Indian food with family and friends.   Figure 11: Loyalty's photo of jonny cake.

Like hair and appearance, food for the girls operates as a site for happiness, frustration

and memories. For example, Aimee said that

> *Some people may say that shoes are a girl's best friend, but food is a best friend for me,*
> *ya know. It's an essential. Food is the reason I am the size I am today- because of food*
> *right? It helps me gain weight and lose weight. I am overweight because I eat a lot*
> *smacks lips* and I'm OK with that *laughs*- I'm OK with food I mean. *Thinks out*
> *loud* Food overweight? Yeh. Yeh- I'm OK with that. And um, it took me a while to*
> *accept myself for my shape and size. My body is not considered to be average, attractive,*
> *and um, ya know, what the world finds to be attractive and I'm totally OK with that.*

Even in Aimee's response, she connected food back to her physical appearance. She realizes that

what *others* consider to be attractive may not be her body, and she has decided that she is fine

with that. Aimee's relationship to food is one that exemplifies how other girls in Sint Maarten

may feel about food in relation to their physical appearance because it affects to some extent the

proportions of their body thus effecting the kind of attention they may receive from men and

their peers.

Food offers them a kind of safety and comfort that may or may not require negotiation.

The girls enjoy eating food, but the safety comes from enjoying food with the people they love:

their friends and family. The girls come from different cultural backgrounds and certain foods

prepared by their mothers and grandmothers bring back nostalgic memories of their childhood.

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For example, Nirvana wanted to take photos of different foods that were essential to her growing up as a Black girl. She states that

> *So, I had a couple picchuhs of very popular fruit trees on the island. So, like kinep trees, soursop trees, mango trees. I felt like that represented um Black girlhood because majority of us grew up outside late aftanoon eatin' the fruits especially around summa time [Yes!] and I was like I should trow dem in like ya know just kinna have a like memorabilia.*

Nirvana had accidentally deleted all the photos she had taken pictures of so at the second interview, we had a conversation about the pictures she had taken. Towards the end, when she was remembering the last of the photos, she suddenly remembered:

> *Oh! I had, like, food. Like food- like rice and chicken, oxtail. Like the real like, ya know.* [I did in fact know. Those foods are staples for Black Caribbean girls!] *The growing up foods. Dat remind you dat you a Black girl. I had those.*

Some of the girls even considered eating as fun. When I asked the girls about the things they wish they had access to on the island, second to adventure parks were restaurants. These included very American cuisines like Golden Corral, Popeyes, IHOP, Applebee's, Starbucks, Chipotle and Texas Roadhouse. When they listed the restaurants, they would like to have on the island, they used the word *experience.* These are food places that they would like to experience. Some of the girls took photos of the drink they ordered from one of the places we did the interviews. Loyalty wanted to remember the place where this project started. Where she was able to freely talk about her experiences of being a Black girl.

> *And I took a picchuh of the [*name of place*] dis is the- dis is weh I get to express ME. About being Black, so. So, I took a picchuh of [*name of place*].*

Food operates as a memory marker. A particular smell or taste of food can take them back to a space and place in time where they experienced great emotion. In this instance, taking a picture of the place where this project took place serves as a memory for the girls. Similarly, Nirvana said that rice and chicken and oxtail were "growing up foods dat remind you dat you a

Black girl." This made me think of all the food mi mama y mi abuela would cook for me when I would visit them growing up. Even now when I go back home, the food makes me think about the times I would visit Sint Maarten and Santo Domingo. For the girls who were not born in Sint Maarten and where part of their girlhood experiences are located, they recalled certain kinds of food that were not available on the island but they make sure to eat when they go back and visit. This in a way is an act of *returning* to their girlhood both figuratively and literally.

Narrating, Navigating, and Negotiating Black Girlhood(s) in Sint Maarten

The interviews were semi-structured in nature with questions that were formulated to help answer the research question: How do Black girls in Sint Maarten narrate, navigate and negotiate their girlhood experiences? None of the girls had consciously thought about their girlhood in these specific terms. They had never heard of girlhood as a concept; however, they were able to answer the questions in a way that made it clear that they had to think about their lived experiences. This thesis project is the first to theorize Black girlhood as a space and place where girls narrate, navigate and negotiate their experiences.

