The Sexual Agency of Adolescent Girls: A Case Study of Trinidad & Tobago

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes, expectations, and evolution of early experiences of Trinidadian adolescent girls as they navigate physical and emotional intimacy, their capacity to conceptualize and/or enact sexual desire to develop their own sense of agency. Using Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) as a case study, it examines whether attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors pertaining to sexual agency are influenced by socioeconomic factors or key life events, adverse experiences, and the influences of family, community, and broader societal structures. Emerging scholarship on sexuality in the Caribbean explores how women navigate sexual relationships and exercise their agency within the social and economic contexts of the Caribbean. The lived experiences of Caribbean people, particularly women and girls, are important, worthy of exploration, and necessitate permanent documentation. An examination of Caribbean society – a confluence of diverse and complex natural and social environments will enrich scholarship on the worlds shaped by people in this region, particularly by youth who will form the society of the future. Using transnational, Caribbean, and Black feminist frameworks, this study seeks to understand sexual awareness, desire, actions, and motivations in their early stages by conducting interviews with a diverse sample of adolescent girls in T&T.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes, expectations, and evolution of early experiences of Trinidadian adolescent girls as they navigate physical and emotional intimacy, their capacity to conceptualize and/or enact sexual desire to develop their own sense of agency. Using Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) as a case study, it examines the factors that influence adolescent girls' behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, about sexual, and how their behaviors demonstrate their agency and independence of thought. Emerging scholarship on sexuality in the Caribbean explores how women navigate sexual relationships and exercise their agency within the social and economic contexts of the Caribbean. The lived experiences of Caribbean people, particularly women and girls, are important, worthy of exploration, and necessitate permanent documentation. An examination of Caribbean society – a confluence of diverse and complex natural and social environments will enrich scholarship on the worlds shaped by people in this region, particularly by youth who will form the society of the future. This study seeks to understand sexual awareness, desire, actions, and motivations in their early stages by conducting interviews with a diverse sample of adolescent girls in T&T.

Dedication

To Jean Foncette, my great-aunt and the memory of my grandmother, Yvonne Robertson, two amazing women who, even when they have not understood me, have always believed in me and loved me.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all the adolescent girls and young women in Trinidad and Tobago that I worked both as a therapist and in community projects between 2013 and 2019. I learned so much from you, which made me a better therapist and ultimately a better scholar. Your ideas and insistence on agency and declaring your own desires was the spark that generated this scholarship and for that I am truly grateful.

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Chapter I

Introduction

"As women we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge…. The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation." (Lorde, 1978/1984, 53-54)

Feminist author, poet and activist, Audre Lorde connects the power of the erotic to the creative, political and social agency that women have if they can connect with this source of power. In this powerful essay she emphasizes the promise and fulfillment women can actualize if they tap into this source of power and cautions against the perils of not doing so. Therefore, to ignore the erotic is to render a complex, essential facet of our existence silent. This silence produces not only gaps in the archive, but also articulates the relationship between Black women and power (Hartman, 2008; Morgan, 2022). By archive I mean the historical accounts of Black women's and girls' lives in the Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and wherever Black women's ancestors were enslaved and considered as property. Silences are a testament to the many ways that women's narratives are not evidenced in research literature, one of the reasons we engage with gender as an analytical tool. Silence or erasure of the minoritized subject thus enacts a form of violence, immuring Black women' and girls' accounts to erasure and dismissal in the historical and contemporary imagination. Considering the diverse ways that women, girls, people from the global south are rendered secondary, subjugated or absent, the archival silence necessitates some type of resistance. Although not immediately evident, the need to resist the silence and be a collaborator and co-conspirator in resisting epistemic silencing was what inspired this research. Encountering women and girls who were silent or unnoticed made it is

important to conduct research on the sexual agency of adolescent girls in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T).

Problem Statement

The notion of adolescent and young adult female sexuality and desire is taboo. Rhetoric in popular and private discourse seems to treat female pleasure and sexual agency as ideas to be suppressed, treated with horror or contempt at worst, or dismissal and paternalism at best. Adolescent decisions about sex and the behaviors in which they engage around sex have important implications for their overall health and well-being. Sexuality connects personal agency to one's relationship with power and the deepest guide to our creative and political energies (Lorde, 1984). To ignore the notion of sexuality, particularly in young women and girls thus imposes silence and erasure on important aspects of their lives. The suppression of young women's and girls' sexuality thus becomes another form of sexist oppression (hooks, 1984).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes, expectations and evolution of early experiences of adolescent girls as they navigate desire and physical intimacy, and to understand the cultural, socioeconomic and structural factors that influence sexual agency. Scholars of adolescent sexuality argue that discourse on desire has been largely missing from discussion about adolescent sex (Fine, 1988) and critique the pathologizing of discourse (Kempadoo, 2009). Mindful of these criticisms this dissertation provides an alternative perspective to the problematization of young female sexuality, highlighting the intentional and thoughtful ways adolescent girls think about and act on their own sexual desires outside the context of what is being done to them, or decided for them. In popular culture ideas about sexualized young Black women are often reactive to provocative scenes in media, institutional concern for propriety and respectability (Edmonson, 2003) or a hyper focus on behavior that is

considered outside the margins of acceptability or order. In scholarly literature – medical and social sciences – it is easier to find discourse on female sexuality that is characterized by the disease model (Kempadoo, 2009), or addresses social concerns (Fine, 1988; McClellan and Fine, 2006), such as the risks of teenage pregnancy, or promiscuity. Adolescent sexual behavior has been explored in connection to delinquency and risk (Simon and Gagnon, 1986; Smith, Levy and Chamberlain, 2006); gendered and sociocultural patterns and scripts (Matick-Tyndale et al, 2005); sexual and reproductive needs (Esan and Bayajidda, 2021) and in a variety of medical contexts (Pfeffer, Ellsworth, Gold, 2017). Nevertheless, the notion of reasoned, agentic behavior in adolescent and young adult female sexuality and desire is taboo. Rhetoric in popular and private discourse seems to treat female pleasure and sexual agency as ideas to be suppressed, treated with horror or contempt at worst, or dismissal and paternalism at best. Adolescent decisions about sex and the behaviors in which they engage around sex have important implications for their overall health and well-being, hold a mirror up to society, and trouble traditional, colonial ideas about young women and girls and sex. Moreover, they may evidence one of the ways adolescent girls in T&T actualize agency by subverting gender (and age) relations that are typically at play in how the state engages with girls (Haynes, 2017).

It is this troubling that sparked my curiosity about adolescent girls and young women's sexual agency. As a former psychotherapist I worked with adolescents. Too often I observed a chasm between where adolescent girls saw themselves and where adults believed them to be in terms of sexual interest, desire, and engagement. Typically, parents of adolescent girls aligned any misbehavior with promiscuity, refused to consider their teenagers' feelings of attraction; or from the perspectives of teens, they engaged in hyperbole and conflated attraction or conflict with parents with promiscuity. The misalignment bothered me as a therapist, but also intrigued

me. I thought about my experiences as a teenager, getting into trouble for even appearing to be too friendly to any boy. I wasn't a particularly adventurous teenager, I preferred to play it safe. My engagement with desire was typically more romantic, or emotional than sexual. By age fifteen, I like many of the girls in this study, knew peers who were sexually active, but I did not believe I was ready for that, and I believed other teens should not have been either. But I was an opinionated adolescent and I liked to argue the merits of a greater cause than my own in the hopes it would advance my lesser goals like open access to talking to boys. I welcomed the freedom of adulthood, but I sought to do more than that – to push the boundaries of what "respectable" adults believed was appropriate and to open-mindedly consider the possibilities of a profound connection to sexual agency and desire. This study, therefore, is a means to understand the phenomenon of sexual agency, tapping into erotic desire that targets the silences around adolescent girls and sex.

Black and Caribbean feminist scholarship along with historical analysis of the conditions for women in the Caribbean (Reddock, 1985; Spillers, 1987; Turner, 2017) describe how Black women's sexuality has been theorized in the past with consideration only for the maintenance of oppressive, patriarchal institutions - the institutions that maintained slavery, and done in a way that was degrading and inhumane. So much about Black women's sexuality has been characterized by tropes and stereotypes, embedded in chattel slavery and the continuity of plantations (Turner 2017; Spillers 1987). What has resulted is a culture of secrecy and propriety, tied to social progress, to control the life of women (Hammond 2004; Edmonson 2003; Hine Clarke 1989). Sexual relations are influenced by regional and international relations of power, gender, class, nationality and ethnicity. Relations of power matter in how sex is understood and interpreted in various contexts in society. Scholars such as Kamala Kempadoo (2009) have

explored how colonialism, North American imperialism, and global relations of power have contributed to the fetishization of the exotic, creating ideas about Caribbean women's sexuality that are influenced by these structures.

The failure to talk about sex has historical roots in patriarchal societal attitudes and beliefs about the roles of women and girls, particularly regarding sex. In part the result has been that young women and girls often experience a strong pressure to feign disinterest in sex, to present themselves as chaste, and to equate morality and self-worth with passivity and a lack of sexual agency. Although adolescence is a period in which curiosity about and initiation of sexual relationships begins to emerge (Susman and Rogol, 2004), messaging in public discourse, by caregivers, and peers discount sexual agency when contextualizing the behavior of adolescent girls and young adult women. This presents a problem of disconnect – a minimization of the lived experiences of young women and girls, an erasure of an important facet of their identities with broader implications for their health and well-being. Failure to understand young female sexual agency affects the ability of caregivers, scholars and practitioners to support and educate girls and young women. From a public policy perspective, ignorance about young women's and adolescent girls' sexuality impacts their well-being in tangible ways by limiting caregivers, educators, and health care providers from providing meaningful educational and reproductive health services. I would also argue that a misunderstanding or mischaracterization of young women and girls' ideas and experiences about sex presents a flawed, incomplete understanding of socio-cultural interactions and conditions in society.

Background and Reflexivity

I first conceived this research question in my work as a psychotherapist with adolescent girls, and young adults in Trinidad. Sex and sexuality enter the therapy space in many ways.

Often parents of adolescent girls (seldom boys) identify sexual acting out as a priority behavioral problem. Whether their concerns are based on concrete evidence, or merely perception and fear, is disputable. As a psychotherapist I tried to create a space where clients, engaged in the very vulnerable action of therapy, could experience agency, where they could feel empowered to express their needs and goals, and to be fully aware of being treated with dignity and respect while being vulnerable. Creating a safe and empowering therapeutic environment is even more important when clients are adolescents because they are typically embracing burgeoning identities of empowerment in the absence of real societal power, other than body autonomy. Fostering an atmosphere of co-created space allows adolescent clients and young women who may lack the confidence, to speak about sex or sexuality if they desire. In the role of therapist my main priorities were that they were safe, and that their therapeutic needs were met to ensure their well-being. My role for minors was also to be a conduit, to bridge the gap between them and their parents, to enable them to communicate, to validate the developmentally appropriate needs of adolescents as sexual beings as part of their whole identities.

For young women fostering dialogue about something as personal as sex allows them an opportunity to connect what they feel and understand about themselves with their relationships with partners, and what they have learned about relationships in their families of origin. The more I grappled with this idea in therapeutic practice the more I began to appreciate the extent to which the problem of ignoring sexual agency extends broadly into the larger society. Moreover, there were too many similarities among parents' concerns and beliefs about girls and sex for it to simply be a matter of individual differences. Too often public and professional discourse on sex is devoid of clear, healthy affirming language and attitudes. The way sexuality is approached in schools, teachers' expectations of adolescent girls' behavior (Fine and McClellan, 2006), and the

way medical practitioners talk, or rather avoid discussions with patients of any age about sex, sexuality and sexual health (Rabathaly and Chattu, 2019) evidences a general discomfort or avoidance of discourse on sex. A nuanced exploration of the sexual agency of young women and girls contributes valuable knowledge about adolescent and young adult development, particularly the lives of young women and girls in T&T. Open discussion and deeper understanding of adolescent girls' sexual agency is an important part of validating and asserting the rights of all young women and girls, particularly those who are more vulnerable, to have greater liberty and freedom from their own internalized patriarchy and from oppressive patriarchal mindsets so endemic in society. Moreover, it presents an opportunity to document the lived experiences of a segment of society that is marginalized by gender and age.

Contributions

This project contributes to normalizing discourse on sex and sexuality as a part of the life course, particularly for adolescent girls. Broadly, it is one small, but significant step to dismantling patriarchal inequality that liberates women, particularly women of marginalized identities, from having to hide or ignore an essential aspect of their being. More specifically, open dialogue about girls and young women's sexuality has implications for improvements in the way clinicians practice psychotherapy and medicine, for approaches to education, security and policy and laws that govern our daily lives. Social science research in T&T about adolescent female sexuality, like public discourse, is often framed in metaphors and imagery of victimization, pathology and danger. It evinces an over-reliance on abstinence plus (Abstinence, Be Faithful, Wear a Condom - ABC) sexual health initiatives (Carr and Packham, 2011) in the Caribbean, which focus on HIV and teenage pregnancy prevention (Kempadoo, 2009; Carr & Packham, 2017). Moreover, research that typically addresses youth health behaviors and

development have been overlooked, and when given attention tend to use risk frameworks, looking at violence, substance abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases (Blum et al, 2003). This approach is not unique to the Caribbean. Public health and education initiatives and US society at large tend to authoritatively suppress female desire, through omission and erasure, and to promote narratives of victimization and "explicit privileging of married heterosexuality" (Fine 1988; Fine and McClelland, 2006). To that end this study seeks to broaden understanding of female adolescent sexual desire by conducting interviews with a diverse sample of girls and young women. Using Trinidad and Tobago as a case study I seek to understand the sexual experiences and desires of young women and girls who navigate the unique historical and socio-cultural factors of the nation. The objective of this study is to understand how participants' socioeconomic circumstances, environmental and social experiences influence their attitudes, beliefs and experiences about sex and sexuality.

Methodology

This study is based on the application of feminist approaches to qualitative research. It presumes a collaborative process of knowledge creation with reflexive approach to understanding power and positionality differentials between the researcher and the participants. It is predicated upon an understanding that although Caribbean adolescent girls' opinions and discourse may be under-represented in historical and contemporary archives about their lives, they are experts on their lived experiences and their articulations about the social world present a contribution to knowledge. Thus, the semi-structured interviews conducted in this project move scholarship beyond the academic inquiry as a means of integrating adolescent girls' ideas in empirical knowledge creation. In my project I decenter the customary authorities in society to amplify young voices, and youth's meaning making of the adult world. Through use of an

intersectional analytical framework, I provide some interpretations of girls' meaning making. I utilize thematic analysis to examine the meanings that adolescent girls in T&T attach to their behavior and thoughts about sexual attraction and agency. Additionally, the qualitative methodology and thematic analysis allows participants to frame the significant elements of their lives and their narratives about sexual attraction and agency, to have more control over how their ideas are articulated in empirical research.

Theoretical Approach

This study uses sociological and feminist approaches to understand the social world of adolescent girls in Trinidad. It situates their experiences and understanding of sexuality, their agentic behaviors around sex and intimate relationships of a sexual nature in the historical and contemporary events in T&T and the Caribbean region at large. It presumes that adolescent girls, informed by their socio-cultural environment, can identify with a sexual self and engage in agentic behavior, and that the most, part adolescents are aware of and experience an age-appropriate sexual self. Differences may vary on a spectrum and sexuality develops gradually over time, from innocent, non-sexual childhood crushes, to more informed crushes and flirtations, they understand at different levels relationships between their parents and their peers, they develop attractions in the same way that their physical bodies and minds develop. Their experiences do not occur in a vacuum, and are influenced by the historical, political, economic and social contexts that shape the society in which they live.

Mapping the impacts of colonialism, plantation slavery, the post emancipation era, and contemporary political, social and economic forces in T&T I aim to understand how adolescent girls' attitudes and beliefs about sex; how they make meaning of private and public rhetoric, policy, education and media about sex. Utilizing Black, Caribbean and transnational frameworks

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I provide consider the broader implications of adolescent girls' agentic behavior, their attitudes and beliefs about sex.

Research Objectives

In this study I investigate how adolescent girls identify and articulate their sexuality; how that knowledge is shaped by culture and society at large; and how do they negotiate, as agentic beings who have limited power or control over their lives. How do their negotiations impact the development of their sexual agency? When we consider Black women's and girls' sexuality globally, we have to consider how a system of enslavement for capitalist profit has distorted and co-opted rhetoric and understandings of Black women's sexuality, agency, desire. This epitomizes the problem that is at the genesis of my dissertation research, which is to understand how adolescent girls see and think about themselves as it pertains to their sexuality.

Empirical Approach

The empirical evidence in this dissertation was gathered through twenty-five semi-structured audio interviews with adolescent girls ages 12 to 17 of diverse social classes living in a Trinidad. It uses a qualitative case study method and presupposes those adolescent girls can articulate their unique perspectives on the topic. I used purposive sampling to recruit participants drawing on my personal and professional networks in T&T. The island is a diverse, digitally connected, high income country in the English-speaking Caribbean. T&T's main revenue is derived from the petrochemical industry; however, as discussed in greater detail in the methodology section, that industry employs only 5% of the population. The sample reflects diversity in social class, geographic location, social location, and religious background, though it does not reflect the level of ethnic diversity evidenced in T&T. Because of its shared history of colonialism and plantation slavery, with other English-speaking Caribbean countries, it's

proximity and economic and political cooperation with other countries in the Caribbean

Community (CARICOM) I believe that T&T serves as an adequate setting to begin this study.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from these semi-structured interviews were coded using an inductive

and deductive approach and then line by line coded to analyze the main themes. The semi-

structured interviews allow me to understand adolescent girls' subjectivities and gain in-depth

accounts of their lives. Although the interview questions were used to guide our conversations, I

allowed girls to guide the direction of the conversation the order and emphasis was directed by

participants saw as most important or what they chose to share. An in-depth explanation of the

data analysis process is explained in Chapter 4.

Discourse Analysis

I explore discourse analysis from a Black and Caribbean feminist orientation, using the

case study and an intra-categorical approach to analyze the experiences and perspectives of

adolescent girls in T&T. Caribbean gender scholar, Tonya Haynes (2017) reminds us that

"Caribbean feminisms are heterogeneous… they emerge from multiple disciplines and locations,

prioritize a variety of issues and strategies and draw from diverse epistemological, philosophical

and activist groundings." (27). T&T epitomizes this heterogeneity in its racial or ethnic

composition and the social locations contingent on race, class, wealth and geographic location.

Feminists have been very aware of the limitations of gender as an analytical tool (McCall, 2005)

and as such have benefitted from groundbreaking work on intersectionality (Beale, 1969;

Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, and Bilge 2006).

The case study method helps to identify new or invisible groups that exist at the

intersection of multiple categories (McCall, 2005), in this case gender, age, social class, even

national or regional location, and to provide an intensive study. Thus, the narratives or cases of people in the group are a cohort or time-bound and illustrate novel ways of understanding their complex social location and perspectives, and "the partial crystallization of social relations in the identities of particular social groups." (McCall, 2005, 1781). In my study the structured interview is the method I use to capture participants' unique experiences and perspectives. The traditional categories of Caribbean people, Caribbean women and girls foreground analysis and understanding of this understudied group but I am interested in the diversity of experiences within this group at this particular location.

Organization of the Dissertation

To actualize this investigation, I consider the how adolescent girls in T&T articulate and understand sexuality and act in agentic ways. I am privileging realities and concerns unique to the Caribbean, the historical, political and economic considerations; and the impact of hierarchies of race, class and gender inequality to examine sexuality and desire from the perspectives of adolescent girls in T&T. To that end I have conducted a qualitative study of interviews with girls in Trinidad. This dissertation is divided into five sections, which I shall describe here. The first section is the introduction where I discuss the research problem, the aims of this study, and the gaps it hopes to fill. In next section I review the literature. It is impossible to study the Caribbean without an examination of the historical, economic and social antecedents that have created the contemporary space. To that end I discuss colonialism and neocolonialism and its impact on Caribbean society; the impacts of the plantation system on the lives of women in the English-speaking Caribbean; how Caribbean people enacted agency; the political economy of gender in the Caribbean; and race and class hierarchies and gender inequality to provide context. I found it necessary to illustrate how culture and works of art present a form of passive

learning for adolescent girls in T&T. I also discuss artifacts of culture that describe the framings of young women's sexuality, the insistence on decency and respectability and messaging about how women and girls are valued in T&T society.

In the second chapter I discuss the theoretical orientations and frameworks that define this study. Black, Caribbean, decolonial and transnational feminist theorizing frames this study. The location and historical lineages of colonization and plantation slavery link the experiences of Black women in North America to women in the Caribbean. This is important because it allows analysis of how racial and gendered violence were inhered to plantation slavery in the Americas and demonstrates the relevancy for Black women and women of color in a transnational, contemporary space. I discuss extant literature on sexuality of Black women and girls in the Caribbean and possible gaps. I explain how I utilize transnational feminisms to contextualize my position as a bi-cultural researcher and Black woman in the United States and from the Caribbean.

In Chapter 3 I review my methodological approaches, survey Caribbean and Black feminist scholarship on research methodology, discuss my participants, the site of investigation, how I negotiated access, recruited and conducted interviews. I also explain the analytical approaches I took and the scholarship that informed these approaches. In Chapter 5 I discuss the analysis of themes coupled with narratives from participants that I use to demonstrate the themes. Finally, I conclude my study by discussing limitations and future directions in Chapter 6.

Chapter II

A Review of the Literature

Colonialism and Neocolonialism's Impact on Caribbean Society

One cannot understand Caribbean society without contextualizing the impact of colonialism and imperialism on values, structure and standards that shape contemporary life. Although colonialism and imperialism are widespread in the history of Latin America and the Caribbean, I shall focus on the shared histories of the anglophone or English-speaking Caribbean, with specific attention to T&T, and the impacts of colonialism, particularly culminating in British colonialism, which had the most lasting and profound impact on the nation. Successive European rulers commandeered the islands of the Caribbean, traded them amongst themselves, enslaved and transported people to the Caribbean to advance the goals of the European empire. The Spanish brought the first enslaved Africans to Trinidad. During the 18th century in the last era of Spanish rule, through a Cedula of population the Spanish government invited hundreds of planter-enslavers, and free men of color from the islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia and Dominica in an effort to further populate the island. They incentivized them with land, adding half an acre for each enslaved African they brought (Moodie-Kublalsingh, 2013). By 1797 the territory was governed by the Spanish, heavily populated by French settler colonialists and Africans who spoke a mixture of French creole, termed patois in Trinidad, and some native West African languages, changed hands again to British rule, which would last until its independence in 1962. In an English-speaking, post-colonial nation such as Trinidad & Tobago, the constitution, language, health and education sectors were, and remain based on the frameworks of British law, values and practices that have long lasting effects on daily life.

Impacts on the Lives of Women in the Anglophone Caribbean

The control and treatment of the marginalized and oppressed ancestors of today's inhabitants, and colonial policies and laws that shaped the region are intricately tied to modern Caribbean society. Caribbean feminist scholar, Rhoda Reddock (1988), contends that the plantation system: forceful importation of diverse groups, and bonded labor were defining characteristics of Caribbean society. The day-to-day existence, reproduction, well-being, life and death of the enslaved and indentured depended on the will of the enslaver class. Enslaved women were not beneficiaries of European domestic proclivities. In Reddock's examination of the conditions for women in slavery she writes, "Among slaves the housewife did not exist." Enslaved girls worked the fields or were put to work in domestic service from as young as age four. By the latter half of the nineteenth century young women from age 19 formed the majority of field labor, were expected to work as hard – even working to term during pregnancy – punished as severely as enslaved men, and suffered all the indecencies of laboring as an enslaved woman (Reddock, 1985; Turner, 2017). Under these harsh conditions it was only through extreme determination the enslaved and later freed Africans and indentured laborers could manifest their personal will.