Narrate

Narrating is more than giving a spoken account of something. Narration is usually associated with the telling of a story. Stories are not always told in the sequence in which it happened, but sometimes the audience has to piece together and interpret the story that is being told. When the girls shared their lived experiences with me, I put the collective story together. A narrative is a spoken or written account of connected events (Brand 2007). In this case, much of what the girls had to say are connected. Their lived experiences are connected by similarities, likes, dislikes, judgement, negotiations and navigations. Although the words the girls used were important, their voices, silences, facial expressions, hand movements, lip-smacking and

chupps[22], humor and seriousness spoke even if they did not. For example, smacking her lips (which sounded more of a popping sound) prefaced the majority of Kianna's responses. To a non-Black woman doing research *on* Black girls, this may have been interpreted as an "attitude" or disrespect instead of a way that she expresses herself and is a part of being a Black girl. Black girls can smack their lips to tell you many things such as they are frustrated, annoyed, excited or to answer "duh" to your question (Brown 2009).

The volume of their voices would go down to just above a whisper when they did not want to say it out loud and when they wanted to put emphasis on a particular thing that they said. For example, Khloe shared that she had to get rid of her female dog because the other two male dogs were trying to impregnate her. Instead of saying this outright, she attempted to make hand movements to indicate sexual activity and whispered

You know what I sayin'?

It took me a few seconds to understand what she was saying, but she got her point across. She resorted to hand gestures and whispering because she had perceived what she was trying to relay to me as something inappropriate, or at least too inappropriate to have on audio or in the camera's view. Knowing that they were being audio and video recorded made them conscious of what they were saying especially if it included profanity. Before answering one of the questions I asked, Felicia asked me if it was OK for her to curse, and when I gave her the OK, she did not hold back. For example, in giving a scenario about how girls are held to a higher standard than boys, Felicia stated that

> *Like when you're-like people that are like family wise they will expect more from a girl like "How you could do dis?" "Why would you do dis?" and like it be like wit boys too dey be like "Yeh, leave him deh on da block. He don't cyah." But fa*

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22. A sound effect/ expression that involves the mouth and lips commonly used and known in the Caribbean. Also referred to as a sucking of teeth.

girls it's "get yo ass up, you gotta go to school, you gotta do dis, you gotta do dat" like dah. It depends on the setting too.

Letting the girls know that they can use profanity allowed them to share experiences that they may not have otherwise shared. In this way, the girls are staying true to the accuracy of their experiences.

Their voices would also get louder when they were excited about what they were saying or to emphasize the seriousness of what they were saying. The silences between me asking a question and them answering it was telling that they were thinking about what I asked. For all the girls the concept of girlhood was new to them, and specifically for Khloe, she passed on a handful of questions and I believe this was due to not wanting to sit in awkward silence to think through the question. Her silence reiterated that she was thinking and decided that she was not going to answer the question because she could not think of an answer or simply did not want to and she exercised her right to make that decision.

Their facial expressions were reactions to what I had asked, and one particular facial expression was a head tilt and eyes widening to indicate "you know what I mean" without explicitly saying what it was. Some of the girls were funny from the start. They were really animated and made the interview fun. It felt like they wanted to be there. This could have also acted as a barrier to not show their nervousness. Some girls had a serious demeanor throughout the interviews, but as they answered different questions their demeanor would switch between serious and humor. I appreciated that none of the girls appeared to change how they spoke because they were worried I would not understand which is why I decided to represent their voices in the spelling of their quotes. During the interviews I had to negotiate with myself about how I was going to speak. My accent was slightly changed, but I would never sound like a local. I instead chose to not think about it and let the words flow the way they willed. How the girls

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narrated their answers had a lot to do with their own personalities, the questions I asked and their lived experiences. In echoing Cobbett's (2013) conclusion in her work on gender performances of girls in an Antiguan school, I too found that there were "clearly complex dynamics of power, resistance, freedom and pleasure" (264) in the girls' narratives. And for me, the multiple ways in which the girls negotiate these dynamics adds to the complexity of girlhood.

If future researchers truly care about what the girls have to say and give volume to their resonating voices, much attention should be paid to what the girls are saying as well as their affect as it sometimes speaks louder than their verbal response(s). This is part of the reason Ruth Nicole Brown created Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), to create and provide a space to celebrate Black girls and a place where Black girls can *be* and express themselves freely and unapologetically. Black girls are often dismissed for having "too much attitude" when sound effects, hand movements and other nonverbal language *is* a way of life and self-expression. These must be considered in all contexts of Black girls' lives.

Navigate

Navigating Black girlhood illustrates how the girls move through the different aspects of their social worlds. These can include both physical and intangible spaces such as school and conversations with their peers. Sometimes this means utilizing their toolkit to get them through safely via ignoring, laughing and engaging as different ways to navigate a space and/or place. This safety includes being unharmed physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. For example, a way to navigate school for Loyalty is to ignore the bullies or throw insults right back at them. It all depends on how she is feeling that day. In order to best navigate these spaces, the girls must make a decision on the best technique to utilize as one may work better than the other for any given situation. For example, when Nirvana stated that she has to decide (negotiate) what

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she is going to wear to an event or how she is going to dress for the day, it depends on the setting she is going into. She is negotiating what to wear in order to navigate the attention she may receive out on the road safely.

In order to fully understand the lived experiences of Black girls, we should pay attention to their social worlds and how they utilize their agency to get through spaces and places.

Negotiate

For the girls, negotiation can look very different. A negotiation is a strategy, a compromise and a decision to do or not do something in order to remain safe, feel good with the end result and/or fight against something they do not believe in. To negotiate means that the girls are utilizing their agency in the face and to face structures that might encourage Black girls to go a different way. For example, the adults in Khloe's life tell her

You are a [girl], so you have to sit dow- sit down properly.

I asked her what she thought the adults meant when they told her this and she said she did not know. I believe that she knew but did not have the words to fully make sense of it. She notices that adults do not tell boys to sit properly and

Dey legs does be open so.

while girls have to sit with their knees touching. In Kincaid's (1978) essay "Girl," she recalls all the advice that her mother gave her as a young girl. Among the do's and don'ts, "don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know" (Kincaid 1978). This heteronormative idea annoys Khloe and to fight against this, she sits how she pleases because it is comfortable for her. In a world that has so many *standards* for girls than boys, to assuage boys and men, the girls have already negotiated what this means for their future selves.

The girls do not like being told what to do in general, but specifically when it comes to gender roles. A pattern that arose in the answers to what they liked the least about being a girl was

You're a girl. You're supposed to do this, you supposed to do dah.

Being told how to act as a girl appears to be an important aspect of West Indian upbringing as I also recall the advice I have received from my own mother. For the girls to make sense of fighting against this, Brittany and Aimee stated specifically that we are entering the year 2020, not the 1950s or 1960s. If girls can wash the dishes *and* take the trash out, then *boys* can too. In other words, I do not think that this has to do with disliking being a girl but disliking the structure of gender roles in society. Those are practices of the past and clearly not a gender structure the girls want to ascribe to or are complacent with. Barriteau would be pleased with this. The girls understand that the gender binary associated with gender roles in the mid-twentieth century were more acceptable during that time, but those are not the times they (we) are currently living.

Narration, navigation and negotiation are all interconnected. One cannot happen without the other. How Black girls navigate influences their narratives and their negotiations. How they narrate influences their negotiations and navigations of spaces. How they negotiate can shape their narratives and experiences within spaces. This theorizing of Black girlhood(s) in Sint Maarten can and should be extended to the field of girlhood studies in general. For example, if narrate, navigate and negotiation were applied to Cobbett (2013) work with Caribbean girls and their gender performances the narration comes from the girls coming up with the names of the gender performances and the nonverbal cues given in the interview; the navigation is derived from the gender performances the girls utilize to deal with the attention received or not received

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from their peers; And the negotiation is how they subscribe to the types of performances. Another example of negotiation is that a girl who is considered to be a 'beauty' may dress or act in a particular way to continue to receive attention from boys, be it negative or positive attention.

The concepts of narrating, navigating and negotiating are not new to girls in general, but it now has a name. This theorizing of Black girlhood is necessary as much of what we have come to know and (fail to) understand about Black girls in the diaspora are "bits and pieces of fragmented knowledge" (Smith 1982, 261) from research that did not center the lives of the Black girls and did not acknowledge Black girls as knowledge producers. We have to pay attention to what girls are saying and how they say it, what they do not say, how they get through certain spaces and the decisions, compromises and actions they make and take in navigating those spaces. Narrating, navigating and negotiating work together in creating the lived experiences of Black girls that are central to their identity formation and how they understand themselves in a world that tells them they do not matter. In expanding Brown's (2009) definition of Black girlhood as "the representations, memories and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black and female" (x), I propose a new definition of Black girlhood: Black girlhood is defined as the influential years of a Black girl's childhood where she finds herself narrating, navigating and negotiating her lived experiences that help shape her identities and memories into womanhood/adulthood.