Jamaican historian, Sasha Turner (2017), argues that British abolitionists used women's reproductive potential to justify a continuation of colonial rule. Controlling women's bodies through enslavement was a means to legitimize plantation society. Abolitionists used enslaved African women's bodies and the notion of sexual modesty strategically to argue against the horrors of the slave trade, painting a picture of the horrors of slavery through the opportunistic defense of tortured and assaulted enslaved women. These same abolitionists would then strategically invoke African women's bodies to justify continued enslavement on islands in the

Caribbean controlled by the British government, arguing that offspring of enslaved women would fill a labor void created by abolition of the slave trade (Turner 2017). Starting with the Virginia colony, all the British royal colonies in the Caribbean adopted the legal doctrine of partus sequitur ventrem - the child follows the condition of the mother - ensuring that enslaved women's reproductive lives would be implicated in the intergenerational perpetuation of bondage (Reddock, 1985; Morgan, 2018). Considering these oppressive conditions, women's autonomy around sex and sexuality existed in very limited parameters in a system of chattel slavery.

American literary critic, Hortense Spillers conceptualizes the dilemma of enslaved women in her analysis of American slavery thusly: "sexuality" as a term of implied relationship and desire, is dubiously appropriate, manageable, or accurate to any of the familial arrangements under a system of enslavement, from the master's family to the captive enclave. Under these arrangements, the customary lexis of sexuality, including "reproduction", "motherhood," "pleasure", and "desire" are thrown into unrelieved crisis (1987, 76)." When all aspects of life were controlled, bodies considered property and a means of maximizing production, even relations between/among the enslaved occurred within the confined parameters of their enslavement. The cruelty of slavery impacted the labor of women on plantations. Relationships within the confines of the nuclear family, or even the agency to choose and maintain a sexual partner was not the privilege of the enslaved woman. Women faced the risk of being raped by slave masters, were subjected to their families being torn apart – an enslaved spouse, or offspring, could be sold without so much as a warning, at the whim of the slave master (Reddock, 1985; Spillers, 1987; Turner, 2017).

In the post emancipation period, the British sought to perpetuate free labor not by improving the efficiency of sugar production, but by imposing an apprenticeship period, outlawing land ownership by emancipated Africans, limiting their opportunities to forage or grow their own crops, introducing vagrancy laws, in some cases imposing fines on parents for children not working (Williams, 1970). Ultimately, they filled the labor void by replacing African workers on the plantations with Indians as well as Chinese, Madeiran, Irish, European and even Japanese indentured laborers. However, the largest and most sustained influx of indentured workers came from India. Reddock (1985) writes those two thirds of Indian women came unaccompanied and were widows or widowed child brides. Indian women used the opportunity of migration to dismiss patriarchal values of their homeland. They eschewed the traditional role of housewives, the custom of seclusion of higher caste women, and the concept of being subordinate in traditional arranged Indian marriages and embraced a new type of freedom in colonial Trinidad, albeit limited by their being members of the laborer class. It would take Indian men, aided by the Presbyterian church, to petition the colonial government for control of women's newfound freedoms to ultimately force Indian women into more confining, patriarchal relationships (Momsen, 2002; Mohammed, 2002). Ultimately, despite the equal physical demands on women laboring in colonial society, Eurocentric patriarchal ideology was imposed where it suited the slaver/planter class through the assignment of what was considered lower skilled work during slavery, given lower status, and lower-paid field work during indentureship, reproductive labor and care work, and restriction of relational autonomy.

Historians and gender experts alike have documented numerous ways in which people resisted slavery, among them not only were rebellion but also in more surreptitious ways and methods that spoke to bodily autonomy. Conditions of slavery were sufficiently harsh that they

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affected women's fertility; however, women determined not to bring children into a life of

bondage acted in agentic ways, limiting fertility, through infanticide, and suicide (Reddock,

1985; Momsen, 2002; Turner, 2017). Similarly, indentured laborers, although their conditions

were slightly improved, most importantly including religious freedoms, term limits on

indentureship and compensation for their labor, resisted the oppressive tactics of British colonial

rule. The Hosay Riots of 1884 erupted in a climate already tense because of deplorable

conditions on the plantations, and general unrest by the police suppressing the Africans'

Canboulay processions (Liverpool, 2001). The colonial government banned the movement of

Hosay processions off the sugar estates. Hosay is a Muslim festival but had been observed by

Muslims, Hindus and Africans who participated in the drumming. At several sites the Indians

defied the orders of the British regiment, one procession amounting to more than 6000

participants. As they ignored the riot act being read by a local magistrate the police were ordered

to fire on them, resulting in at least nine dead and dozens injured (Anthony, 2001). Moreover,

despite general negative attitudes and stereotypes, the fact that Hindu and Muslim marriages

were not recognized until 1945, and the colonial government restricting grants to Christians only,

Indians maintained their religious traditions. Historian Bridget Brereton (1979) writes of how

John Morton a leading Canadian missionary to Indians at the time described Hinduism as

sinister, an "unclean faith that fostered a low sense of sin" (112) and Hindu and Muslim rites

deplored as uncivilized. However, less than 12% of the Indian population converted to

Christianity despite economic and social pressures to do so. With these contexts in mind, I

explore how traditions of passive resistance, deception and obscurement influence the behaviors

of relatively powerless adolescent girls who navigate sexual relationships that might be censored

in broader society, and whether the lines between projecting an image and becoming that identity are discrete or merged.

Surreptitious Acts of Resistance, An Assertion of Agency on the Plantations

It would be no surprise that as a consequence of plantation oppression Caribbean people learned to manifest their will in surreptitious ways, through syncretism, innovation, subterfuge, passive resistance and even direct appeals for justice. British abolitionists framed the reproduction capacity of enslaved women as a solution for the reduced supply of labor, a consequence of which was the institution of laws to protect pregnant women and mothers of young children. Nevertheless, enslavers regularly skirted these laws, demanding women return to the fields too soon after giving birth, curtailing the nursing habits or outright forcing women to wean children. Women resisted these "reproductive interventions" by defending their ideas and customs of child rearing, feeding and nurturing children. Running away for the sake of being able to nurse or care for a baby was a more blatant form of resistance, and Turner (2017) notes that some women even appealed to the law, reporting cases of abuse and neglect of enslaved women to magistrates, taking the plantation owner to court in response to efforts to limit breastfeeding to shorter than the legislated time frame. Similarly, women classified as "fit for breeding", were often forced to marry or mate with arbitrarily chosen enslaved men. Despite the trauma of these practices, and their contravention with abolitionist policies meant to foster relational determinism among the enslaved, they continued. Colonial powers and enslavers legitimized their sexual access and abuse of women by characterizing them as licentious, emphasizing their "nocturnal activities" as overindulgence, and blamed them for high rates of venereal disease and infertility, but women resisted by maintaining relationships with those they chose, using the cover of night and clandestine meetings to assert their right to choose.

Resistance through Carnival in the Post Emancipation Era

After emancipation resistance occurred in many other ways, and was more pronounced for Africans, for whom throughout chattel slavery in the Western Hemisphere, language, religion and culture were effectively erased through legislation and violence. Martial arts such as capoeira in Brazil, and stick fighting in islands such as Trinidad and Grenada, innovations such as the steelpan in Trinidad to circumvent the outlaw of drums, and religious systems in all the islands emerged as ways of reformulating the African traditions of their ancestors. Plantation life necessitated methods that would deceive and placate European enslavers or at the very least, discourage interest or control. Specifically, within the origins of Trinidad Carnival there were parallel social discourses occurring on the behavior of the oppressed and the ruling classes. Frances Henry and Dwaine Plaza (2020) discuss French and Spanish colonial elite using their Eurocentric masquerade balls to parody the enslaved in characters such as the Negres Jardin (Garden Negroes) or mulatress or enact the rounding up of the enslaved to put out cane field fires, whereas Africans, observed ancestral rituals, and engaged in masquerade to mock the debauchery of their European[1] masters (Henry & Plaza, 2020). Carnival characters such as the Pis-en-lit, Dame Lorraine, Pierrot Grenade and Jab Molassie – crude, jarring and comical masquerades intended to ridicule the elite – evolved from the diverse population. Africans both native to Trinidad and recently emigrated from other Caribbean islands post-emancipation, East Indian indentured laborers and others, engaged in masquerade-based protest and mockery within spaces where they had limited voice and limited power. In the post emancipation era to the end

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[1] Trinidad was a colony characterized by diversity among the oppressed and the colonizers. Although the British seized Trinidad from the Spanish in 1797, and formally took control in 1802, the island remained populated by a diverse mix of Spanish and French planters and British administrators, Irish convicts and poor whites, Portuguese laborers and peasants from Galicia (Allahar, 2003). Thus there was plurality among the Europeans as well, from which as many scholars have noted, developed a distinct European creole culture (Brereton, 1979; Baranov and Yelvington, 2003).

of the 19th century, the festivities became known by French colonizers as the Jamette Carnival –

a reaction to the "sexualized" and "aggressive" behavior of the African participants. The term

Jamette, derived from the French term, diametre, used to refer to people who were poor and –

considered by the colonial settler class – of low status "below the diameter of respectability"

(Liverpool, 2001, 253; Edmonson, 2003). These newly free Africans' articulations of anger and

contempt, manifested in masquerade, belied the harsh conditions they faced in the post-

emancipation era, particularly poor Black women who were effectively forced to work as

domestic servants or prostitutes, often living in deplorable conditions (Beckles, 1988). Africans

and indentured Indian laborers learned to wear a figurative mask, to perform piety and obedience

as a means of survival, thus sustaining their will to determine some aspects of their existence.

According to Trinidadian calypsonian and carnival scholar, Hollis "Chalkdust" Liverpool (2001),

for Africans wearing a mask and masking were integral aspects of many African celebrations.

Masqueraders became that which they inhabited. This element of masquerade, to undermine with

humor, to perform piety and maintain appearances, is an artifact of plantation society that has

remained and manifests in labor and social interactions in modern T&T. Masquerade, both in

aesthetics and performance, is a lens through which we can understand many of the social

contexts in which women in Trinidadian society defined and expressed themselves, and perhaps

continue to iterate in modern society. Acceptability was contingent on a politics of respectability,

but no genuine acceptance that the formerly enslaved possessed that respectability or even

humanity.

    The notion of respectability resurfaces throughout Caribbean history, utilized by

abolitionists to argue for the end of slavery, subtly implicated in the designation of the enslaved

as uncivilized, in need of refinement or innately deserving of their lot; as a means to restrict

emancipated Africans and limit their aspirations for progress when they were free; and as a measure by which to judge progress in modern society. In the Caribbean the term respectability is applied to women, while reputation is used for men in very specific ways. Belinda Edmondson (2003) writes that:

> In the Caribbean, with its history of slavery and indentureship, and the corollary pathologizing of black and other nonwhite women as nonwomen or non-subjects, the black, brown, and Asian constituencies' desire for a publicly acknowledged "respectable" femininity is both overtly and covertly tied to the desire for social mobility and political or economic advancement. (3)

Jamette of 19th century Trinidadian Society

Black women from urban areas, typically engaged in wanton revelry of carnival, attached to notorious steelpan gangs, the streets and barrack yards, "disreputable women, thorns in the sides of lawmakers and the respectable classes" (5) were the bane of bourgeois existence. "Habitually castigated as being lewd and erotic, and for allegedly instigating obscene dancing," (ibid) the women associated with this "low culture", their habits, their behaviors, and their couplings were not topics for respectable society. Nevertheless, Edmondson argues, despite advancement for women in the Caribbean, the quotidian expressions of cultural and social life, such as the performance or activities of those outside the diametre – the sphere of social acceptability – are important to our understanding of women's status in society. These social contexts – the notion of a specific type of respectability tied to women's public behavior – are important in contextualizing the social, economic and political landscape of the Caribbean today.

The Political Economy of Gender in the Post-Emancipation Period

The economic landscape in T&T as well as other Caribbean sugar-producing colonies was determined by decisions pertaining to sugar production in the British West Indies. According to historian Eric Williams (1970) sugar and sugar by-products accounted for 53% of

all exports in the British West Indian colonies, with Trinidad producing one fifth of all sugar from the West Indian colonies – ranked the third highest. The mostly absentee planters had staked most of their interests in this sugar economy, buttressed by protections from the British government. However, decades after emancipation in the British West Indies, there were few innovations or improvements in production, and the British ended market protections in 1852. Moreover, competition from beet sugar production, cane sugar produced in cheaper labor markets, and a loss of protectionist laws in England meant that by the end of the 19th century British colonies producing sugar were largely bankrupt. The economic decline occurred in an environment where the material and ideological relations of gender for women increased their burdens, and increased discrimination and inequalities (Barriteau, 2001).

Gender development in the Caribbean is intrinsically tied to the dynamic changes that occurred in the post-world war, post-independence period in the Caribbean region (Barriteau, 2001). The early twentieth century Caribbean was characterized by economic deprivation rooted in the impoverishment of slavery, and poor business decisions by those who controlled industry. No longer shielded by protectionist policies, British colonies were more exposed and thus vulnerable to the global capitalist economy (Williams, 1970; Barriteau, 2001). Consequently, the conditions of peasants – those who had been formerly enslaved, and indentured workers suffered the most, particularly women. The first world war and Great Depression of the 1920s had ripple effects globally, and the Caribbean was not left untouched. Despite profits of oil production and remarkable dividends four times the wage bill in the mid 1930s, Trinidad laborers, whether agricultural or oil industry, were paid poorly and continued to live in destitute conditions – a fact that largely led to riots of the 1930s (Williams, 1970). Although T&T had begun to experience the early success of mineral industrialization in petroleum and asphalt (Drayton, 2001 in

Barriteau, 2001), the profits did not materialize better wages or standards of living for the workers. The economic slump following the first world war and subsequent great depression upended development in the Caribbean and intensified civil disturbance (Williams, 1970). Although destitution affected both men and women, gender systems enforced the belief in the inferior status of women – assignment to domestic life, erasure from economic and political participation. However, discourse places both working-class and middle-class women in inferior positions within Caribbean societies. Women were objectified, both socioeconomic groups seen as victims, which diminished the agency of working-class women and devalued middle-class women whose class status was presumed to allow them to escape the gender relations that challenged their societal standing. There were limits on how women could advance themselves, particularly given the requirements in most islands, including Trinidad, that women quit their professional appointments upon marriage. Poor, working class women did not have this luxury because they could not afford to work, but were disadvantaged nonetheless, by class status and economic limitations. Although the civil service was a pathway to progress for many families, in the mid 1940s married women were still required to leave their positions in several countries (Henry-Wilson, 1989; Brereton, 1995 in Barriteau, 2001).

A Changing of Women's Roles in the Post-Independence Society

The social, cultural, political, and economic impact of colonial rule on the Caribbean impacted the lives of women and girls, effects which are still present today and thus have implications for the interior lives of adolescent girls. Economic change in post-independence society coincided with social change, including a change of women's role in the public sphere, and women's access to public resources. As male migration grew in the early twentieth century, matrifocal Caribbean households changed women's roles, if not their relative gender status.

Ultimately migration trends would include increasing numbers of women as domestics and to train primarily as nurses, particularly during the period following the Second World War. Thus, global economic conditions influenced women's lives in the region, and their migration changed Caribbean society. From the 1950s to the early 1990's families depended heavily on remittances from men, but particularly women working abroad. Migration helped women considerably, providing for those who emigrated opportunities to work, sometimes to earn additional qualifications and provide for their families back home. It also provided substantial support to those left behind in the form of cash remittances and the regular shipment of goods that provided for all manner of living expenses and household security. At the same time, it meant a significant loss of human capital, particularly of women at all levels of education and occupational skills. The "expansionist, state-building policies" (Barriteau, 2001, 61) of the 1960s led several Caribbean nations that had recently gained independence, or were on the verge of independence, including T&T, increased women's participation in the labor force and thus helped grow the middle class. The oil boom of the 1970s yielded increased revenue for T&T, coupled with increased foreign exchange reserves, government investment in steel and petrochemical industries, and with the economic boom, increases in lifestyle of the populace. By the mid 1980s T&T had at least 42 marine platforms, over 160 km of oil pipelines and 1150 tankers in its territorial waters in the Gulf of Paria between Trinidad and Venezuela and shipped over 100,000 barrels of crude per day through the region, of which almost 40% were produced in the southwest coast (Agard, Boodoosing and Gobin, 1988). However, economic shocks in the global capitalist economy in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and responses to address the economic fallout, namely high interest rate loans and structural adjustment policies had detrimental impacts on many Caribbean economies. Decreased global demand for raw materials, poor economic

management, hesitancy to pivot at the start of economic downturns in the mid-1980s, meant that

mineral rich nations like T&T were not able to fully exploit their natural resources. Despite state

expansionist policies intended to improve the quality of life and expand the middle class, the

economic gains of mineral industries in some nations, notably in the oil and natural gas sector for

T&T have not left them impervious to the shocks and shortfalls of the global economy, and

subsequent monetary devaluation and export controls. The failure on the part of Caribbean

governments to mitigate these effects, coupled with what Barriteau (2001) terms "archaic gender

ideologies on women's gender role-identities" (70) had a detrimental effect on the circumstances

of women in modern Caribbean society.

Race, Class in Caribbean Society

As alluded to earlier, postcolonial Caribbean society is organized by race, class, gender

and nationality, but the hierarchies are a nuanced intertwining of race and class dynamics.

Caribbean nations share a common history of colonization, structured around the plantation

(Benitez-Rojo, 2001), synonymous with intricate rules and an obsession by European colonial

settlers and their respective governments, with meticulous attention to racial classification and

order (Baranov and Yelvington, 2003). Consequently, race and class divisions that remain in

many Caribbean countries are influenced by similar ideologies. The quest by colonizing rulers

for cheap labor resulted in Caribbean islands, particularly the larger sugar producing countries

like Jamaica, Guyana and Trinidad having "a very complex and cosmopolitan society" inheriting

the site of a "precocious experiment in social engineering" today (Momsen, 2002). Moreover,

constant migration between the islands and the influx of non-European traders and laborers, for

example Syrians and Lebanese and Chinese immigrants to Trinidad, and multiple waves of intra-

Caribbean migration "guaranteed a degree of internecine conflict that could effectively keep the

powerless masses continuously divided" (Baranov & Yelvington, 219). But social class is not a static phenomenon, particularly in a region as diverse as the Caribbean where nations whose economies are tied to external markets through tourism, and petrochemicals like in T&T, are continually adapting and reinventing themselves. Consequently, class, and the ways that people understand their place in society, their relationships and negotiations, "must be understood as part of an ongoing, fluid process of contestation rather than as fixed, static, and unchanging categories." (Baranov and Yelvington, 210, 2003). A person's ethnicity or racial identity could be a stronger determinant of social power than their class position. One could argue even that racial and ethnic identity, encompassing skin-complexion or proximity to whiteness, could have an influence on these hierarchies. This begs the question of whether relationships, both distant and intimate are sometimes used as a mechanism for transcending these class boundaries, or if and how they are limited by these stratifications or exist despite boundaries.

Although the region is more than a century removed from plantation society, colonizing nations long replaced by constitutional monarchies or fully independent republics, racial and ethnic hierarchies persist. Racial and ethnic mix in the Caribbean is unmatched; however, Whites despite being a dwindling size of the population, maintain status as elites, and in many islands maintain a large proportion of the wealth. Similarly, the trading classes in many islands, such as Haiti, Jamaica, Curacao and Trinidad maintain power, economic and political influence by commanding disproportionately more resources. The Black Power movement in the English-speaking Caribbean was a critical period. Aligned with the civil rights movement in the US, it was intended to dismantle the persistent racial inequalities that extended colonial hierarchies with Whites having economic and social power. However, according to Baranov and Yelvington (2003) "Blacks and Indians earned less and were sidelined in many spheres from jobs to beauty

queen titles (222)." Moreover, race and class divisions continued to be manipulated for the benefit of control by colonial powers and subsequently by the white elite. For instance, sociologist Anton Allahar (2003), focused on the dynamics of race and class, demonstrates how the British operationalized the dictum of divide and rule to maintain colonial power. He argues that patterns of racial inclusion and exclusion continue in the Caribbean. For example, in T&T the legacy of whites or light-skinned people whose wealth derived from their domination of business and commerce allowed them to finance the churches and thus access and control the best schools, thus sustaining class hierarchy. This was (and remains) a society where class was color-coded and any features that approximated whiteness imbued the possessor with higher class status. Those who were darker but had attained a level of colonial education and a predisposition to Eurocentric ideals could access some degree of status. This positioned Africans' whose earlier presence in the country, separation from plantation life and movement into urban areas opened opportunities to enter the civil service and thus advanced their entry into the middle class. These negotiations of race and class were intricately woven into notions of good citizenship and the ideological and material conditions of women in the post-colonial nation.

Gender and Status in Caribbean Society

In her examination of Caribbean women and the politics of public performance, Belinda Edmonson (2003) points out the obsession with female respectability is tied to the historical nationalist agenda for political autonomy, social and economic advancement that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. The growing middle class among still colonized Caribbean nations were preoccupied with establishing their legitimacy as rulers of their own domain. Traditional attitudes about Black female respectability (rather the ability of Black men to control the behavior of their women and thus their implicit suitability for leadership) was the preoccupation

of the Black nationalist agenda. This historical context is relevant to contemporary notions of race, class and gender hierarchies in that women's public performance had relevance for how they were treated, the relationships they had, and their mechanisms for survival. The critiques of Black women's "innate degeneracy" (Edmonson, 2003, 4) and the need for respectability is directly related to contemporary notions of women's and young girls' place in the public sphere and transcends all ethnic groups. As Edmonson notes, "Black male leadership qualities were judged by the ability of black men to "rule" their women" (4), in which they were found lacking, while women were regarded as capable of managing themselves. But the purpose of these observations was disingenuous as they were intended to discredit Black men's capacity for self-governance, not to praise Black women, who were often considered loud, lewd, too strong to be protected. In Trinidad, where Black and Indian women formed equal proportions of the society, Black women, denigrated as unworthy of protection, were frequently compared to Indian women, who were considered docile and "delicate". Hierarchies of race and class, and even color thus remained an artifact of plantation systems and colonization. The juxtaposition of two large ethnic groups within the plural and culturally diverse society of T&T created a prime setting to cultivate (and manipulate) racial hierarchies in all aspects of life, including public and private relations (Allahar, 2003).

Considering these negotiations, I am curious about how Caribbean race and class hierarchies and gender inequality affect the development of adolescent girls' sexual agency. If a teen grows up knowing to navigate Caribbean society as a poor girl, knowing that her light-skinned complexion is important, perhaps she also grows up knowing that as a woman she can use her sexuality to gain something and there might be a trade off in how she might be perceived versus how she could tangibly benefit. It's important to discuss the relationship between the

traversing of race and class boundaries, sexuality and the development of consciousness and understanding of the boundaries fits into adolescent and young adult sexual and relational experiences. If, as Kempadoo (2009) has argued, sexuality scholars emphasize adolescent girls' engagement with transactional exchanges in sex, when and how do When do adolescent girls start thinking getting an older man is good for them, or that they can trade off their appearance for social capital with the choice of relational/sex partner? Certainly, these negotiations do not necessarily apply to all adolescent girls or young women. Therefore, it's important to understand the conditions that may influence that type of pursuit. Similarly, it is important to understand whether girls who make these maneuvers do so with intention and awareness, and the subject positions that may drive their negotiations.