The Girls and I Look Forward by Looking Back

I asked the girls and myself the following question: If you could give any advice to your younger self what would it be? This is what we had to say.

Aimee: *Ohhh…Be yourself I mean I- I know that's basic as ever, but be yourself cuz no-no one*

can be a better version of you, ya know? You're the only competition. Your competing

*against yourself *says it firmly* not, ya know, anyone else. And don't try to do things to please other people. And remember that everything happens for a reason.*

Anna: *Um, you don't have to like- you don't have to follow the crowd and you don't have to like- you could have friends but you don't have to have dem like it's ok if you don't-if you're not following the crowd as I said and it's ok if you don't have girl friends around you who like you or whatever.*

Brittany: *That's a hard question…. I would just say "keep doin' me" because I'm turnin' out good so just keep doing what- what I was doing. Yeh.*

Felicia: *Listen, listen, listen. Listen, listen, listen. To ya parents. Listen to your inner self. Listen to your inner self a lot. And you don't gotta be like her. You don't gotta be like he, just be ya self. Yeh.*

Khloe: *To listen more to people options. I rarely does listen to people options. Like dey suggestions. What should I do and what I should do not.*

Kianna: *Be yourself don't leave no one influence you to do anything that you don't want to do and just be mindful of the tings you do and das it.*

Loyalty: *Don't cyah what anybody say. You know you. Do you. You don't have to bleach ya skin to be pretty. You can be Black to be pretty.*

Nirvana: **sighs* Whew. What advice would I give to my younga self...people opinions don't matta and you really livin' fa yaself and being popula ain't always a good ting. Cuz I regret dat now like everybody know who I am. I woulda ratha not now dat I get olda, People now figure out who I am- insteada I go out and "Hey (name), (name)". So, yeh, being popula isn't always a good ting. Dah was- dah-yeh would be the main one. I really used to be out dea and dat wasn't it. Dat wasn't it *chupps*.*

Ocqua: *You don't need to seek validation from others. It's okay to be in ya own lane. Listen to ya*

   daddy. He means well. Strive fa everything that you want because you will get it. Leave

   dem boys weh dey be.

Zola: *Um, probably that it's okay to be alone like you don't have to be with cliques or whateva*

   and I guess that's it.

[To Be Continued…]

Figure 12: Four-year-old Ocqua in Sint Maarten

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

1. How old are you?

2. What grade are you in?

3. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

    a. If so, how many brothers, how many sisters?

4. What would say is your race/color?

5. Were you born in Sint Maarten?

    a. If not, where were you born?

6. What part of the island do you live?

    a. Have you always lived in this part?

    b. If not, what other part(s) have you lived in?

7. Would you describe yourself as a girl?

    a. If not, what do you identify as?

8. Who are the individuals who you live with?

9. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about yourself?

10. What are 3 words you use to describe yourself?

    a. Why did you choose these three words?

11. How would your girlfriends describe you?

12. What do you like the most about being a girl?

    a. Why?

13. What do you like the least about being a girl?

    a. Why?

14. What is a typical day for you?

    a. Do you think that this is a typical day for other girls your age here?

        i. Why/ why not?

15. What do you like to do for fun?

    a. Are there things you would like to do that are not available on the island?

16. Who do you consider to be your role model(s)?

    a. Why?

17. This question is for those whose role models in the above question were male.* Are there any particular female role models that you look up to or that inspire you?

    a. Why this person?

18. This question is for those whose role models who are from a different place. Why are none of your role models from Sint Maarten?

    a. Is there anyone on the island who you think would be a good role model for girls your age?

19. Are there any younger girls who look up to you?

    a. In what ways do they look up to you?

    b. Why do you think they look up to you?

    c. Are any of these girls a part of your family?

20. Is there any advice that you have received from adults in your life that you have followed?

    a. What was the advice?

    b. Why did you decide to follow it?

21. Is there any advice that you have received from adults in your life that you have not

    followed?

       a.   What was the advice?

       b.   Why did you decide not to follow it?

22. What advice would you give to your younger self?

23. If you had to name any challenges about growing up as a Black girl in Sint Maarten, what

    would those challenges be?

24. Are there any things that you like about being a Black girl growing up in Sint Maarten?

       a.   If so, what are they?

25. What do you want to be when you grow up?

       a.   Why?

       b.   Who or what has influenced your decision?

26. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix B

Collage Prompt

Take pictures of people, places and things that represents to you what it means to be a Black girl. The girls will not be given any other parameters. They can take as many pictures as they would like to take. The girls will make the collage during the second interview and during this conversation they will tell me about each picture. The collage represents two ideas. The idea that the girls will be explaining things in the photos that may take away from themselves but at the same time this is fully about them. The things in the photos are representations of what it means to be a girl and the girls will explain the story or narrative behind the photo and how it relates to them. This is also the idea that the concept of girlhood is socially constructed, and the girls will be constructing a visual representation of girlhood by creating the collages.

Appendix C

BRANY SBER IRB

DATE: 07/08/2019
TO: David Brunsma, PhD
CC: Gerlyn Murrell, BA,
FROM: Raffaella Hart, MS, CIP, BRANY SBER IRB (IRB00010793)

SUBMISSION TYPE: SBER-Initial Review (Event ID# 155594)
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 19-020-568 / VT #19-372
STUDY TITLE: Escucha Nuestras Voces/Luister Naar Onze Stemmen: Afro-Caribbean Girlhood in the Dutch West Indies

IRB ACTION: **Approved - SBER**

APPROVAL DATE: 07/08/2019
EXPIRATION DATE: **Non-Expiring**
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Initial Review

Thank you for your submission for the above-referenced study.

1. **BRANY SBER IRB Determination**
   Your submission was **APPROVED** by the BRANY SBER IRB via expedited review under the following categories: 4., 6., and 7. This approval requires that all procedures and activities are performed in accordance with relevant state law.

2. **Submitted Documents**
   a. SBER Study Application xForm (signed 6/3/19)
   b. Protocol #19-372 (version updated 6/17/2019) (BRANY stamp dated 7/8/19)
   c. Parental Permission/Consent Form (Version A)
   d. Assent Form (Version A)
   e. Recruitment letter (BRANY stamp dated 7/8/19)
   f. Recruitment flyer 1 (BRANY stamp dated 7/8/19)
   g. Recruitment flyer 2 (BRANY stamp dated 7/8/19)
   h. Media release form (BRANY stamp dated 7/8/19)
   i. Interview questions (BRANY stamp dated 7/8/19)

   Modifications are in accord with those required by the IRB, and were incorporated as indicated in the enclosed redlined versions.

3. **Provisions of BRANY SBER IRB Approval**
   a. This study requires consent/permission/assent of subjects to be obtained. You must continue to monitor the subject's willingness to be in the study for the duration of the subject's participation. Only use the current IRB-approved and stamped forms in the consent process. Each subject must receive a copy of his/her signed

consent/permission/assent document. Consent forms signed by subjects in this study must be kept by the Principal Investigator for at least 3 years, or longer if required by your institution.

b. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. Any changes to the approved study must be reviewed and approved by the BRANY SBER IRB prior to implementation, except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the subject.

c. Unanticipated problems (including serious adverse events, if applicable) must be reported to BRANY SBER IRB within 5 days of discovery using Form IRB-4 (Reporting Form for Events that Require Prompt Reporting to the IRB).

d. Any complaints or issues of non-compliance must be immediately reported to BRANY SBER IRB.

4. <u>**Inclusion of Minors**</u>

Inclusion of minors in the study is acceptable in accordance with 45 CFR 46.404. Parental permission and minor assent is obtained in accordance with 45 CFR 46.408.

a. Assent must be sought, obtained, and documented from all minor subjects capable of giving it. Subjects ages 13-17 years should document assent by signing a separate assent form.

b. Permission must be sought, obtained, and documented from one parent or legal guardian.

5. <u>**Study Personnel**</u>

The following study personnel have been approved to participate in this research project.

a. David Brunsma, PhD

b. Gerlyn Murrell, BA

6. <u>**Non-Expiring IRB Approval Period**</u>:

This study was reviewed under the Revised Common Rule (2018 requirements) and therefore **does not require continuing review in accordance with 45 CFR 46.109(f)(1)(i).**

However, BRANY SBER IRB requires you "check in" at least annually to ensure your study status is up to date and in compliance. **Your Annual Report to BRANY IRB is due on 07/07/2020.** If your research is completed before then, you must submit a notification of study closure to BRANY SBER IRB (use the xForm called: SBER-Study Status Change (Closed/Enrollment Closed)).

If you have any questions or require any additional information, please call me at 516-470-6909 or send an email to me at rhart@brany.com. Thank you.