Further to the negotiations of race and gender, class hierarchies have often positioned women, particularly working-class women, at a disadvantage. Barriteau (2001) argues that the gendered nature of economic development has historically placed women in a state of subordination in the Caribbean. For instance, cottage industries and women-centered businesses such as private childcare centers, clothing and food makers and domestic service work have played an integral role in sustaining families, particularly women-led households. However, these are the types of economic activities that have too often been sidelined from established banking and economic development at the state level. Janet Momsen has observed that a "double paradox of matrifocal and matrilocal families that coexists with state patriarchy, defines Caribbean gender relations". Women may head households, but not have socio-economic power or social capital. Thus, their economic autonomy is subject to the vagaries of the economic climate, and their social autonomy, to the limits of culture and the socio-political climate. Using Tobago as a case study Michelle Rowley demonstrates how matrifocality can exist where men

are present. Female-headed households do not necessarily imply matrifocal family structure and consequently, a society still largely dominated by patriarchal values of the state, is not matriarchal, despite the prevalence of matrifocality (24, 2002). Rowley and other Caribbean feminist scholars have argued that women exercise a certain degree of economic and sexual autonomy that defies Caribbean patriarchal mores even if it is not consistent with their stated values.

Economic growth and state policies lead to growth of the middle class but benefitted women of all socioeconomic levels. As more educational and employment opportunities opened up, many young women grew to have a greater command over their lives, sometimes becoming more likely to have their first child while continuing to reside at their mother's home and supporting themselves independently on their own income. More often than not, this effect has been demonstrated among women of African descent. This autonomy must be understood relative to the persistent vulnerabilities of women. Although women may experience more economic, social and sexual agency, one cannot ignore that women and girls are actually in many cases powerless and are more exposed to violence and death. Eudine Barriteau (2012) states in her essay *Coming Home to the Erotic Power of Love and Desire in Caribbean Heterosexual Unions*, that in the Caribbean there are "intense negotiations and accommodations of power" (94) for women in heterosexual relationships. For young girls this is graver as they are indeed often economically and socially powerless, and face significant social pressure to conform to relationship norms that privilege male partners demands over their safety, autonomy and pleasure.

This negotiation is evident with Indo-Trinidadian girls. In her study of how adolescent girls navigate a sense of "appropriate womanhood" Trinidadian gender scholar Gabrielle Hosein

finds that Indo-Trinidadian girls feel pressure to be both feminine and embody a womanhood

that is asexual; in relationships with family and community to be obedient, and to carry

themselves respectably (2004). Through modern exemplars of femininity, particularly through

US popular culture, they are able to claim new, more liberated ideals of womanhood without

criticisms of adopting Afro-Trinidadian (Afro-creole) feminine ideals that are seen by their

community as vulgar, immoral and largely unacceptable. Notably Hosein notes that this

privileging of White archetypes of femininity among Indo-Trinidadian girls may be unique to the

Trinidadian landscape because, on the contrary, she argues that for South Asian girls in Canada,

Whiteness is considered immoral.

How Plantation Society Racial Hierarchies Undergird the Contemporary

Although the Caribbean is often synonymous with the cliched "sun, sea and sand" – and

for a nation like T&T, carnival – plantation society undergirds Caribbean history, its impact is

imprinted in the contemporary fabric of society. The confluence of European colonial

governments jostling for territory, trading nations, the annihilation of Taino (Arawak) and

Kalinago (Carib) tribes (Newton 2013), importation and exploitation of enslaved Africans, and

indentured laborers from Asia and Europe are central defining characteristics of Caribbean

plantation society. The social structure, patterns of social relations, hierarchies and structure of

authority remain influenced by patterns of economic organization of the plantation (Beckford,

1971; Smith, 1973).

Rather than the laissez faire, dreamy beaches associated with contemporary tourist

images, this legacy of the colonial plantation system defined by racial classification and

hierarchies that put the small group of Europeans at the top of the pyramid, and the Africans and

indigenous at the bottom is integral to island history (Baranov and Yelvington, 2003). This

hierarchical system and an understanding of one's place and privileges based on the minutiae of skin color nomenclature, and class-based stratification is crucial to understanding Caribbean society today. These tensions are descendent of racial and ethnic divisions germinated in the post emancipation period. As in their other colonies the British instituted the strategy of divide et imperia or divide and rule, thus ensuring the major groups in the society, despite their shared predicaments and collective numbers, maintained animus towards each other. The Africans who had sought better working conditions found they were priced out of the largest labor market in sugar producing territories like Trinidad. Because work on the plantations provided housing, the loss of these jobs meant that not only had Indians usurped their positions in the main economy, but they also displaced them from homes. Over time the two predominant groups in the territories of Jamaica, Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad acculturated to European standards, but also, particularly among working class people, developed strategies for "interculturation" - a blending of religious rituals and customs that also shaped society (Braithwaite, 1971). Brathwaite refers to these as a process of creolization. Additionally, T&T, particularly Trinidad due to the many importations of large diverse ethnic groups, is also a plural society (Beckford, 1971). It is based on a plantation model where Africans, Indians, Chinese and Europeans exist together, but do not necessarily mix, or that mixing is constrained by important social mores and historical meanings.

Free Black people and mixed people of color who comprised middle class society, were influenced by ethnic diversity and social stratification. One's ethnicity, area of origin, complexion, and class status, though rarely openly acknowledged, were central to the public and personal aspects of life, including who obtained certain types of employment, who engaged in

particular religious practices, which groups were considered to have the necessary social capital for certain types of positions of employment.

How Economic Shifts Affected Women's Lives

In the post-emancipation twentieth century Caribbean societies were reconfigured, shifting from agriculture to tourism and financial services. Although these were more important for smaller islands, T&T's geographic location – the southernmost island of the Lesser Antilles, a gateway to Latin America and protected from hurricanes – facilitates its large shipping portfolio. Its oil and natural gas reserves have enabled a profitable petrochemical industry, which at times has made it impervious to some of global market forces that have hampered economic development in non-energy rich Caribbean countries, and shaped a society accustomed to a comfortable, consumerist standard of living. Consequently, economic circumstances have shaped the development of the middle-class, determined what resources women and girls have access to, their freedoms, tastes, expectations and how they navigate in this society.

A tourism industry has developed in T&T, but with unique characteristics on each island. Tobago offers the typical "sun, sea and sand" and ecotourism, while Trinidad serves as a commercial center and attracts visitors during its carnival. Pre-pandemic tourism arrival data for T&T place it 20th in the Caribbean with 480,000 arrivals in 2019. Roughly 20% of visitors are for business, and the majority, more than half of all private holiday arrivals, are expatriates, roughly half of whom come from North America, and typically stay at private residences (UNWTO, 2020). However, tourism represents merely 2% of gross domestic product. Its regional and international commercial shipping activity and financial services also bring high numbers of visitors to the country (Charles, Mohammed and Mohan, 2016). The economic and political contexts are implicated in the socialization and learning of girls as structural changes

affect people at all levels of society, more so when the economic impacts, and responses to them reinforce gender inequity (Barriteau, 2001).

Importantly, dramatic shifts in the socio-political cultural landscape lend themselves to spaces where public dialogue may influence young women. As the number of Venezuelans entering and remaining in Trinidad skyrocketed following instability in their homeland, public discourse on the impacts of their presence became heightened. The plethora of international refugee reports, investigative and opinion articles reflect dueling concerns of those residing in the nations that have received Venezuelans. Trinidad's geographic location – 7 miles from the southernmost border of the island to the north of Venezuela – dramatically increased entry for tens of thousands of Venezuelans seeking resettlement due to that nation's crisis. What the archives do not reflect are the more colloquial, informal discourses occurring among non-professionals, and non-academics on social media. In 2019 a video circulated widely on WhatsApp showed a Trinidadian man, phenotypically of African descent speaking into the camera. He chastised Trinidadian women for their presumed recalcitrance and disdain of local men and panned the camera as he boasted that he and his friends "have the Venes now". In the background of what appeared to be a watering hole or private club, several light-skinned young women with straight or loosely curled hair and various other men. Among several similarly themed videos that have circulated on social media there were items such as voice notes warning people of Venezuelan women performing Orisha rituals, more derogatively described as obeah (meaning witchcraft or rituals intended to force outcomes of the practitioner's desires) to ensnare Trinbagonian[2] men. Formal archives reflect a refugee crisis of more than 5000 Venezuelans

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[2] Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago colloquially refer to themselves as Trinidadian, if they originate from Trinidad, Tobagonian, if they originate from Tobago or Trinbagonian as an adjective that encompasses belonging to the entire nation. I use the term here when speaking collectively of people from the T&T. I use Trinidad or Trinidadian, Tobago or Tobagonian if I am speaking specifically about people from one of those respective islands.

fleeing to neighboring countries per day, and in the early stages, approximately 64% of them being men, for whom 60% had dependent families still living in Venezuela whom they were responsible for (IOM, 2018). As numbers increased the formal archives also reflected dramatic rises in human trafficking that impacted largely young women and girls (Casey, 2019, Hutchinson-Jafar, 2020). Hidden in the interstices of these national public conversations about economy and crime, are the considerations of colorism, xenophobia, and racial hierarchies that reflect some of the jostling rooted in plantation slavery. Among the things young women and girls learn or are reminded of is the association of Latinas ("the Spanish", "the Venes") with promiscuity and prostitution, but also of women with more European features being deemed more desirable, and an existential threat to their relationships and livelihoods (Persad, 2019).

Historically, Caribbean nations such as T&T are familiar with having to navigate the dynamics of external economic and social influence, and foreign motivations as a means to survive. Race, class and gender play important parts in the overarching aspects and the minutiae of daily social and intimate life. For instance, with the reconfiguring of Caribbean economies since the 1960s with the shift from agriculture, have had implications for women's lives. Although a nation such as T&T, is not at the mercy of the tourism and international financial services industries as with other Caribbean countries, and does not depend on foreigners' consumption of their culture to survive, its petrochemical industry is certainly controlled by external factors, a fact more critical and concerning given market volatility and price declines in the oil and gas sector since 2014 (Conrad and Jagessar, 2018). Moreover, the economic impact of that industry, one dominated by men, where men earn significantly more than workers in any other industry at various levels of qualifications, sets the stage for discourse on the economies of sex and class in the society.

These stratifications extended to the marketplace as well, where throughout the Caribbean, including in T&T, gender inequalities in types of employment - with women more likely to work in the lower-paid "pink" economies of the service sector (Freeman 2000), and reproductive industries like child care and primary and secondary education, income, entrepreneurship and capital investment for entrepreneurs (Barriteau, 2002), and education (Parry, 2002). For example, T&T's chief export, which commands 80% of GDP is the petrochemical industry, which employs only 26% of the population. Moreover, not only does the petrochemical industry generate the largest proportion of wealth, it has historically been a source of considerably higher paid jobs, predominantly employing men and all tiers of the sector, allowing men with lower-paid workers to have disposable income and higher living standards than those with similar jobs in other sectors. Bearing these social idiosyncrasies in mind, it is interesting to note the degree to which conventional ideas about masculinity and earning power may determine attraction, notions of the ideal partner, and the degree to which financial considerations exist as a theme in influencing heterosexual relationships with young women and girls.

The Economies of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean

Caribbean feminist theorist M. Jacqui Alexander argues that "heteropatriarchal recolonization operates through the consolidation of certain psychic economies and racialized hierarchies and within various material and ideological processes initiated by the state both inside and beyond the law." (Alexander, 1996, 67). Race and class hierarchies that are based on the colonial legacy foment discontent, ethnic tensions and both subtle and blatant discrimination today. Coupled with gender inequality and just as the history of enslavement influenced attitudes towards the body, the conceptualization of Black and Brown bodies in the European sociological

imagination is relevant to discourse on sexuality in the Caribbean. With respect to adolescent girls, their perceptions of who is desirable and their own desirability are influenced by these hierarchies and the values imposed on them by society. Similarly, their own identities - race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, urban or rural status and the customs, networks and habits – shape their lives and influence value judgements that influence their ideas about sexuality.

Theorizing on sexual relations in the Caribbean, feminist scholar, Kamala Kempadoo (2000) has explored how historic colonial and global relations of power and ruling have contributed to the fetishization of the exotic. She argues that European colonialism and North American imperialism-imposed ideas of the exotic, intermingled with colorism, on sexuality. Consequently, all ideas about Caribbean women's sexuality are influenced by these structures. According to Kempadoo, sexual relations are influenced by regional and international relations of power, but also, gender, notions of class, nationality and ethnicity matter in how sex is understood and interpreted. "Exoticism in its various expressions brought legitimacy to Western rule; it is distinguished from other racisms by fostering an illusion of admiration for and attraction to the other while simultaneously enacting murder, rape, genocide, and enslavement" (Kempadoo, 2003, 162).

In modern T&T society although the populace proudly promotes multiculturalism and national holidays representing a plethora of racial and ethnic groups populate the calendar, people rarely discuss the historical antecedents of these festivities and observances. The term "rainbow country" is often used to express pride in ethnic diversity. However, commercials in print and on television, as well as those who cover the news on local television stations are more likely to be of lighter complexions, slim women with loosely curled hair. There are numerous ways that exoticism manifests in modern T&T society. As with many other nations in Latin

America and the Caribbean, the populace takes considerable pride and interest in beauty pageants and the women who represent the country at national and international competitions (Barnes, 1994). At various junctures since T&T won its first international beauty queen title in 1977, the franchise holders have sponsored numerous women who would appear racially ambiguous, or have more European features. On the occasions in which dark skinned women with more prominent African features have excelled they have experienced initial skepticism from some factions of the populace, largely critiquing their complexion. Beauty pageants are still a source of national pride and preoccupation in T&T like many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Unfortunately, they also present opportunities for public shaming of dark-skinned women, or negative attitudes and perpetuate stereotypical beliefs about women from poor, traditionally Black communities (Dixon, 2012; Doughty, 2018). Young women and girls in Caribbean society are exposed to constant messaging about the inherent value of lighter skin and other aspects of physical appearance through images in the media, popular culture, particularly meme culture and social media content, but also in the representation of Trinbagonian women in the nation's advertising and representations of Trinidad Carnival. Consequently, they are often engaged in passive learning about what is acceptable, and the meter by which their attractiveness or desirability is assessed by love interests. The way adolescent girls and young women receive, observe and interpret adult communications with other adults is a mode of learning the meanings and constructions of desirability, sexuality and sexual agency. The language that is employed in private spaces – by family, close friends, trusted adults – to talk to adolescent girls and young women about expectations and conceptions of young female sexuality. Public rhetoric, by community and national leaders, health officials, clergy, teachers in the media and other public fora are also sites of learning for girls and young women.

How Media Representations Circumscribe Young Women's Sexual Life

An engaging example that epitomizes the potential for passive learning in the social world of adolescent girls is illustrated in a popular television series created for local television in T&T between 1984 and 1990, *Turn of the Tide* (Cline, 2018). The focal point of the first season of *Turn of the Tide* deals with negotiation of class and reputation as a working-class widow seeks to establish a secure future for her two children. Tiny Walker is a widowed huckster who lives with her father-in-law and two adult children Rawle and Theresa. Tiny is obsessed with maintaining her image as a hard-working, chaste, decent and upstanding woman in the community. Throughout the series she uses language that asserts her status as a decent, morally upstanding woman, eschews vagabond behavior, and relentlessly fights for her children to embrace these ideologies. Her pride in her daughter, Theresa, is evident as is the framing of Theresa as a decent, exemplary woman. She enters the scene coming home from work, professionally dressed, carrying a soft briefcase. Before she arrives Tiny and her neighbor speak about how proud she is of her daughter's educational accomplishments and ambitions. This is contrasted with her son, Rawle, a "weed smoker" who is regularly described as "wotless", lazy, a reprobate. Tiny pleads and harangues Rawle to find purpose and establish himself as a respectable person. She maligns his love interests, slandering his current girlfriend who she calls "a nasty wotless gal" a "nasty knock about gal" who she has heard too much about, who everybody in the village knows is "not any damn good". Tiny affirms this by telling Rawle, she has heard too much about his girlfriend, Louise, who she does not call by name, only referring to her as Rufus Cummings' daughter. She drives home her point by stating

I hear too much ting about she, and where it have smoke it must have fire. And in she case it have plenty, plenty smoke, so it must be have more fire than the fire brigade could handle. If them bench behind the school could talk they woulda tell you plenty 'bout she.

When Rawle defends the young woman, referring to her as his girlfriend Tiny aggressively retorts that he is stupid for claiming her as his "chick" because she was with half the men in the village, "who she ain't meet behind the school she meet down in the bay". She doubles down by citing the various ways in which several members of Louise's family have gotten in trouble for legal infractions. Tragically, she adds as evidence, that Louise' mother was also promiscuous from a tender age, and describes what most certainly sounds like an incidence of gang rape in which Louise's mother was the victim at the age of 14. She is enraged not that Rawle doesn't act like everybody else, "friend with she and go yuh way"; she berates him for claiming her publicly "as if she's a decent woman like everybody else".

By contrast Tiny often references her singular and faithful relationship with Rawle and Theresa's father. She exalts her commitment to a chaste widowhood because no man is as decent as her deceased husband was, and her self-imposed celibacy is a testament to their (hers, and her husband's) inherent value. Ironically her father-in-law Joshua invariably reminds her that she gave birth to the children before his son, Peter, married her, which she dismisses. Moreover, she says, men take advantage of women, using them up and then discarding them, or worse, turning their sexual attention towards a woman's "girl children".

Tiny exudes overwhelming pride that Theresa graduated secondary school, is "working in the air-conditioned office in town" and aspires to go to university the following year. Tiny's ultimate hope is for her daughter to finish university, marry and settle down with someone good, someone "from a respectable family, someone good with some kind of pedigree." When Theresa

becomes romantically involved with Ben White, Tiny is conflicted because he is educated (at a foreign university) and from a middle-class family (his father is an attorney, and they live in a more well-to-do neighborhood). But his advances and Theresa's passion for him may undermine her hopes of her daughter advancing her education.

Through the characterizations of this family, we observe ideas about young women's behavior, value and place in the private and public spheres. Tiny's ideas about decent women are rarely challenged on ideology, except when the speakers, typically her reprobate father-in-law, perceive her critiques as a personal attack. There is no indication through the reactions of others, nor the characterization of women in the series, that her ideas do not conform to standard notions of women's and girls' place in T&T society. In Tiny's ideas we can see how important women's interior lives are to the building of a national idea about the nation's progress and acceptability. Tiny desires advancement for her daughter, an evolution from probably her own parent's ideas about women's place. However, her ideas about women's sexuality are still deeply patriarchal and punitive. These ideas permeate the social environment in which adolescent girls learn and make sense of their world, they are present in direct and indirect communication between mothers and daughters and all the people from whom girls understand the experiences of adulthood. Thus, they represent a form of passive learning about what it means to be a woman, and what a rejection of these standards for women's sexuality portends.

In her work on Caribbean women and the politics of public performance Belinda Edmonson (2003) examines the contradictory ideologies surrounding contemporary women's performance in the Caribbean public sphere. She highlights the many ways Black women were encumbered by two opposing ideologies – the wanton jezebel who would become the bane of polite society, and the cultured Black woman, raising her family similarly and thus elevating the

nation and the race. These two opposing archetypes preoccupied the minds of the 19th century establishment and continue to shape discourse in the contemporary lives of Caribbean women of all ethnicities. Through Tiny's eyes we see how deeply entrenched these ideas have remained, particularly for women of so-called lower socioeconomic status. Theresa's love interest, Ben, has a sister who is involved in an affair with a married man that comes to an unfortunate outcome for her. Her class status allows her to pivot and reshape her life and identity, immersing herself in charity work. Her status as a decent woman is never discussed, never interrogated in the series.

Barriteau (2019) notes in her work on sexuality, intimacy and power, that class, particularly poverty, performs an outsized role in determining which young girls end up cohabiting or in sexual relationships with older men. Untenable conditions like economic deprivation and sexual abuse at home push poor girls into intimate relationships that may provide an escape from one form of hardship, but entry into others. Consequently, young women and girls make calculations about sexual and intimate relationships that are mediated by the social and economic power they have. The political economy affects young women's and girls' sexual lives. Moreover, Barriteau argues, "life chances of girls are being shaped in a context that breeds powerlessness, despair and lack of sexual and social autonomy" (317). If, as Barriteau asserts, economic vulnerability is a direct indicator of women's status in sexual relationships, to what extent do adolescent girls actually manifest sexual agency? If we draw parallels between the ways that enslaved women accessed power under impossible circumstances to exercise some degree of control over their bodies, as described in various acts of resistance (Beckles, 1988; Turner, 2017), so too must adolescent girls who experience relative powerlessness in modern society.

How Culture Shapes Our Ideas and Sex

Just as history and the economy play an important role in shaping our institutions and affecting our lives, culture shapes ideas and attitudes and influences day-to-day lived experiences. Outsiders who lack similar cultural frameworks and an understanding of the rituals and traditional artforms embedded in the festival may contextualize carnival in terms of debauchery, sexuality and licentious behavior. But these perceptions are related to colonialism and how we perceive Black and Brown bodies in the Caribbean. Cultural value judgments are mutable in nature, influenced by our identities and positionalities, as well as the overarching institutions and systems beyond our power. Consequently, I have aimed my investigation at how adolescent girls make meaning of their social environments, the artifacts of culture they hold onto, the beliefs, systems and occurrences influence their ideas of their sexual selves and how that has translated into sexually agentic behavior, namely decisions and action (or inaction). I have sought to understand adolescent girls' understanding and interpretations of race, class and gender hierarchies and how those understandings influence their sexual agency. Further, do they internalize messages policing their bodies, their discourse, their expressions of curiosity about sex, and do their interpretations of that messaging determine how they will develop their sexual sense of self?

Economy and Popular Culture in Contemporary Trinidad and Tobago Society

Freedom is constrained or has conditions related to one's relative power and positioning in society. Who more than adolescent girls to epitomize that paradox, being marginalized according to age and gender? M. Jacqui Alexander (1996) argues that the state is an actor in maintaining the status quo of appropriate sexual behavior among its citizens. And, as an obstacle to controlled, heteronormative, patriarchal families, women's sexual agency has always been an

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enemy to the state. This form of social control manifests itself particularly in the areas of the economy that are tied to heterosexual sex for pleasure, which Alexander ties to the ideologies of the neocolonial, heteropatriarchal state. "They pose a challenge to the ideological anchor of an ordinary nuclear family, a source of legitimation for the state, which perpetuates the fiction that the family is the cornerstone of society" (Alexander, 1996, 64). Erotic autonomy, as Alexander refers to it, gives women and girls freedom to choose, potentially anchors their actions in their own ideas and desires, thus opening the opportunity for an unwillingness to accept the status quo, a desire for non-heteronormative sexual relations, or multiple partners. Erotic autonomy frees women to have choices that may contravene the will and power of the state, and thus undermine patriarchal institutions and ideologies. Alexander surmises that it serves as a threat to the heterosexual family, and thus the nation. "And because loyalty to the nation as citizen is perennially colonized within reproduction and heterosexuality, erotic autonomy brings with it the potential undoing entirely, a possible charge of irresponsible citizenship or no citizenship at all" (Alexander, 1996, 64). As such teenage girls, young women, even recalcitrant women of age are potentially unruly bodies to be tamed, including through criminalization.

Some Caribbean nations, including T&T criminalize homosexual sex between consenting adults. These anti-LGBTQ laws are holdovers from British colonial rule when homosexual sex was criminalized. However, heterosexual sex is not. In most tourism-dependent countries in the Caribbean, Alexander posits, social control occurs predominantly in the tourism industry. In T&T, it occurs in the business and "carnival tourism" sectors to which they cater, as well as the extractive industries, which generate the biggest share of revenue. Social control also plays itself out among what Alexander terms "loyal heterosexual citizens" (64). What ties these economic activities together is the infusion of capital and the exploitation of need among vulnerable

people, predominantly poor women. Infusions of cash in economically dependent communities, be they dollars from North American tourists or businessmen, the excess of returning nationals spending during T&T carnival, or the large paychecks in male-dominated extractive industries provide opportunities for women in downstream service economies, but also through the sex trade.