Appendix D

**Biomedical Research Alliance of New York IRB Submission for
Escucha Nuestras Voces/Luister Naar Onze Stemmen:
Afro-Caribbean Girlhood in the Dutch West Indies**

Gerlyn Murrell

Media Release form

I grant permission and unrestricted right to Gerlyn Murrell to reproduce audio, video and images taken of me, for public use including for the purpose of publication, promotion, illustration, advertising, or trade, in any manner or in any medium. I hereby release fro Gerlyn Murrell from all claims and liability relating to said audio or video images. I waive my right to any compensation. I acknowledge that I am under the age of 18 and my parent/guardian has also agreed to the above statements.

_____ Date_____
Subject signature

_____
Subject printed name

_____ Date_____
Parent/Guardian signature

_____
Parent/Guardian printed name

_____Date_____
Person obtaining release

Appendix E

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

BRANY
IRB APPROVED
07/08/2019

Title of research study: Escucha Nuestras Voces/Luister Naar Onze Stemmen (Listen to Our Voices): Afro-Caribbean Girlhood in the Dutch West Indies

IRB #: 19-372

Principal Investigator: Gerlyn Murrell 721-554-2099 or gmurrell@vt.edu

Key Information: The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether or not to be a part of this study. More detailed information is listed later on in this form. This research focuses on the life experiences of Afro-Caribbean girls growing up on the island of St. Maarten and how they understand girlhood. Girlhood is the word that is used to refer to the time in your life of being a girl. You have been asked to participate as a participant face-to-face because of your experience as an Afro-Caribbean girl growing up in St. Maarten. The study will require approximately 5 hours, including two visits for interviews, and one final event to create a collage and share experiences with other participants and family members. This research will be used for publication and to create a short video documentary on Afro-Caribbean girlhood. There will be a total of 20 participants between the ages of 13 and 17 involved in the study. Participants were recruited who live in St. Maarten. Please read the below carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate.

Detailed Information: The following is more detailed information about this study in addition to the information listed above.

Who can I talk to?

If you have any questions or requests for information relating to this research study or your participation in it, or if you want to voice a complaint or concern about this research, or if you have a study related injury, you may contact Gerlyn Murrell at 721-554-2099.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints regarding this research study, or you are unable to reach the research staff, you may contact a person independent of the research team at the Biomedical Research Alliance of New York Institutional Review Board at 516-318-6877. Questions, concerns or complaints about research can also be registered with the Biomedical Research Alliance of New York Institutional Review Board at www.branyirb.com/concerns-about-research.

How many people will be studied?

I plan to include about 20 girls in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

This research project, *Escucha Nuestras Voces/Luister Naar Onze Stemmen* (Listen to Our Voices)*: Afro-Caribbean Girlhood in the Dutch West Indies* is a research project conducted by Gerlyn Murrell about Afro-Caribbean girls ages 13-17 years old, and their experiences growing up as Black girls in St. Maarten. This research will involve a first interview using interview questions

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Protocol #19-372
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to guide the conversation. The first interview should last approximately 1– 1.5 hours in length. After the first interview is completed you will be given a digital camera to take photos of people/places/things that represent to you what it means to be a girl. The second interview will be scheduled at the end of the first interview. You will have 1 week to take the photos that you want to take. Once you feel that you have taken enough photos you are to choose up to 25 to be developed. The second interview will take place to discuss the pictures taken and will last approximately 1- 1.5 hours in length. You will be asked to choose 5 to 7 of the most important photos that you think represents what it means to be a girl to you to discuss in the second interview. The third part of this research will involve a celebration at the end with other girls who have participated in the study to create a collage of the pictures taken, up to 25 photos, and will last approximately 2 hours in length. Your family and friends will be able to attend the third part of the research process. You can share what you have done in this project with the people in attendance. As an interview participant, you will be able to keep the digital camera once you have participated in all three parts of the study. Interviews will be held at a place of your choosing and where you are comfortable in talking openly about this topic. These interviews will be audio recorded using a digital audio recording device. The interviews will be video recorded using a digital camera to include clips of the interviews in the final short video documentary. The final event celebration will be video recorded.

The direct benefits of this research to society are not known. The study allows the participants to learn more about the benefits and drawbacks of Afro-Caribbean girlhood in the Dutch West Indies as well as the opportunity to be involved in the creation of new knowledge and impact the development of resources tailored to Afro-Caribbean girls. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage participation.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject, such as the study is terminated, or it would not be in your best interest to continue.