As recently as 2020 Trinidad was described by the World Economic Report as a small country with disproportionately large economic activity from the oil and natural gas compared to its population. In that sense, T&T ranks 58th out of 140 countries surveyed according to the Global Competitiveness Index (2020). What this means is that, notwithstanding economic inequality, citizens of T&T have exposure to more resources than less wealthy nations the Caribbean. Unlike Caribbean countries that are dependent on tourism and turn to external sources, people in T&T turn inward for income. It is important to consider how, based on economic terms, people access goods and services. Similarly, it relates to how young women and girls see themselves, what they can do, gain or achieve, what economic and social parameters define or limit their social and sexual relationships or behavior.

Moreover, regardless of the sources of income, like other Caribbean countries, Trinbagonian culture is influenced by popular North American culture, particularly the aesthetics from television and film, music and social media of the United States of America. Whether their relative wealth impacts their consumption and tastes in the global marketplace, including consumption of media and foreign values, is important to consider in the socio-cultural landscape. For instance, foreign entertainment, and social and political arguments, both domestic and international programming about young women's roles may shape national identity. For example, Debra Curtis' (2009) ethnographic study of adolescent girls' sexuality on the island of

Nevis in the Eastern Caribbean notes that adolescents derive information about sex from shows and music, as well as their peers, thus developing ideas about their sexuality, through their intimate communities and an exposure to numerous global media sources. Despite a lack of public discourse about non-pathologized adolescent sexuality, and the drowning out of their voices by institutional forces, adolescents engage in sexual behavior, conceive desire and actualize these notions for better or worse.

It is important to understand the complexities of how people in postcolonial nations, particularly small nations consume, and internalize external messages. In *Decolonizing Theory*, feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty (2003) uses the term feminism without borders because, she says, it recalls doctors without borders, "an enterprise that embodies the urgency, as well as the internationalist commitment" (253). However, we are in a state of colonization so intense that those in the Caribbean may perhaps not see themselves as distinct from external social forces. Barriteau notes sensationalized media coverage of a "rabid spread of lesbianism", of teenage same-sex activities and of "reformed" lesbians repackaged as born-again Christians evidences a fear of women and girls "internalizing a sense of sexual autonomy" (322), a notion that is unsettling for the broader society (Barriteau, 2019). These messages may be imported by missionaries, or televangelists, or reflect some of the language implicit in international development; but if they are communicated by locals the lines between external and internal influences may be unclear. Transnational feminist scholars, Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty explore how women's labor is co-opted by nation states in the forming of a nationalist identity, but to the exclusion of marginalized groups of women deemed questionable, such as sex workers and lesbians. They cite Geraldine Heng's assessment that "it is not only around questions of sexuality and gender that nation states have structured their exclusions, however,

but also in relationship to race and class hierarchies... "of economic modernization, by sexualizing and commodifying women" (43).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the impacts of colonialism and neocolonialism on Caribbean society, and explored the many ways that the plantation system through deplorable conditions, policies and practices of violence and dehumanization impacted the women's lives in the anglophone Caribbean. Drawing on more contemporary examples of film in T&T I have argued that adolescent girls experience multiple forms of passive learning through media, discourse and literal images of how young women should negotiate sexual engagement and the values they should prioritize. It is important to contextualize the historical and contemporary socio-cultural landscape in which adolescent girls develop and understand their sexual selves. Consequently, I have discussed how economic and social policy and culture have shaped girls' ideas about sex, and the complex nature of economic and cultural factors that impact T&T society today. In the next chapter I will discuss the theoretical frameworks and orientations that have shaped my study design and methods of inquiry.

Chapter III

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical orientations and frameworks that shaped my research questions and methodological approaches for this study. I have engaged with Black feminist, decolonial, transnational and Caribbean feminist frameworks. Caribbean feminisms is fitting because my work examines the lived experiences of Caribbean girls. Black feminist theory offers a framework rooted in the language of intersectionality, that is applicable to women and girls in T&T and the anglophone Caribbean. I discuss the areas in which Caribbean feminists are theorizing on sexuality of Black women and girls is nascent, but where there may still be gaps. Transnational feminisms allows me to be reflexive, to move in and out of both spaces, and outside the hierarchical, geographic and socially constructed borders. Therefore, the framework is relevant to girls in a place where many can claim a grandparent from another island, and connections to geographies outside the region, ancestral and contemporary. A transnational feminist framework is also relevant for me as a Trinidadian American researcher who transcends both spaces, who is an insider-outsider in both spaces.

Caribbean Feminisms

To examine how young women and girls glean information from their social environments about sex and develop their own sexual agency I am a using Caribbean feminist framework primarily, with specific references throughout to transnational, post-colonial and Black feminist theory. Although I am distinguishing for the purpose of this dissertation between these theorizations there are several overlaps with regard to the issues and methods that these frameworks address. Caribbean feminists have always been interested in the ways in which historical contexts, particularly the legacy of colonization and plantation slavery in the

Caribbean, have shaped ideas about race and gender. Notable Barbadian scholar, Tonya Haynes, in her exploration of Caribbean feminisms considers the way women's or feminist movements in the Caribbean have shaped ideas about relationships and sexuality (2017). She notes, citing Alisa Trotz's (2004) work, how women's bodies have been used to signify the nation, resulting in gendered victimization. As a response those who are vulnerable or perceived as lacking in power or agency, have been conceptualized in the absence of sex. However, desire and interest, although often pathologized or suppressed, must exist for young women and girls in T&T. Their sense of a sexual self, their impetus to engage with that part of themselves, their ideas and sense of how they can actualize these thoughts and feelings is a form of sexual agency.

The pathologized frames through which adults view adolescent sexuality dominate discourse and influence the day-to-day experiences of adolescents. These frames minimize the importance of agency and behavioral or social factors that affect how adolescents interpret adult communication about sex, who they seek out for information, who they listen to and trust. Rather than emphasis on the behavioral and social contextualization of sexuality of young people, researchers and policy makers focus on studies of risk factors for HIV among African descendent Caribbean youth in low-income countries (Kempadoo, 2009). What results is a dialogue about sexual health, sexual determinism and agency that is buried in language of risk and medical concern (Morris, 2012; Kempadoo, 2009; Barriteau, 2013). Those in authority place their attention on the behaviors of adolescents who engage, or appear to engage in promiscuous behavior, behavioral acting out, or other behaviors deemed problematic. However, a lack of discourse about healthy, adaptive sexual development persists and affects the flow of information between potentially trustworthy adults (parents, health and education professionals) and youth. For instance, LGBTQ adolescents are likely to experience more sexual violence. But

their sexual behavior presents greater potential risk for because they are likely to engage in increased rates of sexual activity as they perceive a lower risk of contracting STDs or STIs, and elimination of risk of pregnancy. (Thoma et al, 2013; Ybarra et al 2016). However, non-heterosexual sex is omitted from public discourse about adolescent and young adult sex, while ignoring ideas of desire and intentionality.

Caribbean feminist scholars such as Barriteau (2019) and Kempadoo (2009) make a case for the privileging of not only male agency but young female sexual agency. Sexuality, desire, and interest in sex exist throughout the life course. Consequently, desire and interest, although often pathologized or suppressed, must exist for many, though not all, adolescent girls in T&T. Their sense of a sexual self, their impetus to engage with that part of themselves, their ideas and sense of how they can actualize these thoughts and feelings is a form of sexual agency. In her investigation of the erotic Barriteau (2012) utilizes Anna Jónasdóttir's (1994) work to explain the persistence of male domination as opportunistic, benefitting from them exploiting women's power of love. It is as if to say, women cede their power, for the sake of love. This ceding of power must occur with awareness and intention, and therefore is a manifestation of female agency in exchange for the types of intimacy they desire - an intimacy that is both emotional and physical, and perhaps manifests in other forms as well (Baldwin, 2012, 2014). In her research on professional Caribbean middle-class women, Andrea N. Baldwin (2012) demonstrates their status allows them a degree of autonomy and authority in their public lives, even though they still occupy positions of varying degrees of subordination in their private lives. However, Baldwin fails to address the negotiations women who are outside of these specific class and professional status identities make, thus leaving room for an exploration of negotiations that occur when age and class status might serve as limiting factors. This theorizing can be applied to

acknowledging the same agency and its existence in the life of young women or adolescent girls as coexisting congruent with their developing sense of self, and an emerging sexual agency. This lack of attention paid to young Caribbean women and girls presents a gap in the research that currently exists and has negative implications for our understanding of young girls and women's roles in shaping social culture. It is this gap which this research is intended to fill.

Social, economic and political considerations matter, as do the inner and interpersonal negotiations involved in navigating sexual agency. Such fundamental interpersonal exchanges have significant implications for diverse social contexts such as what intimate relationships to have, who is a "suitable" partner, how to carry oneself in society, what choices or behaviors, careers, including the ways that adolescent girls and young women presently and in the future navigate relationships, make decisions about their reproductive health and negotiate for their personal and professional rights. Understanding the nuances of young women's and girls' observances, interpretations and the decisions they make about sexual agency no doubt influences our understanding of young women's and girls' roles in shaping culture, in how we recognize and value their priorities and how we conceptualize health and social policy.

Although this project aims to cover new epistemological ground, the milieu of socio-cultural contexts that influence young women's and girls' sexual agency has been described in fiction and non-fiction works. Denise Narain (2002) examines post-colonial treatment of cultural identity in literary works that reflect on female sexuality. These fictionalized characterizations are based on realized composites of women and portray the angst and complexity of female Caribbean sexuality. As Narain notes, several notable Caribbean authors "outline the fear and shame surrounding their female protagonists at puberty when the full weight of their prospective gender roles hits them, the texts tend to foreground a resolution which hinges much more

strongly on notions of national/cultural identity than on sexual identity" (Narain, 2002, 341). The moral imperative in these texts to provide some sort of satisfactory closure on the issue of Caribbean cultural identity makes the accommodation of the figure of an adult, sexually active woman impossible. In other words, female sexuality appears not to be easily reconcilable within a nationalist project.

Denise Narain (2002) examines the themes of sex, love and loss in work of Antiguan author, Jamaica Kincaid whose characters articulate the devaluation of the girl child, women's limited social mobility, "and the limited spheres in which women can exercise power in their adult lives." (337) In examining Kincaid's literary treatment of the development of adolescent girls' sexuality Narain posits that Kincaid's definition of what it means to be a girl suggests that becoming a lady — as opposed to becoming a "slut" — is a "precarious balancing act in which the child must constantly police her sexuality and learn to service the needs of men" (337). For example, in Kincaid's work bodily changes restrict a girl's autonomy to express her selfhood as is evident in her character Annie in her work, *Annie John* (1985). In the novel, Annie transitions from her tomboy days as she enters puberty and her mother imposes the limits on how girls can express themselves physically, epitomizing the limitations mothers put on girls' bodily autonomy, and her embodiment of colonially inherited scripts of femininity "systematically renders ambivalent the mother's role as uniformly subservice of colonial values." (Narain, 2002, 336). Narain points out how the mother's attempts to control and suppress her daughter's burgeoning sexuality result in Annie's warped and damaged sense of her physical self. She critically observes herself in the mirror, attempts to diminish her hair, her nose, her cheeks, she hopes to hide her features, even thinks about getting clamps to sharpen her now seemingly broader nose. Because of her mother's negative attributions to her burgeoning sexuality, she,

"the mother", can only see her boldness, even imagined boldness as grotesque, slutty; and the protagonist internalizing these attributions, experiences dissonance, and perceives her body and her sexuality as shameful. Narain seeks an explanation in the dichotomous attitudes of explicit lasciviousness and the "Victorian prudery and decorousness" (336) that she argues contradict each other in Caribbean discourse on sex. "Clearly class is a deciding factor in the location one can occupy in this continuum; but across all classes, men unquestionably have a greater degree of sexual mobility and agency" (336). The novel intimately delves into a point in girls' physical and emotional development where the experiences of bodily autonomy, and development into womanhood, and the societal and personal messages they receive are perhaps crucial to how they contextualize their sexuality, how they relate to people, and whether or not they are empowered in taking up space in society.

When do adolescents recount their sexuality and how does that shape the ways in which they embody this power and relational skill set? Extrapolating from Narain's analysis, do young women and adolescent girls recall or recount their sexual engagement in ways that "assert control over the sexual situation and the telling of the situation" (340). This work matters because ignoring or erasing the narratives of agency and determinism among young women and girls is a form of violation. It robs them of the power to acknowledge their own pleasure, to be curious, and to determine what to do with those desires and when to do it. Narain's characterization of the young women in Kincaid's novels is that they tap into their feminine sexual power, claim control of it, defying their mother's and the men they encounter. They decide the purpose to which they would like to use their bodies, be it for sexual conquest, for exploration, to procreate or not to procreate, or simply for their own pleasure and introspection[3].

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[3] I understand that girls derive pleasure outside of sex and sexuality. I also recognize that some girls identify as asexual, or that is their experience even if they lack the language to articulate asexuality. In this dissertation the

But mothers are also engaging in a type of negotiation as well and because they are women, the overarching patriarchal systems construct ideas of appropriate othering as well as appropriate behavior for young women and girls. Mothers who are not unequivocally protecting their children, particularly their daughters, particularly their chastity and reputation, are characterized as villainous by society. But in the protection of their daughters are also seen as uncaring and cruel in those daughters' eyes, as illustrated in Kincaid's (1985) novel, *Annie John*.

Narain's invoking of young women's desire to employ power is important. In her analysis of Kincaid's novel, eponymously titled *Lucy*, to be desired, is powerful for the main protagonist. She is imbued with a sense of control "which she exploits fully, disengaging herself from any of the emotions, such a love, with which women are conventionally meant to (over)invest sex" (341). In Kincaid's characterization Lucy defies the typical expectations of women, feeling envious of her friend who feels disgusted or ambivalent for receiving money from a man for fondling her, whereas Lucy is envious. The idea of the chaste, reactive, or hopeful and appeasing "good" Caribbean girl is disrupted in Kincaid's imagining.

Transnational Feminisms

Transnational feminists Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty offer transnational feminism as a way of thinking about women irrespective of geographic boundaries, in similar contexts but different geographies across the world as opposed to thinking about all women across the globe as a non-descript other. This framework allows an understanding and integration of a diversity of traits among unequal people in unequal relationships, as opposed to contrasting with a singular dominant (US-oriented, and thus Eurocentric, heteronormative) culture. It is important in considering the interconnected relationship among people in the

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questions I am seeking to answer are concerned with those were have been raised as girls and who experience sexual attraction and desire, who experience pleasure from that desire.

Caribbean, and with external territories that have influence over their ways of life, particularly, those in North America and the US. My own positionality as a woman whose lived experiences and identities encompass the experiences of an insider and an outsider in the society that I am investigating is relevant. Transnational feminists critique a top-down hierarchical research positioning the researcher in both "class" and geographic space. A transnational frame allows for a cross-pollinating of my research with Black feminist work which has been more recently (as opposed to historically) focused on sexuality in different ways than in the Caribbean, and that are important for my project. As I am working with adolescent girls in the Caribbean, I am utilizing transnational feminist frameworks because they lend themselves to an integrated and complex understanding of gender and the society. Integral to transnational feminisms is an understanding of positionalities, boundaries and barriers, thus bridging a gap that might arise between Caribbean and Black feminist theorizing. I am also aware of ways that my positionalities, as a Black feminist who was born in the US, and raised in the US and Caribbean might influence how I am doing this research. A transnational feminist perspective lends itself to navigating this, which I will address further my methodology section.

Black Feminisms

While there has been recent progress in the Caribbean around research about agency and sexuality (Barriteau, 2012; Baldwin, 2013; Haynes, 2017), there is still a gap as mentioned earlier that does not address how young women and girls actualize their agency and sexuality; how they give voice to their innate desires and speak back in opposition to the dominant voices that presume to speak for them. Through shared experience of the ravages of chattel slavery and plantation society, Black feminists' experiences encapsulate Black women's resistance to a silencing of marginalized voices. Spillers (1987) argues that our characterizations of Black

women are prejudiced and fanciful, a byproduct of our bizarre preconceptions of them, and so deeply tied to ideologies that are so contrived and harmful, it is nearly impossible for Black women to free themselves of the tropes and negative stereotypes. She critiques public policy, notably the Moynihan Report (1965)[4], as a naming of Black women that is damaging and lacks basis in reality or history. She states "[e]mbedded in a bizarre axiological ground, they demonstrate a sort of telegraphic coding; they are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean" (257).

Black feminist scholar, Evelyn Hammonds (2004) argues that race has "a powerful effect on the construction and representation of gender and sexuality" (302). She says that it is treated with silence, an attempt to limit rhetoric on "so-called deviant sexuality in public discourse (however), its submersion in private spaces for people of color is never addressed" (303). Silence robs Black women, particularly those women who are marginalized, of an opportunity to assert their freedom to embrace diverse forms of sexual expression.

Black women confront multiple identities and subject positions that may not necessarily epitomize their reality and against which they may rebel or at the very least demand interrogation. Hammond argues that "Black feminists must reclaim sexuality through the creation of a counter narrative that can reconstitute a present Black female subjectivity and that includes an analysis of power relations between white and Black women and among different groups of Black women (305)." Her ideas about a nuanced approach to female sexuality that resists the narrative of a monolithic group of Black women can be extrapolated to T&T society.

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[4] Negro Family: The Case For National Action (1965), commonly known as the Moynihan Report was ostensibly written by Assistant Secretary for Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan to address economic inequality for Black Americans. However its focus on Black family structure to explain persistent structural inequalities produced by historical marginalization, lack of clarity and contractions made the report controversial. Many argued that it allowed conservatives to reinforce racial stereotypes and that President Linden Johnson's lack of follow-through on the report frustrated many in the civil rights movement who pushed for change.

Consequently, it is imperative to examine what power relations exist between Black and East Indian young women, or along the continuum of race and color spectra that people identify in Trinbagonian society; the communication of power relations between working class and middle-class women, urban and rural women. Particularly in my study, what do adolescent girls make of these articulations of power, how do their subject positions as adolescent girls impact their meaning making and actions pertaining to sex?

Hammond has theorized that "historically, Black women have reacted to this repressive force of the hegemonic discourses on race and sex with silence, secrecy, and a partially self-chosen invisibility" (2004, 305). Black feminist theorists, historians, literary critics, sociologists, lawyers, and cultural critics have drawn upon a specific historical narrative that purportedly describes the factors that have produced and maintained perceptions of Black women's sexuality (including their own). Three themes emerge in this history: first, the construction of the Black female as the embodiment of sex and the attendant invisibility of Black women as the un-voiced, unseen everything that is not white; second, the resistance of Black women both to negative stereotypes of their sexuality and to the material effects of those stereotypes on their lives; and finally, the evolution of a "culture of dissemblance" and a "politics of silence" by Black women on the issue of their sexuality. (Hammond, 305, 2014)."

Historians like Darlene Clark Hine (1989) and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1992) argue that Black women's silence established a culture of dissemblance which was used to resist against violence and hegemonic constructions of Black women's sexuality. Coupled with a promotion of proper Victorian morality, this practice allowed them to maintain autonomy over some aspects of their lives. However, these strategies ultimately harmed women who didn't conform to the standards and ideals of propriety, namely poor women, queer women, young

women. One of the most enduring and problematic aspects of the "politics of silence" is that in choosing silence Black women also lost the ability to articulate any conception of their sexuality. This is true too in the Caribbean – a region where, owing to the influence of British colonialism, Victorian ideals predominated societal mores. Silence about sexuality, erasure of discourse on the sexuality of women with marginalized identities does not mean it ceases to exist. When considering the sexual agency of adolescent girls' women in T&T how do they understand and articulate their sexuality in a post-colonial society where "decency" and a performance of piety are valued? Arguably women perform most caregiving of girls; consequently, girls may see themselves in negotiations of intimacy in the ways that their mothers do and internalize the body politics of women who have learnt and communicated that decency is the appropriate form of womanhood. Therefore, I ask, where do girls locate themselves in a society that does not even have open, meaningful discussions about sex? How do adolescent girls relate to the cultural norms and societal expectations regarding sexual behavior, how do they negotiate within the existing social structure and what new contexts do they create? One space where we can interrogate the impact of body politics is in the discourse and evolutions of young women's participation in Trinidad Carnival. Edmonson (2003) says that archetypes of womanhood come from representations in carnival and "civic organizations of uplift" (2). Carnival, African, banal, ritualistic and primitive in the eyes of colonial power, could only be seen by those with a voice to shape society, as debase. Women's participation outside of the elite beauty pageants sponsored by the merchant class, was considered improper, and the reputation garnered from participation in carnival in the 19th century further solidified Black women's place among the jamettes, as carnival groups were on the periphery of polite society. These perspectives rewarded respectable women or those aspiring to be respectable for conforming to standards of respectability while

eschewing sexualized, or "debased" public performances. What that means is there was considerable push for women to alienate themselves from many aspects of the erotic.

Black feminist author Audre Lorde describes the erotic as one of the many powers we have, "a deeply female and spiritual plane" (1984, 53) that we have had to suppress in the midst of oppression. Lorde's idea of the erotic transcends the sexual, it is not to be conflated with pornography, which she says, is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, a suppression of true feeling. The erotic taps into our creative power, our emotional selves. It taps into our attitudes, intentions, and our deepest feelings about what we do, and how we are doing it, particularly if we are attuned to it – "the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge" (56). Thus, her theorizing on the erotic gets at the core of self-awareness and thus links our feelings to the many ways we manifest agency. Using the erotic then may illustrate how young women and girls tap into their creative energies to understand themselves apart from childish conceptualizations, and to connect with their evolving selves – a powerful thing for those with limited power.

Lorde's beliefs about the force of the erotic to empower us are antithetical to the messages adults typically project to young women and girls. As women's and girls' empowerment have become buzzwords in modern society; notably as problematic strategy of international gender development work (Cronin-Furman, Gowrinathan, and Zakaria, 2017), and work centered on the lives of marginalized communities; institutions and people with power have embraced young women in (circumscribed) leadership positions, but not necessarily embraced empowerment about sex and sexuality.

Since Lorde's writings in 1978, more contemporary work by Black feminists such as Joan Morgan (2015), Britney Cooper (2018) and Tressie McMillian Cottom (2019) have theorized about young women's employment of the erotic to seek fulfilment and liberation.

Morgan (2015), who like Lorde is of Caribbean descent, expresses "a commitment to reframe the existing narrative about black female sexuality by positioning desire, agency and black women's engagements with pleasure as a viable theoretical paradigm." She writes feminist scholars cannot only talk about inequality, we need to elevate discourse on Black female sexual pleasure and make it relevant to Black women who show up in a multitude of identities - poor and working class, LGBTQ, religious, nonreligious, and in diverse geographical, sociocultural spaces, moving past that damage to claim pleasure. In her (2018) memoir, *Eloquent Rage*, feminist scholar Brittney Cooper states that we cannot have a healthy sense of self without the freedom to pursue sexual pleasure. Morgan underscores her declaration that "there is no justice for black women without pleasure" (Cooper, 36 in Morgan, 2015).

Intersectionality

To gain a thick description of sexual agency of girls in T&T, I have employed an intersectional analysis by expanding the experiential base from which my theoretical frame is grounded, centering poor and marginalized girls rather than one privileged group, such as, older women or privileged, middle class young women and girls in T&T. Several Black feminist scholars and activists have contributed to the knowledge of intersecting vectors of oppression that face Black women and other women of color. Black feminist and political activist Frances Beale's 1969 pamphlet entitled *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female* was the nucleus for a later essay where she describes the multitude of ways in which the intersecting oppressions of race, class and gender magnify experiences of inequality for Black women. Beale identified capitalism as an oppressive force denying Black men an opportunity to earn a living, and a system that economically exploited and physically assaulted Black women.

In 1974 the Combahee River Collective issued a statement that was pivotal in shaping feminist political discourse as an active commitment to the struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression. Not only did the Combahee statement emphasize activism, but it asserted the need to develop integrated analysis based on the interlocking systems of oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) employment of legal frameworks crystallized these ideas that described the multi-dimensionality of Black women's experiences as being distorted by the single axis with which society views our experiences. That society views disadvantage occurring along one dimension and erases the combined effect of both race and gender discrimination. By minimizing or eliminating the combined impact of race and gender Black women are multiply burdened, sidelined in feminist theory because of it (1989). Patricia Hill Collins (1990) describes race, class and gender as "interlocking systems of oppression" that affect many aspects of women's existence. Intersectional analysis is not a novel concept for Caribbean feminists. Edith Clark's (1957) book, *My Mother Who Fathered Me* explored the complexities of marriage, child rearing and kinship care, integrating observations of how class -- poverty and social standing affected the sexual lives and the ability to survive for families in three different communities in Jamaica. Caribbean feminists have also used intersectional analysis to examine the lives of women in historical and contemporary island society (Reddock, 1985, Mohammed, 1998; Barriteau, 2012; 2019).

Through this project I have sought to highlight the complex ways that adolescent girls in T&T navigate developing their own sense of sexual agency, the ways in which they understand desire and intimacy and the ways in which they act upon their ideas, feelings and opinions. To emulate Odette Parry's (2002) work on gender differences in education in the Caribbean sexual agency, intimacy, relational interaction does not occur in a vacuum, but is influenced by history,

biology, culture and socioeconomics, which demands that we situate the development of sexual agency in the context of "cultural expectations, and wider societal structures which operate as mediators of power and social control" (93). As such, peer and family groups, institutional systems, and popular media shape adolescent girls' attitudes and beliefs about sex in T&T society.

I elicited articulations of adolescent girls' desire and made connections between their understanding of their sense of self, their sense of place, their understanding of society's beliefs about their sexuality and how they impute those ideas into their own behavior as it pertains to sexuality. This study focuses exclusively on adolescent girls in T&T across socio-economic strata as a means of understanding the nuanced approach to sexual agency in that country. Because this work is about understanding emerging sexual identity through an empowered lens, it does not directly address issues of trauma, oppressive paradigms of sexual engagement or sexual agency for more mature women. My intention is that this initial work allows me to expand the investigation to older groups of women to understand how sexual agency develops throughout the life course, and to extrapolate from a Trinidad and Tobago context to a Caribbean and transnational perspective.

Formulation of Research Questions

In the subsequent chapter I shall elaborate on the research questions that shaped the structured interviews and the methodological approach that framed this study. Here I would like to explain how the research questions were formulated based on key points from the literature. In examining adolescent girls' sexual agency, I have conducted an inquiry into whether and how adolescent girls have ideas or opinions of their own about sexuality both broadly and about themselves – their own values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior. In order to do that it is necessary

to examine the genesis of their understandings of sexual attraction. It is also necessary to understand how culture and society – through the prism of institutions such as family, church, education – shape their understanding and articulation of their sexuality.

Key Points from the Literature

This work seeks to understand agency from adolescents' and young women's perspectives. It is a sociological exploration into the world of young women and girls as they begin to see themselves as sexual beings, to have interests or desires for partnership that are both emotional and physical. I used semi-structured interviews to examine the ways young girls in T&T think, speak and communicate with each other (their peers) and with others (adults they engage with in institutions and personally) about sex, about their collective attitudes and behaviors in society. I wanted understand the broader social structures that shape the ways young girls and young women navigate the intangible sexual spaces - female adolescent attraction and dating behavior; female adolescent sexual behavior; the language and contexts they use and the socio-political forces that influence their ideas and behaviors. In her work, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks (1984) asserts that rebellion can come in the wake of any opposing environment, describing how she arrived at feminist consciousness in the patriarchal household of her upbringing choosing higher education against patriarchal beliefs of her parents that as a woman she did not deserve education or that it would undermine her identity as "real" woman. So too, young women and girls can develop ideas about their sexuality and define or enact agency consequentially or despite their formative environments, and certainly rebel against firm lessons if they exist. Desire and interest, although often pathologized or suppressed by adults, must exist for young women and girls in T&T. Their sense of a sexual self, their impetus

to engage with that part of themselves, their ideas and sense of how they can actualize these thoughts and feelings is a form of sexual agency.

Rationale

In my former role as a psychotherapist, clients frequently introduced conversations about sex and sexuality into the therapeutic space in the context of development in the life course, in relation to problems in primary relationships - with partners or caregivers, and as part of trauma work. The limited conceptualization and allowance of space to envision and articulate women's sexual agency is not a problem exclusive to young women and girls, but as they typically have the least power in society, there is more at stake. Rarely do adult caregivers talk to teens about intimacy, and rarely do young women and girls communicate their thoughts or desires to trusted adults. Similarly, women, particularly young adult women, do not always feel comfortable exploring or articulating their sexual agency and the varied ways it manifests in their life. Particularly for adolescent girls, discussion of anything sexual is treated with suspicion, umbrage or contempt. Although current negative commentary about rap music motifs is equally focused on fat body politics and racial politics in casting, there is as expected, a discourse on propriety. The irony of public discourse is that it fails to challenge the real power of men while simultaneously ignoring the ways in which adolescents' attitudes, beliefs and behaviors around sexual intimacy might be considered agentic.

Sex Education

As mentioned previously, the discourse around young women and sex speaks primarily about pathological actions, framing women as victims or indecent, misguided youth, even when the problem centers sexual activity with girls below the age of consent. Citing 2014 data from the Central Statistical Office of T&T (CSO), the Family Planning Association of Trinidad &

Tobago (FPATT) issued a statement in one of the daily newspapers stressing the crucial need for

sex education in schools. The data in question evidenced that between 2008 and 2013, 2000

teenage girls gave birth to 2638 children, 15% of all births, during the period reported. Stressing

the urgency of interventions FPATT argued that "pregnancy in adolescence places an

insurmountable barrier in the young woman's path to competent adulthood" (Fraser, 2014).

There was no mention of the role of fathers in exemplifying competent adulthood. At a meeting

of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services (in the Trinidad and Tobago Senate) senators

discussed data from the 2014 to 2018 period reflected there were 3,777 teenage pregnancies,

with an average of 62 teenagers getting pregnant every month. Over one third or 1,395 of the

pregnancies were cases of statutory rape involving adult men between the ages of 20 and 30 and

expectant mothers who were minors (Ramdass, 2019). Medical practitioners argue sometimes

pregnant teenage mothers refuse to provide accurate information as to the identity of the fathers,

thus making it more difficult to investigate or enforce statutory rape laws. At that meeting

representatives from FPATT who were invited to comment, again stressed the need for sex

education in schools, citing an incidence of a teenager who had been in self-imposed fast because

her father threatened to poison her when he found out she was sexually active (Neaves, 2019).

Between those two meetings the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Midwives (TTAM) cited

legislative roadblocks that limited their capacity to provide comprehensive and affirming

reproductive care for teens. Marcia Rollock, secretary of the TTAM asked "How do we provide

care and not break the law? Do we provide this care and information they seek, or do we tell

them to go get their parents and risk losing them, (thus) making them vulnerable to STDs?"

(2019) She urged the Ministry of Planning and the Office of the Attorney General to amend laws

to enable adolescents to receive better reproductive and sexual health and information services, underscoring that these are human rights.

Although minors lack legal self-governance and cannot legally consent to sex with an adult, the intentionally evasive behavior of pregnant teens and the behavior of teens independently seeking sexual and reproductive health care could suggest agentic behavior. Yet public conversations about the preponderance of predatory relations between adolescent girls and older males, and high rates of teenage pregnancies suggest a misalignment between societal attitudes about adolescent sex and youths' actual behaviors and beliefs. Often parents and adults in caregiving roles, or adults with power to make decisions about adolescent lives have discomfort conceptualizing adolescent sexuality, acknowledging its existence and addressing the demands of communicating effectively with adolescents. Consequently, the few initiatives meant to address adolescent sexual health (largely to address excessive promiscuity or teenage pregnancy) fall short. As Kempadoo (2009) states, "The overriding trend in studies of adolescent sex is the uncritical problematization of young people's sexual praxis, accompanied by a search for methods to curb or end youthful sexual expressions though ABC campaigns and religious, parental, or school instruction" (7).

Moreover, this modern discourse omits an understanding of the needs and concerns of adolescents themselves and ignores the most marginalized and vulnerable - poor youth, youth of color, LGBT youth. As Fine and McClellan state, "Little has actually been heard from young women who desire pleasure, an education, freedom from violence, a future, intimacy, an abortion, safe and affordable childcare for their babies, or health care for their mothers (300)." To that end, one of my goals is to ask adolescents about their own perceptions of adult communication, both in intimate spaces - with family members and teachers, adults in their

community, as well as the messages they receive from the broader society. It is important to consider ways that adult perceptions and communication influence adolescent perceptions of censure, or the ways that caregiver unresponsiveness, ignorance or ineptitude and or support affects adolescent and young adult decision-making and behavior.

Conceptual Framework

This study will be qualitative, using a predominantly Caribbean feminist framework while also utilizing a transnational feminist and Black feminist framework. It is   aimed at understanding the roles of gender, race, and class in lived experiences of sexuality among adolescent girls and young women in T&T. It elevates their voices and contributes essential knowledge about important themes and trends in the lives of young women in the Caribbean. For the purpose of this study intangible aspects of sexual agency include ideas, attitudes and beliefs about personal sexual behavior and sexual identity, and ideas, attitudes and beliefs about sexual desire, intimacy, and behavior in society. Tangible aspects of sexual agency will be considered behaviors relevant to sexual desire intimacy and sexual identity, such as voicing one's sexual interest or desires, thoughts or intentions about sexual activity, whether to engage or abstain from sex, articulations and actions pertaining to intimacy and sexual desire. It is important to note that these ideas and beliefs can exist without individuals being involved in sexual intercourse.

Key Terms

Sexual Agency

Sexual agency is the embodiment of intellectual and emotional knowledge and desire combined with a sense of empowerment to actualize one's desires. Curtain et al (2011) describe sexual agency as sexual self-efficacy as well as lesser studied components such as sexual knowledge and sexual embodiment (women's feelings about their bodies during sexual encounters) (49).

Rosamond King, in her (2014) work, *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination* uses the term to describe "the activity of women voicing, advocating for, and/or pursuing control of their own sexuality or erotic pleasure on their own terms" (124). King's characterization succinctly captures the ideas, intentions and desires of women and girls as they navigate social landscapes of intimacy, body politics and actualization of their sexual autonomy. Notably she argues that it is for heterosexual women, whose "gender identity and sexual orientation are not inherently transgressive", that sexual agency is paramount (124). In that vein, I argue that adolescent and young adult women's sexual agency is considered equally transgressive as it defies well-established patriarchal mores and colonial rules of knowing one's place and performing piety and decency (Narain, 2002; Plaza, 2020).

Intimacy

There is little consistent view on the concept of intimacy, even in work that purports to explore the concept. Barriteau (2019) in examining sexuality, intimacy and power among Caribbean women, speaks about "privatised and politicized sexual relations" and "intimate sexual relations" (301). Kempadoo focuses on a range of emotional and physical exchanges. Noting the limits of extant research, she surmises that says the terms love, sexual desire and sexual passion are excised from typical studies that address sexuality in the Caribbean. However, there is a shift in how researchers have begun to think about how emotions accompany sexual expression. More and more scholars in the field of Caribbean sexualities are recognizing the importance of investigating feelings of intimacy, trust, sharing and respect. Laina Bay Cheng (2003) specifies the need to examine adolescent "sexual desire and pleasure, as distinct from emotional intimacy" (66). For the purposes of my study, I am interested in young women and girls' attitudes, thoughts and behaviors for why they pursue intimate relationships or exchanges

influenced by sexual desire. I define intimacy here as that which is both sexual and non-sexual: thoughts and ideas that are motivated by sexual desire including those where young women actively chose to not engage in sexual intercourse.

Chapter IV
Methodology

Introduction

This dissertation examines the sexual agency of adolescent girls in T&T. To do so, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with adolescent girls between the ages of 12 and 17 years old residing in Trinidad. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the research questions that guide this study are:

(i) How do young women and girls identify and articulate their sexuality? (ii) How do culture and society shape their understanding and articulation of their sexuality? (iii) Specifically, what are adolescent girls' perceptions of communication about sex, both in intimate spaces — with family members and peers – and publicly – with teachers, adults in their community, and messages from the broader society? (iv) When and how do adolescents recount their sexuality, if they do at all, and how does that shape the ways in which they embody their sexual agency? How do they negotiate within the limits of society, and navigate the evolution of their developing sexual agency? Extrapolating from Denise Narain's (2002) analysis, do young women and adolescent girls recall or recount their sexual engagement in ways that "assert control over the sexual situation and the telling of the situation" (340). Do adolescents have any thoughts or opinions of their own about sexuality both broadly and about themselves - their own values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior?

In the remainder of this chapter, I address the methodological procedures involved in this study. In the first section I address Black feminist theorizing on sociological knowledge creation. In the second section I discuss how my theoretical framework connects to the empirical methods used in this study. This work is guided by feminist theoretical frameworks; therefore, the methodological approach is mindful my positionalities as a researcher, the historical and social

contexts that affect the people in the research site, and the exigencies of their current lived experiences. As I have sought to integrate Trinbagonian adolescent girls into my scholarly project I am conscientious about the methods I use to conduct this work. In advocating for a Caribbean feminist methodology Baldwin and Cossy (2018) herald Audre Lorde's mandate for feminists to go beyond the academic space in pursuit of knowledge and in order to contribute to the intellectual tradition. They urge us to innovate in Caribbean feminist knowledge making and to utilize these need methods as modes for change. In my project I decenter the customary authorities in society to amplify young voices, and youth's meaning making of the adult world. To seek knowledge outside academia "we must devise methods to engage with other knowledge that can act as a focal point for change in the way Caribbean feminism is practiced and can help to resist normativity within Caribbean feminism" (Baldwin and Cossy, 2018, 195). Finally, in the fourth section I conclude with a brief summary of the information presented.

Decolonial Black Feminist Theorizing on Sociological Knowledge Creation

Saidiya Hartman in *Venus in Two Acts* (2008) posits that the way Black people show up in the archives is distorted and dismembered. Feminist scholars from the global south have often critiqued how feminists from the imperial north have framed women and girls from the 'third world' as a monolithic group, in need of intervention and salvation in the form of development projects, capacity building and charity. That characterization negatively impacts decolonial Black feminist knowledge creation (Baldwin, 2013). It is a powerful framing that ratifies the ownership of knowledge and knowledge creation outside of the global south. I would argue that the Caribbean, once the site of wealth that built the modern industrial West, is now perceived not even as a site in need of intervention, but more as a trifle, a space for respite, color and fun. Caribbean feminist scholars Andrea Baldwin and Marva Cossy (2018) argue that feminist scholarship itself

is a form of resistance that "is produced, transmitted and pursued by complementing and transforming other modes" (195). My subjectivities as a Trinidadian American woman overlap with my participants – I grew up as a Black girl in T&T, under the influence of the same educational and religious systems that these girls experience. However, I am still an adult researcher from the global north. Therefore, in this dissertation I am drawing not from an archive where Black girls' representation is nothing but an encounter with power (Hartman, 2008), but centering their knowledge. Knowledge creation in this project is a caring interrogation of the afterlife of slavery, an annotation and redaction (Sharpe, 2016) of the way the Black girl's place in Caribbean sociological epistemologies is framed. Having encountered the epistemologies that imperialist history has given us, I am going into society, specifically appealing to my community for girls to tell their own stories. Thus, this study aims to draw from Trinibagonian girls' lived experiences as a case study for girls in the Caribbean.

Baldwin[5] describes an affective archive – a way of feeling and doing that evinces ways of understanding which are unique to Black people. Thus, there are ways of knowing that are particular to Blackness, Black girlness, Caribbean girlness, Trinidadian girlness and not present in traditional archives, not even considered knowledge. Affect gets lost in the archives because Caribbean girls, also subject to racial, class and age marginalizations, are largely written out. Yet these knowledges affect how girls in the Caribbean interpret, shape and make meaning of society. Their articulations though youthful, perhaps innocent and not yet fully formed, signal that they understand their lived experiences as both autonomous and constantly engaging with systems of power. Their agentic behavior is knowing, mediated by an esoteric affective archive and their engagement with communal and state systems of power. I am consequently engaging with a type

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[5] (personal communication, 2021)

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of affective archive in a manner that privileges adolescent girls' knowledge creation. This method is directly connected to my methodological research practices and the types of care with which I engage when conducting my research. I articulate these ideals by utilizing Caribbean and Black feminist epistemologies to shape the orientation and methodological framework. For instance, philosopher Michel Foucault's *"The History of Sexuality"* is considered a foundational text on Western sexuality. However, Foucault situated his arguments first in Victorian era sensibilities – in an era in which people from the region of interest to me had not yet been forcibly made a part of Caribbean civilization, or if there, they were treated as commodities. Thus, a re-centering is imperative, because when we define social constructs simply based on the extant data we often exclude marginalized groups, or our conclusions are circular, drawing us back to epistemologies that do not represent us (McKittrick, 2021).

Material and Discursive Conditions

What discourse is there for those whose humanity is barely considered valid? Black and Caribbean feminist scholars have theorized the many ways that Black women and girls ontologically incised from social science and historical discourse. Saidiya Hartman (2008) asks how do we re-write and chronicle the Black people when there is a scarcity of recording their lives or their suffering? Christina Sharpe (2016) says that "those of us who teach, write, and think about slavery and its afterlives encounter myriad silences and ruptures in time, space, history, ethics, research, and method as we do our work." (12). Philosopher, Sylvia Wynter posits that the Western bourgeois conception of human over represents itself" (260) while placing indigenous, Indian and Black people at the nadir of civilization. If "the Black girl in the archive is little more than a register of her encounter with power" (Hartman, 2008, 7) how can we begin to examine the discursive conditions of Black girl life? From what archive or what discourse on adolescent girls in T&T do

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we draw our epistemological moorings? Discursive conditions are the situational contexts, orientations, or arrangements in which discourses are taken up. They shape the particular ways we understand, talk about and embody certain topics (Bondy 2011). Eudine Barriteau (2003) posits that gender systems in Caribbean society evidence the asymmetrical power relations that are both material and ideological in nature. Disparities in access to material and non-material resources affect the lived experiences of women and tell us about how power and status are conceived, maintained, and articulated. Since the lives and experiences of adolescent girls in T&T are under-represented in the archive, this study serves to generate a narrative on the discursive conditions of adolescent girls in this particular setting.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Caribbean scholars discuss how women's sexual and external behavior are framed in terms of health, or the validity of the nation. Kempadoo (2009) describes the conditions in which discourse about adolescent sex occurs in the Caribbean, and I would argue, in many countries classified as the developing, racialized or under-resourced territories. Her critique lies in the medicalization, pathologizing of adolescent sex, and discourse around HIV and pregnancy prevention. Similarly, women and girls' behavior in the public sphere is co-opted as a national project, a measure of postcolonial worthiness for self-governance (Edmonson, 2003) and to be employed as an economic agent to satisfy the imperialist appetite or to define good citizenship in heteropatriarchal terms (Alexander, 2005). Therefore, Caribbean girls' sexual behavior has the potential to disrupt development status, or negatively impact health indicators – a framing that perhaps denies agency and even humanity.

Sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins (1989) talks about how Black women's unique standpoint positions them to experience victimization due to race, gender and class. For this reason, African American women's strategies for resistance to these interlocking systems of oppression have been

pivotal to Black feminist theorizing. Consequently, "the social, cultural, political and economic resources" (Bondy, 2011, 7) that shape Black women's and girls' roles in society constitute their material conditions. Black women's political and economic status – as women having greater burdens of unpaid, reproductive work, earning unequal pay, their communities, relationships and experiences "stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality" (Collins, 1989, 748). One could argue that as Black women's consciousness is shaped by their material conditions, so too are Black girls' and Caribbean girls' consciousness is shaped by their material conditions.

Methods of Empirical Research

In this section I have provided a detailed description of the processes involved in conducting this research. The purpose of this project was to understand how adolescent girls in T&T think about their sexuality based on messaging from their community and broader society; to examine what influences their attitudes and beliefs about sex; and how their decisions and agentic behaviors are predicated on the societal attitudes and beliefs communicated about sex. It uses sociological and feminist frameworks to understand the socioeconomic and experiential factors that influence adolescent girls' sexual agency. This project is important because it fills a gap in the research literature on adolescent sexuality in the Caribbean, specifically in T&T, and seeks to frame adolescent girls' attitudes, beliefs and decisions about sexuality in an affirming and non-medicalized or pathological manner. I utilize a qualitative approach that involves audio interviews with 25 girls ages 12-17 years old in T&T.

The Case Study

The case study method is popular in intersectional feminist research because it allows for identification of a group that might be invisible because of their position at the intersection of

multiple identities (McCall, 2005). It provides a more nuanced approach to understanding the complexities and uniqueness of the group's experience illuminating group diversity and difference. Thus, the narratives or cases of people in the group are a cohort or time-bound and illustrate novel ways of understanding their complex social location and perspectives, and "the partial crystallization of social relations in the identities of particular social groups" (McCall, 2005, 1781). Gender, age, social class, even national or regional location are intersecting categories that allow for an intensive study of the participants. Case studies allow an intense investigation of a small group of cases. Case study research lends itself to a focus on the details of a group of individuals classified as similar, linking their actions to structures that exist and processes that occur on a larger scale (Neuman, 2011). In the case of my study an examination of the sexual agency of adolescent girls in T&T facilitates a demonstration of how social forces produce effects in this setting. It is expected that the case study can then be utilized to link micro level processes occurring in T&T to macro structures in the Caribbean region at large, particularly in the anglophone Caribbean region that shares a history of British colonialism, diplomatic and trade agreements and environmental conditions in contemporary space.

Sites

In January of 2022 I recruited research participants from communities all over Trinidad. The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is the southernmost nation in the Caribbean, located in the Lesser Antilles 81 miles south of Grenada and 7 miles from the northeastern coast of Venezuela (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021). The nation consists of two main islands – Trinidad (1,850 square miles) and Tobago (115 square miles) – and several smaller ones. Trinidad is the largest island, the most populous and is the seat of government, economic and industrial center of the nation. With an estimated population of 1.4 million people T&T is ethnically, socio-

economically and culturally diverse. People of Indian and African descent are the largest ethnic groups in the nation at 37.6% and 36.3 % respectively. Among other groups 24.4% are of mixed heritage; 7.66% identify as Dougla (of Indian and African origin), 0.65% European; 0.06% Portuguese; 0.30% Chinese; 0.11% Indigenous Amerindian; and 0.08% Arab. As such people adhere to a variety of religious traditions including with 63.2% who identify as Christians; 20.4% as Hindus; 5.6% Muslim; 2.5% identifying as no religion; and 10.8% other, including individuals of traditional African religions, Buddhism and the Bahai faith (Trinidad and Tobago Central Statistical Office, 2011). Trinidad was settled or colonized by the Spanish from 1498 until 1797 when the British invaded. Tobago, colonized by the Dutch, Courlanders and the British, was annexed to Trinidad in 1899 (Brereton, 1979). The nation received its independence from the United Kingdom in 1962.