If you decide to leave the research, contact the investigator so that the investigator can dispose of the data collected, if any.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? (Detailed Risks)

During this project you will be asked questions concerning your personal life. Some examples of these questions include questions about being a girl, any challenges you face, role models, and how you identify (race, gender, class)? If there are any questions you would rather not answer or do not feel comfortable answering, you can state so clearly, and I will move on to the next question. There is a risk that by being a part of this study you could experience psychological or emotional distress. If this should occur, you will be provided with a list of techniques and

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

resources to help you address any psychological or emotional distress and information about institutional resources that can assist you that are within close proximity.

By participating in this study, you may incur some costs. These costs would include travelling to the location that you choose to have the interview. Costs would include bus fare if you take the bus. You will not be reimbursed for travelling costs.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

I will make every effort to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information only to people who have a need to review this information. I cannot promise complete confidentiality. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board, Human Research Protection Program, and other authorized representatives of Virginia Tech.

This study is not meant to gather information about specific individuals. The information provided will be combined with that of other research participants to gather information. There is a risk that the final research paper and short video documentary for this project may include information that will make it possible for anyone who knows you to identify you based on details you provide and about your life. Your name will not be used in any part of the final paper or documentary. In agreeing to participate in this interview you are agreeing to accept possible identification as a risk. You will be given an opportunity to view the final research paper prior to publication and you can withhold your assent for some or all sections of the research paper which you believe might identify them. Your name and the names of other individual participants will not be used in the final research paper.

Only Gerlyn Murrell will have access to pre-publication information provided. All information provided during and upon completion of this project, will be kept in the strictest confidence and data will be kept on a password protected computer, not accessible from other computers, and kept in a locked office. The interviews will be kept private, recording devices locked away and every attempt made to transfer all recordings immediately after interviews to the password protected computer mentioned above. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

If identifiers are removed from your private information that is collected during this research, that information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without your additional informed consent.

The results of this research study may be presented in summary form at conferences, in presentations, reports to the sponsor, academic papers, and as part of a thesis/dissertation.

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study
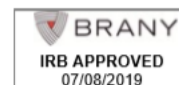
What else do I need to know?

This research is being funded by Gerlyn Murrell, Virginia Tech Department of Sociology, Dr. Kwame Harrison, and Virginia Tech Women's and Gender Studies program.

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study. If you participate in all three parts of the research study, you will be given the digital camera you used in the research study.

Signature Block For Participants Under 18 years old

Your signature documents your assent to take part in this research and agree to audio and video recording. I will provide you with a signed copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Signature of participant   Date

_____
Printed name of participant

_____   _____
Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

_____
Printed name of person obtaining consent

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Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

Title of research study: Escucha Nuestras Voces/Luister Naar Onze Stemmen (Listen to Our Voices): Afro-Caribbean Girlhood in the Dutch West Indies

IRB #: 19-372

Principal Investigator: Gerlyn Murrell 721-554-2099 or gmurrell@vt.edu

Key Information: The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether or not to be a part of this study. More detailed information is listed later on in this form. This research focuses on the life experiences of Afro-Caribbean girls growing up on the island of St. Maarten and how they understand girlhood. Girlhood is the word that is used to refer to the time in your life of being a girl. Your daughter was asked to participate as a participant face-to-face because of her experience as an Afro-Caribbean girl growing up in St. Maarten. The study will require approximately 5 hours, including two visits for interviews, and one final event to create a collage and share experiences with other participants and family members. This research will be used for publication and to create a short video documentary on Afro-Caribbean girlhood. There will be a total of 20 participants between the ages of 13 and 17 involved in the study. Participants will be recruited who live in St. Maarten. Please read the below carefully and ask any questions you may have before giving permission for your daughter to take part in the study.

Detailed Information: The following is more detailed information about this study in addition to the information listed above.

Who can I talk to?

If you have any questions or requests for information relating to this research study or your daughter's participation in it, or if you want to voice a complaint or concern about this research, or if your daughter has a study related injury, you may contact Gerlyn Murrell at 721-554-2099.

If you have any questions about your daughter's rights as a research participant or complaints regarding this research study, or you are unable to reach the research staff, you may contact a person independent of the research team at the Biomedical Research Alliance of New York Institutional Review Board at 516-318-6877. Questions, concerns or complaints about research can also be registered with the Biomedical Research Alliance of New York Institutional Review Board at www.branyirb.com/concerns-about-research.