The petrochemical industry is the main driver of T&T's economy making it one of the wealthiest and most developed countries with one of the highest gross national incomes in Latin America and the Caribbean. Petroleum and petrochemical industries account for about 37 percent of GDP, and oil and gas accounts for over 70 percent of exports, but only 5% of employment (World Bank, 2015 data). T&T has also become a major financial center and manufacturer and supplier of food, beverage and cement in the Caribbean (World Bank, 2015). The country has a relatively reliable, modern and comprehensive telecommunications infrastructure with two major internet and mobile service providers, one jointly owned by the government of T&T and the publicly traded company, Cable and Wireless, the other a Caribbean based provider operating in markets worldwide. T&T is a very connected society with high mobile phone and social media usage, and entertainment consumption, particularly from the United States (Datareportal, 2021). It is also deeply connected transnationally to places in North

America and the United Kingdom with large populations of Caribbean immigrants "because of population and cultural presence, as well as long histories of migration and transnational flows" (Nixon and King, 2021, 270).

The capital of T&T is located in the northwest, as are several urban communities, whereas there are more suburban communities in an area called the East-West corridor that stretches across the northern part of Trinidad, and suburban or rural communities in the south and northeast. Parliament, main offices of the various ministries of government, and headquarters of many major businesses and financial institutions are located in the capital. Although the primary source of wealth comes from the extraction of oil and gas in south Trinidad and marine fields predominantly in the southwest, much of the governance, commercial, higher-educational and cultural infrastructure are concentrated in northern Trinidad near the capital of Port-of-Spain. Consequently, when researchers recruit participants, unless their subject matter focuses specifically on a rural area or a region distant from the capital, there is a tendency to sample primarily from urban areas (Noel, 2019). This approach may yield an unrepresentative sampling of young women and girls in T&T. Thus, my goal was to recruit from a variety of locations to engage a broad and more representative sample of girls.

The adolescent girls who participated in my study came from a fairly wide geographic area of Trinidad. There were ten girls from three different communities in southwestern Trinidad, two girls from central Trinidad, three girls from the suburban areas between south and central Trinidad, three girls from north Trinidad, two girls from communities in the far northeast, four girls from east Trinidad and one girl from west Trinidad. Due to safety measures based on the incidence of covid-19 cases I decided not to travel to Tobago to interview participants. I engaged contacts from Tobago living in Trinidad in an attempt to recruit girls of Tobagonian

origin living in or visiting Trinidad; however, given the time constraints I was unable to do so. It was important to include young women and girls from different geographical locations because they provide a more nuanced perspective of social, cultural and class differences on the island. When I conducted my interviews, some students were on vacation, and for some who had returned to school the format was virtual or with varying forms of in-person attendance such as alternate days for older students. Since in-person options were announced last year, schools have employed a hybrid approach to education – virtual for younger students, and in-person for older students, who have access to vaccinations.

Negotiating Access

I began reaching out to people in my personal and professional networks in T&T in the autumn of 2021 to share my desire to do research about adolescent girls. At that time, I was simply gauging whether I would be able to communicate with a diverse group of adolescent girls through these networks and what type of recruitment strategies would be most suitable. Once my university's institutional review board granted permission to conduct this study, I began contacting those who were parents, guardians or relatives of girls within the age group. Because this study did not take place in the schools, I did not need further approval from the Ministry of Education's regulatory body for research. Several friends, former colleagues, and people from my community in south Trinidad were parents or primary caregivers of adolescent girls and acted as liaisons between me and other girls in their communities. Not only did many of them express a desire to assist and have their children participate, but they also identified other adolescents who might be interested. In one instance the sister of a friend had two cousins who she believed would be interested in participating. When she communicated with the girls, they recruited four of their friends to participate. In another instance while talking with an adolescent

from the community who is a teenage mother, she suggested that she knew other girls I should talk to about the topic as well. When she agreed to participate, she liaised with friends in a community residence for teenage mothers. I sought permission from their guardians and assent from those girls to conduct interviews.

Negotiating access is an ongoing activity and each community may have its own complex mechanisms by which entry is negotiated (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Subedhi and Rhee, 2008). Thus, negotiating access particularly for girls who were younger or not from my immediate social networks or communities I worked at negotiating access on various occasions. Similarly, although I chose a strategy of speaking with parents or guardians when they were my first point of contact, because I emphasized the importance of girls' assent to participate, even for those parents who gave permission without consultation from their daughters, I also spoke to the girls separately, stressing that the decision to participate was entirely up to them. This practice of obtaining both permission and assent is a more ethical approach to conducting research with minors. Moreover, particularly in a society where parental and adult authority is given more regard than adolescent opinions, I hoped to trouble the traditional notion of a hierarchical relationship between me as the researcher and participants (Kim, 2012). I also continually had to negotiate access to the girls and their parents' or guardians' time, as well as the girls and their parents' spaces, as most interviews were conducted in their homes. My status as a former mental health professional in Trinidad, a community worker and someone with personal and familial ties to the community and as a university researcher helped me to establish lines of communication with the participants and their parents or guardians.

Interviews took place in their communities, typically in the girl's home, or in the home of a family member. One of the considerations I was mindful of while interviewing was the risk of

covid-19. At the time of my field research 48.3% of the population had been fully vaccinated and some had received booster shots. An additional 48% of the population had received the first shot of a two-dose regimen. When the Ministry of Health rolled out its adolescent vaccination program in August 2021 at least 12%[6] of the adolescent population received their first vaccines during the first week they were eligible, prompting the Chief Medical Officer to announce that there was a very good average rate of vaccination for the adolescent age group (LoopNews, 2021). I conducted interviews wearing an N-94 mask at all times and most of the girls were masked also. Since March 2020 schools in Trinidad and Tobago had been conducting classes virtually and had resumed in-person classes for fully vaccinated students in the upper classes of secondary schools from Forms 4 to 6 in October 2021 (McKenzie, 2021). The Ministry of Health of Trinidad and Tobago adopted their Covid-19 guidelines from the World Health Organization and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recommending social distancing and small outdoor gatherings when the rate of cases was within a safe range. Therefore, whenever feasible we conducted our interviews in outdoor spaces or areas of the home with considerable ventilation. Trinidad is a Caribbean island with mild temperatures in the early months of the year. Most homes in the Caribbean are constructed with verandas or large common areas with windows that are typically open to allow light and breeze to flow through. These spaces proved very useful for gathering and socialization in a pandemic. Similarly, when negotiating access, I disclosed my vaccination status and that I intended to wear masks at all times. Additionally, some parents volunteered that they had all been vaccinated or that they were being conscientious about safety measures. Six girls were domiciled at a community residence for teenage mothers. Prior to arriving at the site, I stressed the need for privacy and girls feeling

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[6] Author's own calculation based on the data presented in the article from LoopNews TT citing population figures from the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago.

comfortable to have conversations openly. At this residence the girls were interviewed in a room that is not typically used at the facility. Five girls came to my home, based on their stated preference.

During recruitment and arranging interviews maintaining adolescent autonomy, protecting their privacy, obtaining a true understanding of their conceptualizations and ideas and managing Covid-19 precautions were the most pressing concerns.

Participant Selection

I initially intended to use snowball sampling as a first step in the sampling process (Bailey, 2018) to recruit girls to participate. Community referrals, kinship ties, familiarity with community are very important in Caribbean society and being able to speak directly to people and have them refer others is typically a useful method. These techniques lend themselves to more organicity and flexibility. In the field the response was so favorable from people in my personal and professional networks that there was little need to ask girls or their parents whether they knew of other interested participants. Therefore, I found there was no need for recruitment through flyers or social media. In fact, as stated previously, three girls who volunteered took it upon themselves to share information with their friends and provided me with their contact information when I was still in the recruiting phase. Similarly, two other friends shared my contact information with their friends, who reached out to me. I adjusted my sample size as themes began to reoccur and reach a point of saturation. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) recommend these criteria for determining the stage in data collection at which new information produces little or no change in the data already collected. Overall, the attitude towards participation was one of enthusiasm and interest in the topic.

In the initial information and recruitment phase parents and guardians expressed interest in having someone talk with their adolescents and the only concerns typically expressed were how would their privacy be maintained, and whether their adolescents would be interested. In addition to the twenty-five girls interviewed there were six others who expressed interest in participating; however, those interviews could not be scheduled given time and geographic constraints. Consequently, I used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) and recruited eleven girls from various communities in southwest Trinidad, one girl each from north, east and south Trinidad. Purposeful sampling is defined as a qualitative research strategy where the researcher relies on the availability and willingness of participants who are knowledgeable and can provide information rich narratives, particularly as a means of maximizing resources in qualitative research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Participants' ability to narrate experiences and articulate opinions on the subject were prioritized (Palinkas et al, 2015). The first people I recruited were individuals I knew personally who were parents, guardians or relatives of adolescent girls. Six of those girls were from my community and were thus familiar with me, had spent time with me engaged in recreational or volunteer activities or in social contexts with their families. I had close relationships with three other girls' parents, thus I had some initial reservations about whether the girls would want to participate if they believed that talking to me would violate some sort of generational code (I am not too cool to admit that for teenagers' friends of parents are considered "old people", not cool, not the kind of people you talk to about sex or sexual relationships). With all of those girls I explained to them and their parents and raised the subject of whether they believed it would be uncomfortable talking to me about the topic. In case there was a sense of being eager to please or feeling compelled to do something for someone they viewed in a role of an aunt, I underscored the voluntary nature of the exercise and

stressed that they should not feel compelled to do the interviews if they did not want to, and that I would have enough participants either way.

If someone suggested a participant for whom they could not give permission, such as a niece or the daughter of a friend, I asked them to share my information and get permission to share their phone number with me so I could follow-up personally. Informed consent is crucial to participation involving human participants and should not be taken lightly. Given that my project was an inquiry into agentic behavior of adolescent girls I felt an added sense of responsibility to ensure the optimum conditions for them to be well-informed and to actualize the full extent of their agency in participating. Thus, it was important that my communication and recruitment materials were accessible and provided a clear explanation of the project. When I talked with parents or guardians of adolescent girls, I explained the aims and processes using a recruitment script (Appendix B) to guide the conversation. I explained that participation was entirely voluntary and that girls could not feel that they were being coerced, as well as how coercion could undermine the study. I also explained the process of permission and assent to underscore the importance of the girls' capacity to participate or refuse according to their own will and the expected duration of the interview, and I answered any questions that they asked. In our initial conversations I obtained email addresses for the potential research participants and subsequently shared recruitment letters describing the project tailored specifically to the parents or guardians (see Appendix B), permission and assent forms (see Appendices C and D). Permission and assent forms and recruitment letters were specifically tailored for the parents/ guardians or participants respectively.

For only two girls participating in the study my initial communication was directly with them. In all other instances girls heard about the study first from a peer or their parents or

guardians. For seventeen girls I met with them and explained the study over the phone with parents while they were present, and I spoke with both parents and girls during the same conversation. I then emailed them copies of the assent forms ahead of time so that they could familiarize themselves with the content and had them sign permission and assent forms in my presence before the interview. For seven girls I had conversations with their parents or guardians prior to their participation and spoke to the girls over the phone or in person separately. They subsequently signed permission and assent forms simultaneously prior to the start of the interviews. None of the individuals recruited refused to participate except for the aforementioned six participants who could not be scheduled due to time constraints.

I devised an a priori list of 30 pseudonyms for all participants that was stored in a separate physical and digital location from all identifying information for participants. I did this so that I would not unintentionally assign names to girls that were similar to their given names or that might be connected to them. If a name on my list was similar to the name of a participant, their parent, or a relative, I removed it from the list and assigned an alternate name. Once an interview was scheduled I assigned a pseudonym, which was used to store interviews, transcripts and any information not on the consent forms.

Eight of the girls who participated in my study were 12 – 14 years old, and seventeen of the girls were 15 – 17 years old. Two were still in primary school[7], and one was in the first year

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[7] Primary school in Trinidad and Tobago is two years of kindergarten starting typically at five years old and 5 years of schooling prior to sitting the Secondary Assessment Examination (SEA) to enter secondary school. Children typically sit the exam and enter secondary school between age 11 and 12. Each year after kindergarten is typically referred to as a standard, ie. Standard 1, Standard 2, etc. Secondary school begins after completion of SEA and placement in a school where a minimum of five years of matriculation are expected, referred to as Forms 1 to 5. After five years of secondary education students write subject area examinations set by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). Students who are interested in pursuing a university degree in The University of the West Indies or the UK typically complete two additional years of advanced-level work in what is known as Form 6, and rigorous examinations set by a separate regional examination board. Some modern variations of tertiary education have modifications to this system.

of college. Five girls in the study are in secondary school, but have never physically attended secondary school, or attended for less than 6 months. Two others have not yet attended secondary school. A majority of the girls were in Form 4 or would have been in Form 4 or Form 5 if they had consistently attended school.

When we began the interview, I advised the girls that recording was about to commence and explained the order in which our conversation would proceed – demographic questions first, and then questions about the main topic. I reminded them that they could ask to stop recording at any time or for any particular response, without penalty. None of the girls chose not be recorded; however, I offered that if they did not wish to be recorded I would have taken notes intermittently so that I could remember important points. They were reminded that they could decide what information was included and that they could at any point ask for particular details to be omitted.

As previously indicated participants were asked demographic and socioeconomic questions as identified in the interview schedule (Appendix E) and then questions about relationships, whether they have experienced liking someone in a way that was different from their feelings for friends or parents. They were asked to describe what that is like and what they have observed and understood from people in their social environments who experience something like that (parents, family, friends). They were asked about their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors relating to liking someone in a non-platonic way. The first third of questions – up to question 9 – were designed to gauge a level of maturity and understanding among adolescent girls. Questions 10 and onwards presumed a more mature level of understanding evidenced by statements the girls would have already made in the early parts of the interview. For instance, girls who mentioned words like sex, attraction, or sexual intercourse early in the conversation

were not asked whether they knew what sex was. However, all girls were asked whether they had ever liked someone in a non-platonic way.

The interviews on average were approximately forty minutes with the longest (the first) being one hour and 15 minutes, and the shortest lasting 31 minutes. Once we had discussed all the topics guided by the semi-structured interview sheet the girls were asked whether there is additional information they wish to provide and whether they had questions for me.

At the end of the interview the girls were thanked for their participation and given a token of appreciation – a small gift bag containing 16GB flash drive, pencils and candy and invited to choose from a selection of novelty pens. For the five girls who were interviewed at my residence I escorted them back home. For all other participants I followed-up with parents or guardians before I left their homes. Additionally, I reminded them of contact information if needed for follow-up.

There were 8 girls between the ages of 12-14 and 17 between the ages of 15 and 17, thus the sample of respondents skewed slightly older. Girls who participated in the study originated from a relatively wide geographical area with higher representation of participants (11) from three communities in southwest Trinidad (Table 1).

Table 1: Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Self-described social class	[8]Density (urban, rural, suburban)	Location
Anaiya	17	Afro-Caribbean	Upper middle class	Suburban	Central
Amara	15	African	Middle class	Rural	Southwest

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[8] The urban, suburban and rural designations do not accurately describe the social or geographical landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. There are two urban centers and many connected municipalities, boroughs, towns and villages. However, these designations may provide a rough description of the location and activity or connectedness of the site.

Shelby	13	Black	Working class	Rural	Southwest
Arya	14	Afro-Trini	Lower middle class	Rural	Southwest
Savielle	15	Black/Afro Trinidadian	Middle class	Rural	Southwest
Tenille	16	Black	Higher middle class	Rural	Southwest
Ava Marie	14	Black	Middle class	Rural	Southwest
Adenike	14	African and East Indian	Lower Middle class	Rural	Southwest
Kayleigh Ann	17	African	Middle class	Urban	North
Kylie	15	Black	Upper middle class	Urban	South-central
Zindzi	16	Mixed (African, Spanish, Indian)	Father's side rich, mother, working class	Suburban	East
Marissa	17	Indian & Black	Higher middle class	Urban	South-central
Nabila	17	Dougla	Working class	Urban	Central
Imani	12	Black	Lower middle class	Rural	North
Ashanti	12	Mixed	Rich on dad's side, middle on mom's	Urban	East
Yemi	16	African descent	Middle class	Rural	Southwest
Tiwa	15	Black	Middle class	Rural	Southwest
Mikela	15	Trinidadian	Middle class	Rural	Southwest
Vanessa	17	Black and African	Upper middle class	Urban	North
Maya	17	African	Middle class	Suburban	Northeast
Aisha	13	Black	lower middle class	Suburban	Northeast
Zariah	16	Spanish and Dougla	working class	Suburban	Northeast
Shola	16	Black	working class	Rural	Northeast

| Lorielle | 15 | Chinese | upper middle class | Urban | West |
| Giselle | 16 | Mixed | middle class | Suburban | South |

Kamala Kempadoo's (2009) work in the Caribbean, as previously mentioned, is a critique of the pathologizing and medicalization of adolescent sex – the over utilization of Abstinence, Be Faithful Wear a Condom (ABC) programs. Caribbean gender scholars Baldwin (2014), Haynes (2017), and Barriteau (2019) theorize on love power, about how women cede power while negotiating love relationships. When it comes to caring relationships women's negotiations do not map onto the progress and agency they have outside the home. Need for politics of pleasure/ theorizing about love and power. But their work addresses adults, particularly middle-class women in the Caribbean, not adolescent girls.

The research gap does not address how Caribbean adolescent girls actualize their agency and sexuality, and considerations about adolescent sexuality are framed largely from a heteronormative orientation. How do they give voice to their innate desires and speak back in opposition to the dominant voices that presume to speak for them? Therefore, in my interviews with adolescent girls in T&T I am engaging in a theorizing that is less institutionalized and co-opted by those who maintain the status quo, for a younger age group, and for adolescent girls of all sexual orientations. Discourse on adolescent girls sexual desire, rather than "missing, absent and silent" is still an important and uneven terrain" (McClellan and Fine, 2008, 84). Moreover, it is not simply a site for understanding girls' ideas, attitudes and beliefs, but has implications for girls' conceptualizations of women's place in society and the consequences for conforming or defying broader social culture. As feminist scholar M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) posits, an understanding of adolescent girls' sexual agency interrogates "the multiple operations of power,

of gendered and sexualized power that is simultaneously raced and classed yet not practiced within hermetically sealed or epistemically partial borders of the nation-state" (4).

Methods of Data Collection

Interviews

In this study I used a semi structured questionnaire (see Appendix E) to guide interviews. As a Trinidadian American scholar, an adult and someone who has spent most of adulthood living in the US I am mindful of the physical and experiential distance between me and my participants. In constructing my semi-structured interview questions, I was mindful of that distance and the importance of fully engaging my participants, so we developed mutual understanding. Mindful of my identities and positions I understand that "physical distance does not always mean that we know less about the region than those who live there, but it does mean we know *differently*" (Nixon and King, 2021, 270). Consequently, the questions are designed to ensure that our collaboration is meaningful.

Beyond the measures that I have already mentioned, to mitigate the likelihood that girls might be self-censoring or editing comments to suit what they believed I would want to hear, and particularly as I was discussing what might be considered a sensitive or taboo subject (Nixon and King, 2021), I probed answers whenever I thought they were vague, or girls seemed to hesitate. I wanted to be sure that I made no assumptions about the meanings or intentions of girls' words, and that I could render their communication as closely to what they intended. At the beginning of interviews, I explained the nature of the structured interview and typically after I had asked the demographic questions and the initial question about girls' experiences of liking or being attracted to someone in a non-platonic way, the questions did not flow sequentially as often girls gave information sooner that a question was asked.

Data Analysis

By observing how arranging, rearranging and collecting ideas outside ourselves are processes that make our ideas our own, I think about how "our ideas are bound up in stories, research inquiries, that we do not (or should not) claim we own" (McKittrick, 2021, 15). Semi-structured interviews provide a wealth of information because they let researchers to explore participants' subjective viewpoints with in depth accounts of their lived experiences (Flick, 2009; Evans, 2017).

Discourse Analysis

I explore discourse analysis from a Black and Caribbean feminist orientation, using the case study and an intra-categorical approach to analyze the experiences and perspectives of adolescent girls in T&T. Caribbean gender scholar, Tonya Haynes (2017) reminds us that "Caribbean feminisms are heterogeneous… they emerge from multiple disciplines and locations, prioritize a variety of issues and strategies and draw from diverse epistemological, philosophical and activist groundings." (27). T&T epitomizes this heterogeneity in its racial or ethnic composition and the social locations contingent on race, class, wealth and geographic location. Feminists have been very aware of the limitations of gender as an analytical tool (McCall, 2005) and as such have benefitted from groundbreaking work on intersectionality (Beale, 1969; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, and Bilge 2006).

In my study the structured interview is the method I use to capture participants' unique experiences and perspectives. The traditional categories of Caribbean people, Caribbean women and girls foreground analysis and understanding of this understudied group but I am interested in the diversity of experiences within this group at this location, and yielding to the novel ways these girls may shape my thinking about sexual agency. Inspired by Katherine McKittrick's

(2021) words I am "think(ing) about the epistemological grounds through which (I) theorize, and imagine and name liberation" (22) on behalf of these girls. I have conceptualized the study, and I am writing the dissertation, but I do so in collaboration with them in search of new ways of thinking and new knowledge. To do this work I have employed the ideas of Caribbean and Black feminist scholars as my primary methodological and theoretical frames. My referential beginnings and scaffoldings shape my conclusions (McKittrick, 2021) about girls in T&T. Utilizing feminist and decolonial conceptualizations of ethics and reflexivity, I am attentive to the power relations between me, and my participants and our social locations operate in the development of ethical research relationships and practices, most notably those pertaining to the assent of minors and conducting research as a person from a large institution in the global north. In the final section of this chapter, I demonstrate how these epistemological orientations shape a methodology that validates the emergent themes and discuss the social implications and practical implications.

Coding

To analyze the themes, I segmented the transcripts into demographics and topical narratives then used a combined method of inductive and deductive coding to search the text topical portion of the interviews. A deductive approach to coding involves using codes derived a priori based on the research questions and theoretical framework (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). To restate, my research questions were (i) How do young women and girls identify and articulate their sexuality? (ii) How do culture and society shape their understanding and articulation of their sexuality? (iii) What are adolescent girls' perceptions of communication about sex, both in intimate spaces — with family members and peers — and publicly — with teachers, adults in their community, and messages from the broader society? (iv) When and how

do adolescents recount their sexuality, if they do at all, and how does that shape the ways in which they embody their sexual agency? How do they negotiate within the limits of society, and navigate the evolution of their developing sexual agency? I also wanted to understand whether/ how adolescent girls recall or recount their sexual engagement in agentic and empowered ways. Based on these questions I coded for knowing, feeling (attraction, emotions, knowing, physical), communication (with romantic interest, friends, family, parents etc.), peer influence, other or social influence, control, education, religious beliefs and agency.

Inductive coding is an alternative method that involves allowing the data from interviews to generate codes (Chandra and Shang, 2019). A hybrid approach to coding, combines these two approaches. I have utilized a hybrid approach because although I would like to constrain my analysis to some degree, given the scope of the project, I don't want to overlook information that might arise because I imposed too many constraints (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I simultaneously used deductive coding to ensure that my preconceived ideas of what themes to look at did not limit the analytical process or overlook important themes. and the themes that were most prominent.

Guidelines for Thematic Analysis

As I discussed in the section entitled "Methods of Empirical Research," the data I analyzed was derived from semi-structured interviews, as they inform my research questions. In the remainder of this section, I describe the guidelines I used to analyze my data. I employed a method of thematic analysis for this study. Thematic analysis is a flexible, foundational approach to analyzing qualitative data that allows the researcher to find patterns and trends within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To avoid the risk of this method being poorly demarcated, it is advised that researchers create concise guidelines and theoretical frameworks that match the

method to maximize the analytic approach. Thematic analysis is useful for examining the meanings that people attach to their behavior and thoughts on a topic, the significance in their lives and their ideas on how the constructs being studied have significance in their lives. It also "allows us to examine how these constructions might reflect the 'reality' of participants' lived experiences, the material or social contexts in which they live" (Evans, 2017, 3) and that constrain their behavior regarding sex and intimate relationships as adolescent girls.