How many people will be studied?

I plan to include about 20 girls in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, she can participate in this research?

This research project, *Escucha Nuestras Voces/Luister Naar Onze Stemmen* (Listen to Our Voices): *Afro-Caribbean Girlhood in the Dutch West Indies* is a research project conducted by Gerlyn Murrell about Afro-Caribbean girls ages 13-17 years old, and their experiences growing up

as Black girls in St. Maarten. This research will involve an interview using an interview guide and is anticipated to last approximately 1– 1.5 hours in length. This research will involve the interview participants to take pictures with a digital camera given to them to use of people/places/things that represent to them what it means to be a girl. A second interview will take place to discuss the pictures taken and will last approximately 1- 1.5 hours in length. This research will involve a celebration at the end with other girls who have participated in the study to create a collage of the pictures taken that will last approximately 2 hours in length. You daughter can invite family and friends to attend the third part of the research process. Interview participants will be able to keep the digital camera once they have participated in all three parts of the study. These interviews will be held at a place of the interview participant's choosing and where you as the parent are comfortable in your daughter talking openly about this topic. These interviews will be audio and video recorded using a digital audio recording device and a digital camera. The interviews will be video recorded to include clips of the interviews in the final short video documentary. The final event celebration will be video recorded.

The direct benefits of this research to society are not known. The study allows the participants to learn more about the benefits and drawbacks of Afro-Caribbean girlhood in the Dutch West Indies as well as the opportunity to be involved in the creation of new knowledge and impact the development of resources tailored to Afro-Caribbean girls. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage participation.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw your daughter from this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. She is also free to withdraw, for any reason, without penalty. She is free not to answer any questions that she chooses or respond to what is being asked of her without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject, such as the study is terminated, or it would not be in your daughter's best interest to continue.

If you decide to leave the research, contact the investigator so that the investigator can dispose of the data collected, if any.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? (Detailed Risks)

During these interviews, participants will be asked questions concerning their personal life. Some examples of these questions include questions about being a girl, any challenges they face, role models, and how they identify (race, gender, class)? If there are any questions the interview participant would rather not answer or does not feel comfortable answering, they can state so clearly, and I will move on to the next question. There is a risk that by being a part of this study the interview participants could experience psychological or emotional distress. If this should occur, participants will be provided with a list of techniques and resources to help them address this psychological or emotional distress and information about institutional resources that can assist them that are within close proximity.

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Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

By participating in this study, you may incur some costs. These costs would include travelling to the location of choice to have the interview. Costs would include bus fare if you take the bus. You will not be reimbursed for travelling costs.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

I will make every effort to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information only to people who have a need to review this information. I cannot promise complete confidentiality. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board, Human Research Protection Program, and other authorized representatives of Virginia Tech.

This study is not meant to gather information about specific individuals. The information provided will be combined with that of other research participants to gather information. There is a risk that the final research paper and short video documentary for this project may include information that will make it possible for anyone who knows the participant to be identified based on details they provide and about their life. In giving parental permission to allow your daughter to participate in this interview you are agreeing to accept possible identification as a risk. The participant will be given an opportunity to view the final research paper prior to publication and they can withhold their assent for some or all sections of the research paper which they believe might identify them. Your daughter's name and the names of other individual participants will not be used in the final research paper.

Only Gerlyn Murrell will have access to pre-publication information provided. All information provided during and upon completion of this project will be kept in the strictest confidence and data will be kept on a password protected computer, not accessible from other computers, and kept in a locked office. The interviews will be kept private, recording devices locked away and every attempt made to transfer all recordings immediately after interviews to the password protected computer mentioned above. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

If identifiers are removed from your private information that is collected during this research, that information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without your additional informed consent.

The results of this research study may be presented in summary form at conferences, in presentations, reports to the sponsor, academic papers, and as part of a thesis/dissertation.

What else do I need to know?

This research is being funded by Gerlyn Murrell, Virginia Tech Department of Sociology, Dr. Kwame Harrison, and Virginia Tech Women's and Gender Studies program.

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study. If you daughter participates in all three parts of the research study, she will be given the digital camera she used in the study.

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission for your daughter to take part in this research and agree to audio and video recording. I will provide you with a signed copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Signature of parent/guardian   Date

_____
Printed name of parent/guardian

_____   _____
Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

_____
Printed name of person obtaining consent

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Appendix G