Although there is no uniform format for conducting thematic analysis, I, as a novice researcher, have employed Braun and Clarke (2006) guidelines, coupled with my research questions and theoretical frameworks that have guided my study to provide a starting point for analysis. First, I familiarized myself with the data by transcribing my interviews, reading and re-reading the data, and annotating my initial ideas. I also cross-referenced these with the jottings I had made in my fieldwork journal. Then I generated initial codes, coding interesting features of the data systematically and collating data relevant to the codes. Next, I searched for themes: collecting the various codes into potential themes and gathering data relevant to each potential theme. After reviewing the themes and whether they fit in relation to the extracts I coded at the first and second level I generated a thematic map of my analysis. I continue to analyze the data and refine the specifics of each theme to obtain clear definitions and descriptives. Finally, I highlight the salient, compelling narratives that exemplify the themes, adding quotations or expressions to elucidate the points, and connecting back to my initial research questions and the literature. I will address these narratives in detail in my discussion of analysis in Chapter 4.

Analytical Process

In the first stage of my analysis, I focused on how adolescent girls in T&T think about sexuality, their articulations of the experience of non-platonic love or attraction, and how they

derived those ideas based on broad social categories: intimate space, family and community, and institutions in the sociological sense such as faith, educational and health care institutions.

In the second stage of my analysis, I concerned myself with girls' conceptualizations of their material conditions, their understanding of their social position as teenage girls, as excluded or included in society or their communities, and their understanding of their class or economic positions. For instance, I looked at how girls talked about their lived experiences of comfort, security, insecurity, hardship, and how those perceptions mediated their views about sexual activity. I looked at the ways girls talked about how interest in sex or engagement in sex might interrupt their plans or aspirations to continue or change the trajectories of their lives, thus shifting their material conditions. When talking about reasons for engaging or not engaging in sex, or actualizing an attraction or love interest they often spoke about it being an interference in the path that they were currently on.

In the third stage of my analysis, I explored how girls' ideas matched or departed from the societal ideas and their rationale they articulated for the coherence or departure from these values and ideas. I also examined how the coherence or departure evidenced agency, and the extent to which their articulations of agency evidenced meaning making that conformed to oppressive – patriarchal, heteronormative, classist – gender orientations, or a rejection of oppressive ideas. For instance, there were girls who talked about their desire to be independent and make something of themselves, to reject limitations imposed on them, but believed that their first responsibility was to "produce" children, or that their lives would improve only if they conformed to behaviors of a "good girl". Conversely there were girls who articulated engaging in conformist behavior, such as religious practices, or being "well-behaved" but only for the utility of it, not because they believed it was the right thing to do.

In the fourth stage of my analysis, I created a thematic map to examine how girls discussed their actions, and what ideas and behaviors they articulated about agency. Finally, in the fifth stage of the analysis, I refined the specifics of each theme, examining the overall story the analysis conveyed, ensuring that my definitions were clear.

Development of the Interview Process in the Field

Semi-structured interviews were useful in giving some structure to the interviews, and in instances where conversation was not flowing or the conversation had diverted, they provided a means of organizing the questions (Bailey, 2018). The benefit of having semi-structured interviews was that they could be adapted as the situation demanded. For instance, questions about the duration of a relationship or the positivity or negativity of a relationship proved moot because most girls were not in relationships. Some described the feelings of anxiety, shyness and discomfort that came with being attracted to someone, but it was based on a brief or previous experience, or hypothetical given that they had never told a love interest of their attraction. Most, though not all the girls who were sexually active had experienced trauma associated with sexual activity, thus it was more often a negative experience than a positive, though they spoke positively about their emotional attractions.

Some circumstances that affected the quality of the interview were settings and locations. To prioritize privacy and equally prioritize health safety measures most interviews were conducted in open spaces. In three locations girls lived together in either community residence settings or at a familial home. This meant that when a group of girls was interviewed consecutively thus, spanning several hours of interviews in the same location, people occasionally passed by. It also meant that recording devices sometimes caught ambient noise, particularly the sounds of birds chirping, and automobiles passing in the street. It was difficult to

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be totally immersed in conversation, keep track of the topics to be discussed, and note the times when ambient sound might compromise audio. Thus, my field notes documented broadly how settings may have impacted the interviews and helped to contextualize but could not serve as a minute-by-minute cross reference.

Researcher Positionality

It is important to state my positionality in this research as my identities shape the way I conceived this project and shaped how I engaged with respondents. Importantly, although I designed this project, and I managed the collection of information, I did not control the creation of knowledge. I believe that my research methods evidenced a thoughtfulness about how my positionalities affected interviews, how respondents responded to my embodied differences, the perceived privileges or power that may have impacted the interview process. I am a Black, Trinidadian American graduate student, who is a heterosexual, cisgender woman. I was born in the United States, and I have lived half of my life in the northeastern US but spent my childhood living in T&T where I was educated at a private elementary school in southwestern Trinidad, and attended a public school, non-parochial, non- "prestige" school in the southern city of San Fernando, Trinidad. My status as a citizen of T&T by descent affords me the opportunity to move between the borders of T&T relatively easily as does my status as a US citizen. Moreover, I am a skilled interviewer because I'm a trained psychotherapist, and in the two years prior to beginning my doctoral studies a substantial part of my professional work involved conducting interviews, clinical assessments, referrals and interventions with court-referred adolescents and their families, and youth in medical settings in Trinidad. I had also spent three years prior to that living and working with a variety of adults and adolescents outside the court system, but in other mental health settings and photographing and documenting culture and ways of life in T&T.

Although I spent my childhood in T&T, before 2013 I had never worked there; thus, my professional identity is oriented largely as a Black woman socialized in the work world of the northeastern US. Consequently, in my interactions with people with whom I am unfamiliar and in professional settings although I perceive myself as presenting as a Trinidadian woman, I am interpreted as somewhat foreign – an American with ties to Trinidad. My family's middle-class status, their regional origins in Trinidad, my manner of speech, the language I use, even when speaking in Trinidadian dialect signifies someone who is educated, privileged and possibly attended a "prestige school".[9] My identities frame my perspectives on gender, race and class. The ways that I perform gender, race and class, as well as the meanings others ascribe to my identities, experiences and performances impact my engagement with research participants and the interpretations I have made. For instance, when I listened to recordings of my interviews, I was very cognizant of the differences in word choices, pronunciations and intonation between myself and girls from my immediate community, girls from different parts of the country, and girls of different class privileges. Conversationally I strove to match the tenor and tone of my interviewee's speech, particularly to maintain a sense of ease, as I was very aware of how I would be imbued with authority as an adult, as someone sort of foreign, as someone with more education. In my interpretations and analysis, I hope that I have represented the voices of my participants, particularly those who are marginalized in ways that are a true reflection of their voices.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) says that intersectionality can be used as an analytical tool to demonstrate how Black women apply their outsider within standpoint to create knowledges as

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[9] The Concordat of 1960: Assurances for the Preservation and Character of Denominational Schools was legislation passed by the first post-independence government of Trinidad & Tobago that allowed an expansion of free secondary education. It engaged the facilities and governance structures of private secondary schools run by church boards, originally Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist schools with colonial ties, to increase their enrollments exponentially in exchange for government funding and continued control of their schools. Following the introduction of government schools not associated with the Concordat, it became common to refer to the schools as prestige schools. Children enter these schools via national entrance examinations and a ranking system, though the schools choose 20% of their enrollees. Many factors tied to race, class and wealth inequalities are associated with entrance to these schools. https://www.moe.gov.tt/the-concordat-of-1960-2/

marginalized subjects. In seeking to understand the observations, interpretations and agentic actions of adolescent girls my project embodies the idea of developing knowledges outside the perimeter of dominant culture. In applying this framework, I was mindful of several potential barriers to exchanging information in the research setting and based on the research subject. As mentioned above, my race and class presentation as well as my professional identity and age – old enough to be a parent of any of my participants, may have caused participants to interpret me as an authority figure. I emphasized methods of orienting participants to the process in language that was accessible to, using interpersonal cues, thoughtful questions and queries, sharing information about the study and about myself as appropriate to allow them to feel comfortable and to maximize informed consent. To that end I dressed casually enough to not appear imposing, but also 'presentable'[10] enough that participants saw me as someone who was serious about my project, someone to be trusted and someone who respected them. Dress is one manner of signifying one's intentions in T&T society and so my clothing mattered depending on the context. Conversationally I used a combination of standard English and Trinidadian dialect to present my recruitment information and consent forms. During the interviews adolescents spoke informally, often using conversational Trinidadian dialect and our conversations ebbed and flowed with a mixture of language. All participants were offered electronic versions of paperwork prior to the interviews and the opportunity to go over them in person using paper forms. A minority of parents or guardians availed themselves of the opportunity to go over paperwork at the time of the interview. At least half used the opportunity before to read over the forms prior to interviews.

Interview questions were divided into three categories: demographic questions, questions about attraction and sexual agency, and the interview wrap-up. Some questions are derived from themes for

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[10] Presentable is a term that is often used in Trinbagonian conversation to convey that someone is neat and tidy, dressed appropriately for the place, occasion, or age. For example many people wear comfortable, casual, sometimes even worn clothing at home. Being presentable would connote changing out of 'home clothes' into something appropriate for casual visiting, or not wearing shorts and a t-shirt as if going to a party or the beach.

semi-structured interviews of adolescents recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), Sexual and Reproductive Health Program (Ingham and Stone, n.d.). Those questions are designed to gather information on adolescents' partner selection, sexual behavior, and risk taking. However, risk taking was not a focus of this study. Instead, I sought to understand adolescent girls' perspectives on what safe or risky behavior was, and how they made meaning of the messaging they received from family and society. In order to avoid the perception that these questions are intended solely to pathologize or gauge adolescent risk behavior, the interviews were oriented to understand their earliest experiences of attraction and to take shape in a narrative form. The questions (Appendix E) provided some structure but were only used as a guide to follow respondents' narratives. The first section was designed to serve two purposes: first as a period of establishing rapport between me and participants, and secondly, to capture demographic information. The demographic section privileges the knowledge and perceptions of girls, as it is their view that informs how they see the world. Therefore, characterization of their community, their complexion, race or ethnicity and estimation of their family's economic status and social class are not contingent on their knowledge of the data, but their understanding of their lived realities. Additionally, during the interview I asked questions based on what participants had already shared, probed if they were vague or unclear. A pattern that developed was that sometimes girls (younger) felt uncomfortable saying words like sex, or uncomfortable using curse words or what they considered vulgar speech from peers, because they were talking to an adult. Yasmin Gunaratnam (2011) in discussing the messy work of interviewing as an 'insider'/and or 'outsider' says that first we must use what she terms bridging practices, to close the distance be it through language use, methodologically or imaginatively. This serves not to erase difference, but to make it knowable. Thus, I attempted to bridge the difference by utilizing a stance of questioning, but without judgment, validating when I felt confident that I could do so effectively, and using language that made prescient my age and cultural differences when

necessary. I probed only enough to ensure that I had clearly understood what they intended to say, but I did not push if I believed they were disinterested in exploring a topic. When interviewing adolescents, it important to create a safe, affirming and non-judgmental environment, especially for questions on topics that could be considered sensitive or taboo (Pfeffer, Ellsworth and Gold, 2017). Consequently, I hope that these efforts mitigated the impacts of positionality in the interview process.

Limitations

In discussing my methodological approaches, I believe it is important to underscore, as qualitative scholars have cautioned, that all research has limitations and caveats (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Gunaratnam, 2011; Bailey, C. 2017). Therefore, I would like to mention some of the caveats with which my thematic analysis should be considered.

By recruiting a geographically and socioeconomically diverse sample I aimed in this case study to represent as broad a cross-section of adolescent girls in T&T. The ethnic composition of the sample, however, does not reflect the diversity in T&T, there are far fewer girls of East Indian descent that represented in the population, and no girls who reside in the sister isle of Tobago. These limitations, as previously discussed, could not be helped given the constraints of recruiting in a pandemic. However, there is some preliminary indication that Trinbagonian girls' ideas of womanhood may be similar across ethnic groups (Hosein, 2004). Therefore, adding more ethnic diversity might not augment the analysis presented here.

Additionally, I am familiar with some participants given that I am from one of the communities where recruitment will take place. This is both advantageous and potentially risky. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith in Decolonizing Methodologies asserts that when the word research "is mentioned in indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories", that people are distrustful of it and consider it a dirty word (2012). As I applied that to my project I thought about

the attitudes and beliefs participants had toward my interviews. They appeared enthusiastic about participation; therefore, I hope that the experience represented a collaborative and beneficial engagement. Since this study is qualitative the small sample size presents limitations to transferability using these strategies. However, one of the objectives of my project was to create rich, grounded data in the field.

Conclusion

This chapter explicates a methodological map of how I conducted my research of sexual agency of adolescent girls in Trinidad and Tobago. I have used Black, Caribbean, decolonial and transnational[11] frameworks allowed me to explore the discursive conditions of intimacy and sex for adolescent girls. I was interested how adolescents made sense of the messaging, seeking information from their social environment about relationships, intimacy and sex, and therefore, how they behave collectively in this post-colonial society. Decolonial, Caribbean and Black feminist frameworks allowed me to focus on the socio-political, class, and cultural conditions that shape Trinbagonian girls' lived experiences of intimacy and sexuality and shape the trajectory of their agentic behavior (their enquiries are often furtive; they seek information in secrecy, information exchanges occur outside of the gaze of social and community structures that have real power over their lives).

I have described the methods of empirical research by including descriptions of the sites, negotiating access, participant selection, and methods of data collection and analysis. My methods of data collection included recruitment conversations with parents or guardians, semi-structured interviews, and discussion of social class in T&T.

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[11] Among frameworks these conversations are fluid and ongoing. In different theoretical and scholarly contexts the theorists I use can be considered separately as decolonial, Caribbean, Black feminist or transnational theorists or all at once.

The rich data gathered from interviewing adolescent girls in T&T is pivotal to this study. I utilized a qualitative method of inquiry and a case study approach to garner an in-depth, thick description of adolescent girls' ideas, beliefs and attitudes towards sex and intimacy from early to late adolescence with a relatively broad cross-section of girls from across Trinidad. Face-to-face interviews allowed me to develop a connection and establish rapport with my participants. It was also essential to assess the extent to which girls had privacy and the privilege to speak openly without fear of interference from relatives or punishment from parents if they said something deemed too precocious or inappropriate. I relied on my values of autonomy and principles of confidentiality or privacy which proved to be particularly useful, for instance, when after an interview with one of my younger participants her mother came out to the veranda where we had been sitting and surreptitiously asked me what she had talked about. After three attempts to get me to share information she retreated, no doubt she planned on coaxing information out of her daughter. The girl had told me that she was very close to her mother, and her narrative evidenced that, unlike many participants, she communicated openly with her mother about information that was confusing or that she believed she should keep private from others. She had also identified her mother as the person she trusted and turned to if she had questions about relationships or sex. Therefore, I did not feel that any intervention to mitigate punishment or judgment was warranted. However, it illustrated how important it was to have in-person interviews to gauge the nature of the environment. Moreover, face-to-face interviewing allowed me to judge any divergence between what the girls were saying and what they might have been thinking, to evaluate any discrepancies between their articulations and body language, and, quite frankly, to be a real bodily presence with them while co-creating knowledge. I feel confident that I can consider our discussions a co-creation of knowledge because so many girls expressed the unusual (sometimes

weird, awkward, uncomfortable), but gratifying experience of talking about relationships and sex. There were participants who stated that they had never thought about certain questions before, or that they had thought about them, but never discussed them with anyone. Importantly, in their roles as informants, participants were placed in the role of knower, or authority with their voices being central and essential to the discourse, a position that they rarely occupy as people subjugated by age, gender, and in a broader context, regional or national status.

In the next chapter I present the analysis of data from my dissertation. I address the ethnographic themes that emerged from this study. Chapter 5 discusses the social and cultural conditions in T&T, and articulates my conclusions interpreted through the theoretical frameworks I have used for this study. As such Chapters 4 and 5 are to aid the reader in understanding how adolescent girls in T&T experience and understand their own feelings of intimacy, attraction and desire, their understanding of sex and sexuality, and how they make meaning of the social world around them regarding these ideas about adolescent girls and sex.

Chapter V

Discussion of the Analysis

In this chapter I discuss the analysis of themes of my research, demographic information, and share some of the narratives that elucidate the themes. The themes presented here are agency by knowing and feeling; agency articulated in timing, preference and context; communication: the gaps, silences, and sources of information risk. The latter theme explores the multiple institutional and social contexts where girls receive messages about sex and learn the social rules about sex. Parents and educational and religious institutions, teach risk avoidance, purity and respectability. However, girls impute ambition, independence, autonomy and self-directed learning from those sources. Communication often begets misinformation, restrictions or silence. Nevertheless, girls evidence agency when, despite the silences they seek the information they desire – from social media, from trusted adults and peers – formulate their own opinions, and aspire for their future. At the end I discuss how the impacts of trauma and neglect add an ancillary topic to this research.

First, I present a general overview for which I will provide more detailed analysis later in the chapter. Girls' responses demonstrated they were knowledgeable about intimacy and sex. All girls could identify a specific age at which they first felt some form of attraction. Their identification of feelings ranged from innocent, mostly emotional affinity that they could separate from a filial or platonic attraction or love to deeper sexual feelings. I wanted to understand what agentic moves girls have made, and what they identified as their choices despite perhaps contradictory or incomplete information they were hearing and seeing in society. Articulations of agency were evident when girls talked about their reasons for pursuing or a relationship; whether and why they communicated with caregivers or friends, what was

important in deciding whether or when to have sex; discussing what values to adhere to, and when discussed their ideas about an ideal relationship and what they would do if they weren't getting that out of their relationship. For instance, girls articulated desires of obtaining their own businesses, getting homes, employment, and a desire for a partner who had ambition, and who supported their quest for education or success. They believed that to be important to an ideal relationship and saw relationships and more so sex, as interrupters of their quests. To delay sex therefore served as an agentic way to exercise control over their lives and futures, rather than ascribing to broadly held societal values.

To answer the question of how adolescent girls, identify and articulate their sexuality, the theme of agency considers the knowing and feeling attraction. Girls were asked whether they had ever experienced attraction, and to explain what the experience was like. As described in the key terms defined in Chapter 2, sexual agency is the embodiment of intellectual and emotional knowledge and desire combined with a sense of empowerment. Therefore, I examined what girls said about attraction, how did they know, what did it feel like, and was attraction reciprocated. To acknowledge attraction, one must acknowledge a reaction or response to someone outside of oneself, this is the first step to what King (2014) calls women pursuing erotic pleasure on their own terms. If you acknowledge it, it exists, and that can be powerful. Agency is also evident in their articulation of how they engage with sexual attraction – what they share with others, with whom they share, the timing of those disclosures, their preferences and the contexts in which they chose to act upon or not act upon those feelings. The articulation of attraction is significant because girls understand that they are not adults; but there is some element of shared experience, even if it is from a less developed or less mature context.

Adolescent girls reflect narratives of risk avoidance that are evident in teachings from adult caregivers and school. They do not negate their feelings of attraction, sometimes they reject the measures and restrictions parents, and caregivers have for them, sometimes they follow them finding ways to circumvent the aspects they believe are too restrictive, or even, as described by them, ridiculous. Culture and society shape their understanding and articulation of sexual attraction through this lens of risk avoidance; therefore, agency is manifested in how they satisfy the desire to experience attraction with the need to manage risk. They are repeatedly exposed to information about the dangers of sexual activity. For many girls they act in agentic ways by delaying sexual activity, prioritizing completing secondary education, considering safety, boundaries and understanding consent.

To understand girls' perceptions of communication or lack of communication from adults – when confronted with silence, they seek their own knowledge. They communicate amongst themselves, they seek knowledge on the internet, they make meaning of the silences, they observe parents, aunts and uncles, friends. They reject the aspects of education that do not seem to speak directly to them while still internalizing the narrative. They believe that pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are serious and real risks for them, and some girls talk about their objectives to avoid those risks, or to avoid repeating those risks. That may mean various things – delaying or avoiding sexual engagement until older, seeking information elsewhere, beginning to test the landscape by talking to boys, checking them out on social media. Adolescent girls' recounting of sexuality is limited by age. They are not for the most part sexually active; therefore, their recounting is of attraction, testing the waters by talking to love interests, discernment, rejecting, considering. Through knowing, feeling, and choosing girls understand, identify and articulate sexuality and claim control of these feelings. As demonstrated in their

responses about their experiences of sexual attraction (desire/love/liking in a non-platonic way), their understanding of sexuality reflects how society and culture are articulated according to their worldview. Their framings demonstrate the impacts of school or education, parents, social networks, digital and physical geographies they inhabit. Their narratives reflect how they have understood the messages, historical, economic and social contexts around them, and how they, as minoritized subjects, act in agentic ways. Themes of education, religion and social media explain the mechanisms girls use to make sense of the silences, to have choices.

Adolescent girls in T&T gather information from multiple sources, personal or interpersonal and institutional to form their ideas about sex. When engaging with adults a lot of their exchanges are passive, involving observance or communicating their reactions, doubts or disagreements through actions and in silence. Those that experience open communication appear to rely more closely on relationships with trusted adults – parents, aunts, cousins, older siblings – to gather information or opinions about sex. The gaps are filled via multiple sources, but chiefly influenced by social environments at school and social media. Although many girls acknowledge very limited open discussions with adults about sex, they are constantly assessing the messages they receive and making decisions about how to act considering these messages. To better understand these themes, I will first discuss the demographic findings and responses to the interview and interviewer.

Demographics

Girls' characterizations of their family's socioeconomic status ranged from financial struggle to access to luxuries and education. Three girls did not name a social class but said that things were hard, or a financial struggle for their mothers or families growing up. Six girls described their families as working class or lower middle class, for instance saying, "My family

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cannot afford, not plenty of stuff, but they try to. So, they can afford groceries. My grandmother will buy stuff to put in the house like curtains, bedsheets, towels, ceramics. My aunt, she can afford groceries as well. My mom can't really afford much because she's not really working a big-time job." Ten girls described themselves as middle class using descriptions that ranged from, "Clothing, somewhere to live, they have jobs. Vacations occasionally, not all the time." to "Middle class. Not really high, but not too low. Because I get all my needs, not all my wants, but all my needs." One girl explained that her parents denied her a (Sony PlayStation) PS5 because they said they could not afford it, but they got her a laptop for school. Six girls described themselves as upper or higher middle class, "I have a lot of access, access to education." I can get necessities and luxuries (like the new iPhone) as well." Their descriptions of what their families could afford, interpretations of conversations they heard from parents and guardians, and the jobs they described their parents having seemed to convey that most, though not all, had a fairly accurate assessment of their family's economic situation. Parental occupations as reported by girls spanned a broad range including but not limited to selling food occasionally from home, market trader, domestic care worker, nurse, teacher, and investment banker.

As described in Chapter 4 (Table 1) girls came from a broad geographic expanse of Trinidad. Five of the ten girls from southwestern Trinidad came from communities that are fence line communities within the southwest oilfield areas. In fact, two of them described the busiest activity in their community as noise from big trucks going in and out of an industrial estate. Other girls from the southwest came from areas that are less rural and have more public amenities but are similarly quite far from the main urban areas of Trinidad. Communities in south and central Trinidad from where three girls originated are more accessible to the major highways on the island, and to urban and commercial centers. The girls from north and west

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Trinidad were from very distinct neighborhoods, one from a coastal village in the north, the others from very distinct communities near the capital of Port of Spain. The girls from east and northeast Trinidad came from communities that were commercial and transit hubs, and from farming and fishing villages on the far northeastern coast. Thus, the sample was a geographically diverse representation of girls living in T&T with slight over-representation of girls from south and southwestern Trinidad. The over-representation of girls from south Trinidad is explained in part by availability of participants, willingness to participate and researcher location. The earliest responses came from families in southwest Trinidad, and they included multiple girls who were related or acquainted with each other. As some of these girls had recruited their friends to participate, rather than simply agreeing to an adult's request, it demonstrated their enthusiasm in taking some ownership of who would be involved in this project. Given that data collection occurred within a relatively short period of time, and my concern about the risk of interviewing being interrupted by transmission of covid-19 I opted to interview all these girls when the opportunity arose, rather than decline some participants to pursue recruitment in other locations. Typically, when utilizing a purposive sample researchers prioritize how participants can narrate their experiences and articulate opinions to create a rich narrative (Palinkas et al, 2015). This objective remained a priority for me; however, I opted to conduct all interviews and to be more purposeful about the articulation of details once I approached minimum sample size.

Inquiries About the Researcher

At the start of each interview, I reminded girls of the voluntary nature of their participation and that they could ask to stop, choose to not answer or ask me any questions. At the end of our conversations, I again invited them to ask questions. By asking me questions participants were involved in subverting the researcher's gaze, complicating the understanding of

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power between us. However, it is important to note that they asked when I had finished the interview and invited them to ask. I had hoped that some would ask questions without prompting, but they did not. I also read some of this as participants' subverting the researcher's gaze and complicating normative understandings of power by asking me questions about myself and about my studies and the research project.

Ten girls asked me questions at the end of the interviews. Two asked about the research process, one asked why I had chosen to do this project, two asked about my course of study, and one asked whether I had ever liked a boy, and when did I have my first boyfriend. One girl asked my opinions on whether young girls who had life events that interrupted their education could turn things around. One girl asked me if I believed in love. One of the girls I interviewed in the home for teenage mothers asked me what I thought about young girls like (us) – young and pregnant and in homes. How old was I when I first fell in love, my age, where I live, and if I don't find school stressful? I had anticipated that some girls would ask me questions about my experiences of relationships, intimacy or sex when I was their age; however, none of them did. Possible explanations for this might be that perhaps my age and mature presentation made them disinclined to ask questions of that nature back to an adult. Children in T&T are not typically accustomed to questioning adults in a very open manner unless they are individuals in their intimate space, such as parents, aunts or uncles, or older cousins. Although I was born in the US I was raised and completed primary and secondary education in Trinidad. I remember as an adolescent first year student in college in the US being struck at how outspoken and opinionated American students were. I do not believe that Trinbagonian teens are not outspoken or that they lack opinions, in fact, my interviews reinforce that they are indeed quite opinionated on the subject matter. However, the way they articulate their opinions publicly and the way they are

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raised to perceive and treat adults with whom they have no personal relationship may have affected the likelihood of questioning. I should also note that as part of my conversational style I typically validated or reflected using similar language to theirs, that I understood what they meant or had experienced. Having trained as a psychotherapist and worked with adolescents for several years I am skilled at positioning myself in a non-judgmental stance and adopting a matter-of-fact disposition to details that might otherwise engender strong reactions from adults. Importantly, and unlike many adults in these adolescents' lives I did not see myself in a role of providing counsel or having the capacity to shape or change their behavior. There were several interviews in which I responded to their comments by noting that the reason I was conducting this research was because I believed they had opinions on society and ideas about sex. I did this both as a method of normalizing their narratives, and to reinforce their sharing of information. Thus, it is possible that the confluence of these factors influenced the dearth of personal questions. It is also possible that my age and experience served as a blind spot, and I was oblivious to their attempts to manage impressions or present a false narrative. Understanding the relationship between my positionalities as a researcher from the US, even if I embody some shared identities with my participants, I have to leave room for the possibility that my position may have stirred up a form of silence or a mask in the form of a desire to present a perfect self (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012). In the subsequent sections I shall discuss the specific themes that were derived from analyzing the interviews.

Themes

Agency by Knowing and Feeling: The Initial Stages of Sexual Attraction

Girls' responses demonstrated they were knowledgeable about intimacy and sex. No matter the age group they tended to identify Standard 4 or 5 – typically when girls are between 9

and 12 – as the age at which they first felt some form of attraction. An identification of feelings ranged from innocent, mostly emotional affinity that they could separate from a filial or platonic attraction or love to deeper sexual feelings. Apart from perhaps two or three girls, and aware of the nature of the study, they all giggled when reacting to the question about whether they had ever liked someone regardless of age, experience or social location. This was true even for several of the girls who described histories of trauma or negative experiences with relationships or sex. Many of them conceived of emotional and romantic notions of liking, attraction, intimacy and sex and typically conversed openly about their interests and desires, about sources of information, and most clearly about their future desires and intentions regarding sexual and intimate relationships.

After responding to the demographic section girls were asked, "Have you ever liked someone? And follow-up questions about what the experience felt like, what they did, and whom they told. They shared both emotional and physical descriptions of what it was like to feel attraction to someone. One girl, Shola (16), described the feeling as "An energy that just runs down my spine. It's like a spark. And when I'm around them I can't really speak, I can't really talk, and I'm just at a loss for words and they will be talking to me, but I can't really form my words. I can't do that."

Younger girls also identified these feelings. Adenike (13), when asked how she knew the feeling was different from strong feelings she had for family members or friends, said, "I guess my heart was beating fast, like if I was nervous." Ashanti (12) said, "Yes, one of my friends. Because every time I saw them, I would have butterflies." She distinguished that the feelings were quite different from feelings she had of other boys with whom she was friends. Another girl, Anaiya (17), who was older described her feelings of liking when she was younger: "I

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always wanted to be near them... I don't normally get sexually excited is very rare. But I like to be around certain people." When you're 13 "the hormones start to kick in."

There was also some recognition of a distinction between an emotional, non-platonic attraction that was 'permissible' or different for adolescents than the experiences of adults.

> Kayleigh (17): Yes, but that is a secondary school thing. You see the boy, you talk to him, he talks to you. It isn't like how adults may say it. They might go deeper, like go out and stuff, but it's just a school thing and everybody knows you and the person are together.

I asked Kayleigh, who for reasons described later in the discussion, said she did not believe she had ever experienced true attraction, how she knew that she liked someone in a non-platonic way. She said, "I smiled a lot and when he was talking, I was smiling, smiling." She giggled as she described this. They used terms such as "adult stuff" and "adult things." When asked to clarify what that meant at least two girls spelled it out for me as "sexual intercourse." Two of the youngest girls, ages 12 and 13 said that they did not like saying the word sex. Older girls displayed more nuanced understandings of attraction, and some could narrate differences in an innocent attraction compared to deeper sexual feelings as they got older. For instance, Vanessa (17) said, "I was able to differentiate between platonic attraction and more than like a crush. Since I was 6 it wasn't that kind of way, but it was more than a friend…. It changed as I got older. When I was younger it was more like innocent, kind of wanting to get to know somebody more than usual because maybe at that age I was kind of self-involved. And now it's more like a feeling of admiration towards the person if I like them, and kind of wanting to help facilitate their needs and to be close to them and other stuff." When I asked if this was different

to the closeness with family and friends she said, "Yes, so similar to that feeling but also I guess it's just attraction is what's the difference."

There were evident age distinctions between older and younger girls in terms of familiarity and ease talking about sex, which was expected. I anticipated that there would be an age at which girls recognized sexual attraction in themselves as a thing apart from what they saw depicted in media or even from adults in their lives. I was also curious about young adult women's sexual agency but interested in its early beginnings. Therefore, the interviews were designed to capture the earliest stages of attraction and liking from the perspectives of adolescent girls.

Nineteen girls (75%) in this study were not sexually active, nor had they ever been. Thus, their discussions of attraction were based on strong physical and feelings of attraction. Their discussions about sex were somewhat in the abstract. Their ages and development, as well as life experiences framed their articulations about sexual attraction, with younger, less experienced girls evidencing more of the emotive and social, and older girls speaking more frequently about both the emotional and physical sense of sexual attraction or their ideas and plans for sex. For instance, one of the girls, Kylie (15) who had been sexually active said, "I liked Jamie[12]. Every time I see him my mind used to go blank. "I was easy, I was easy to get. You know how some girls does be like, no, you don't know each other for that long. I just went. I just wanted it. When asked why she said, "I don't know, he was nice." I did not probe this particular comment further, in retrospect perhaps I should have. In my journal I jotted down after the interview how the abundance of details, and a combination of traumatic experiences and sexual activity made some aspects of the interview overwhelming for me as the researcher. I remembered how as a young

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[12] As with the participants in this study a pseudonym was assigned to anyone they may have mentioned by name in their personal narratives.

woman I have sometimes initiated a kiss with someone I was dating for the first time because, knowing I was attracted, I wanted to move past the anxiety of wondering and waiting for it to happen. Girls are taught to be demure, to wait and not make the first move. For some the disincentive to initiate the first move is high as they could get characterized as being "fast" or pushy, or even worse, as sluts (Lomax, 2018).

Agency Articulated in Timing, Preference, Context

I wanted to understand what agentic moves girls have made, and what they identified as their choices despite what they were hearing and seeing in society. Articulations of agency were evident when girls talked about their reasons for pursuing or a relationship; whether and why they communicated with caregivers or friends, what was important in deciding whether or when to have sex; discussing what values to adhere to, and when discussed their ideas about an ideal relationship and what they would do if they weren't getting that out of their relationship. For instance, girls articulated desires of obtaining their own businesses, getting homes, employment, and a desire for a partner who had ambition, and who supported their quest for education or success. They believed that to be important to an ideal relationship and saw relationships and more so sex, as interrupters of their quests. To delay sex therefore served as an agentic way to exercise control over their lives and futures, rather than ascribing to broadly held societal values.

Like when Anaiya (17), who described herself as Afro-Caribbean, said there was a boy she liked and she contemplated whether she would want to have sex with him. But she observed that sometimes this same boy, who she noted was Afro-Trini "these days they only want a specific type of girl… they either want an Indian girl, or a girl with Dougla hair. She said that one day they we were together for lunch, and he said he was more interested in, he only liked light-skinned Dougla girls with loose hair texture.

Leslie: He really said those words?

Anaiya: Yeah. And then he said we could be friends. And I was like "no." My intuition was strong enough to know it's not worth it with him. Because I know it's not just me, he would be pushing that thought to in reality.

Anaiya, like other girls in the study expressed agency through their thoughtfulness and by reckoning with the negotiations, opportunities, caveats of the relational landscape in their social environments. They defined the parameters of teenage relationships based on what they considered appropriate for their age, or by how they claim space and maintain autonomy in relationships. As in the previous example considering how boys might perceive them in terms of racial hierarchies, and also, considering whether boys were showing interest simply because they saw them as an opportunity for sex, not as someone special with whom they might one day have sex.

Anaiya: "Sometimes it doesn't really have reasons, they just want to have sex for attraction. Because I know there's a thing called sex with benefits. I don't want that. I get attached. I will get attached and be very annoyed and want to fight if I get attached and they're not attached I would get very mad.

If we're together and they're pushing, let's have sex. I would break up with them immediately. And if they like have an ex and they were sexually involved before and they're like, that's my friend. I wouldn't allow my boyfriend to have a girl best friend. Because that's usually the girl they want to have but they can't. Or they're friends with the ex. That's a big red flag."

Girls made decisions about what values they prioritized and integrated messages from parents with their own values. For instance, Mikela (15), said that although many in her religion

pick and choose what rules to follow ("anything goes") she chooses to uphold values herself. She said that for now she had no interest in sex before marriage, because she internalized the teachings of her church. She said that although her father, who with her grandmother was a primary caregiver, was not opposed to her having a boyfriend once they didn't do "adult stuff"[13] he had encouraged her to focus on school. While she chose to follow religious teaching, she left open the possibility that she would still consider her own personal comfort above all.

Mikela: You could probably get to know the person by a certain time.

Leslie: Is marriage a requirement?

Mikela: With my religion, marriage is required.

Leslie: Do you think that people who are of your religion that's like a strict rule that they stick to or is that a preferred thing.

Mikela: You shouldn't be forced to do it. You should be ready to do it at your timing. You should do it when you have the person you know you want to do it with. When you're long term.

Girls understand the parameters established by their parents and still they seek to create independent pathways to actualizing their desire and understanding their sexuality. Amara (15), who spoke of how important her religious beliefs were for her and suggested that she would be more attracted to a young man who was genuine and serious about his religious faith (rather than boys who she knew were insincere). She weighed the implications of exploring attraction in the midst of conflicting parental messages. She described how some adults seemed to communicate that she was at an age where she might soon be allowed to have a boyfriend, and others signaled

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[13] Mikela and several other girls described adult stuff as sex, or sexual intercourse. Another girl, Amara said she knew the behaviors that were off limits included sex, but also any type of physical activity, but she was open to entertaining the latter since her caregivers and the church did not specify kissing as taboo.

it was acceptable but only if it was not openly acknowledged. Although she was afraid that her father might react negatively to her talking to boys, in the right conditions if it was someone, she was attracted to she would consider kissing him:

> Amara: The church never said you can't kiss somebody.
>
> Leslie: But you're making your own decision.
>
> Amara: Well, I don't think it's wrong.

Nevertheless, she set limits on what she believed to be appropriate behavior for her, saying that she wouldn't do something that she didn't believe was right with that person (like share nudes). Giselle (16) when asked about her reasons for not having sex or thinking about having it said that it was wrong, but she immediately qualified her statement and expressed a view that demonstrated a complex understanding of her youthfulness and inexperience, a need for safety and security, the importance of remaining judgement free about personal decisions about sex, and the possibilities of sexual exploration.

> Giselle: Well not wrong, but it's kinda not safe as yet. If I know the person like really, really well, which would probably take a while.
>
> Leslie: How long does it take?
>
> Giselle: I don't know, it could be different for different people. For me maybe over 2 years. I was saying it was wrong because of my age, but then I thought there are people my age who do that, and I guess they have a relationship with the other person that would be the same as an adult, so I guess it's not technically wrong."

She evidenced a disambiguation of her personal feelings or values and opinions about adolescent behavior from the notion that people should be able to determine what is right for them (some of our anti-choice advocates should hear from her).

Similarly, Lori (15) was mindful and decisive in her acknowledgement that sex could wait, and relationships could wait, but left room for other young people to make decisions that were comfortable for them. She admitted that despite her age she felt awkward and that was implicated in the moves she made to entertain an attraction to someone or decide whether to act upon it. She said:

It might seem weird to be in a relationship. It's both being awkward and being more focused on school. I'd rather focus on school rather than being in a relationship. It's nothing that I want particularly now, maybe in the future. I think I'm too young. Sometime around when you're in university would be a good age. But I'm not going to shame somebody who is in a relationship. I personally wouldn't want to have sex younger (than university). I'd rather it be with someone I'm dating, not a one-off time. And relationships when you're younger are not serious.

Leslie: Potentially someone you would marry?

Lori: Potentially. But I don't have to be married to them or engaged to them.

Communication Gaps and Silences, and Sources of Information

The Education System as a Source of Information on Risk Avoidance Repeatedly girls in this study discussed avoiding risk. Their descriptions of peer communications indicated that typically if they learned about sex from friends or same age peers the information motivated them to investigate on their own, though typically not from trusted adults. However, when they received information from parents, guardians, teachers, church leaders, the discussions involved avoiding pregnancy and the risks of sexually transmitted diseases.

Ava Marie (14): In school I didn't really listen, nobody else neither. Because nobody don't want to hear that.

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Leslie: HFLE - Health Family and Life Education? What are they teaching?

Ava Marie: I think it was about sexual harassment, and about the body parts, and about AIDS and how people does contract AIDS.

When asked about what was important in making decisions about sex most girls spoke in terms of avoiding risk. They talked about being with someone you could trust to use protection, or who had not slept with several other people because of the risk of STDs. These were the messages typically communicated by their parents and in classes at school. Consequently, their ideas about sex being an activity that they had even slight interest in were tied to the responsibilities of having to mitigate or avoid the risk of contracting an STD or getting pregnant.

Tenille (16): I don't think it [sex] will happen for teenagers because they're young. Should be 18 and up. When you're 18 you're legal.

Leslie: So, you're an adult officially, so sex is something for adults?

Leslie: Why do you think it isn't for young people.

Tenille: It doesn't make any sense. You can have babies and I don't think anybody want a baby at a young age. Some people still going to school.

Leslie: Are there any other risks other than having a baby?

Tenille: Who de person been with before me. Because you don't know what the person have.

Leslie: Is this because of STIs?

Tenille: Yeah.

Other girls discussed the importance of being with someone who they trusted to take the risks seriously.

Yemi (16): Trust and feeling safe - that they will use protection, that they won't sleep around.

Tiwa (15): Make sure to avoid pregnancy and STIs, make sure you've finished your education and have a job in case you get pregnant so you can support yourself.

Maya (17): Need to think about the consequences. Use protection, find out if any one of them have any diseases or infections.

Zariah (16): So, you need to do stuff like, say someone who is old enough where it's legal to do STD tests. Because I always thought if I was to have sex with somebody it's best to have a test because many of these don't have a cure. So, I don't want to end up with one of them, especially if it's my first time. Testing. Being mentally stable to take care of a kid. Protection. You have to be mentally able to take that on.

Thus, adults utilize education as a conduit for disseminating information about the risks of sex. But the communication in education is largely one-sided. Adolescent girls seek information to verify whether the discomfort they experience from the messages they get in school is legitimate. They sense that what they're hearing is biased, based on race and gender. School does not tell them about trust, does not fill their curiosity about the relational aspects of negotiating sex and sexual relationships. And that is what they want to know. The courses are a stock photo of what adults believe should be the only communication about sex. The only girls who mentioned religious education about sex were Roman Catholic girls. I was surprised to hear that girls in religious education and confirmation classes did something known as "Theology of the Body". I was curious about the role of school and education in girls' conceptualizations about sex. How are girls' meanings and orientations towards sex governed by what they learn, and how does education fit into their ideas, beliefs and behaviors pertaining to sexual attraction and the

decisions they make. The responses of participants in this study demonstrated that schools served both as an institutional site for learning. Many schools have classes that discussed the factual information about sex (albeit from a risk and aversive standpoint); and a social setting to experience attraction first-hand and learn in unsupervised settings from peers.

School and education are important in determining one's role in a gender system, and in the Caribbean the gender gap in achievement and enrollment favors girls (Bailey, 2002). Gender differences in the Caribbean labor market have improved considerably since the late 1990s when, according to sociologist Barbara Bailey, women had to have higher levels of education than men to achieve similar earnings (ECLAC/UNIFEM, 1995 cited in Bailey, 2002). However, wage inequality persists, only exacerbated by the pandemic as women left the labor market at higher rates, dropped out of informal labor markets at higher rates and were less likely to return to work (ECLAC, 2021). Therefore, it is quite likely that girls understand that the road to their survival has always meant they have to shore themselves up with whatever accreditation and resources that will allow them stability. Girls may notice that the women in their families and community have more economic and familial responsibilities, as was indicated in their allusions to the responsibilities of pregnancy and parenthood, and self-sufficiency. School may influence how masculinity and femininity are constructed. Thus, girls might internalize the values of educational attainment and deprioritize desires for intimacy or relationships in favor of focusing on school. Certainly, many of the girls in this study made statements to that effect. School or education was also a source of information about sex. Beyond consulting the internet for information, which will be discussed later in this chapter, most girls when asked specifically about what they had learned in school mentioned various lessons in various courses: Health and Family Life Education (HFLE), Integrated Science, Biology, Social Studies, and Human and

Social Biology (HSB). In Biology and Integrated Science, they said they learned about reproductive systems, viewed diagrams with sexual organs so they could identify them, learned about sexually transmitted diseases and infections.

> Tenille: We had to do a presentation on different types of diseases you could get from sex. We didn't really do much in biology because that's when covid came. That's when school shut down and we never really do nothing on it.

In Social Studies three girls said they learned about family relationships, marriage, parenting. Although it was not consistently mentioned, some secondary schools in T&T teach a course called Health and Family Life Education (HFLE). Some girls said they had not done HFLE, or when it was listed as a suggestion of classes they may have had, did not acknowledge it. However, it would appear that some students encounter the curriculum at some point in their secondary education through various modes. The earliest girls reported learning about sex was Standard 3 (typically around age 8 or 9). Most girls said they discussed reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases in Integrated Science and Biology classes. Some mentioned discussing the family or relationships in a limited way in their social studies classes.

The Health and Family Life Education Regional Curriculum Framework came into being based on a resolution passed in 1994 by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Standing Committee of Ministers of Education. In consultation with United Nations organizations – UNICEF and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and additional technical assistance from the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI), Ministry of Education, St. Lucia, OECS Secretariat, and United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) and University of the West Indies (St. Augustine). A technical report and framework for the HFLE curriculum published by UNICEF (2008) states the rationale

as a means to fill an educational gap that does not address the social problems that affect young

people. They characterize the youth population in the region as such:

> This group has historically always been "at risk." In the past, it was infectious diseases
> that ravaged this group. Today, however, emotional and behavioural disabilities rank
> high among the health conditions that affect young persons in the Region. Increasingly,
> Caribbean youth are being adversely affected by a number of social, psychological and
> physical problems.

Thus, the HFLE curriculum includes lessons intended to "delay the onset of drug abuse; prevent

high-risk sexual behaviors; address anger management, conflict resoution, improvements in

academic performance and "positive social adjustment." (Unicef, 2008, 4) The topics can be

taught as a standalone course or integrated into courses already taught at school suggested as

infusion courses; multidisciplinary courses with various subjects organized around the HFLE

themes; interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary methods.

I did not get the impression that HFLE courses or the materials discussed in the other

programs left a marked impression on the adolescents who spoke to me.

Savielle: Schools do not talk about (relationships and sex), like they do schoolwork, but they

don't talk about life choices all the time. I mean it has the guidance counselor. But the guidance

counselor is like, they only have 1 guidance counselor for several schools. School should talk

about more life choices because when you go to school it's just schoolwork. They're not talking

to you about this kind of stuff[14].

Girls largely described the education they received in school as biological, showing

graphics or impressing information upon them in an authoritative, not didactic way. Among the

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[14] There is indeed a shortage of guidance counselors and school social workers in T&T. The Ministry of Education
reportedly documented that they have only 127 of the 334 secondary school social workers needed, with the largest
shortfall occurring in primary schools that have 73 of the 183 needed (Paul, 2021). So Savielle's experience at her
own school is not a unique circumstance. https://www.guardian.co.tt/news/shortage-of-school-social-workers-
6.2.1331926.375e812f39

twelve girls who attended government run secondary schools two mentioned HFLE specifically. Six of those girls had interruptions in their schooling due to trauma, removal or separation from family of origin. In conversations with them there was nothing to suggest that instruction in school had impressed upon them anything related to health or family life, nor did any of them indicate that school personnel were involved in the discovery of traumatic events that had led to their removal or placement. One girl who attended a denominational co-educational school, considered to be a top choice school, said that she didn't really remember anything from the classes.

Religious Beliefs   Similarly, girls who received religious education, specifically Roman Catholic girls in confirmation classes said they received information about sex. Three girls shared the types of information they received in formal religious instruction, and the ways those experiences shaped or did not shape their ideas, attitudes and beliefs about sex. There were other girls who said that they heard admonishments about the impropriety of sexual relationships outside of marriage but identified church as having a central role in their ideas and orientations. However, like education, religion provoked a silence, a gap in they type of information girls seek to know.

For example, Amara described how in church stressed that having a relationship with God while having relationships with other people meant not doing things that are sinful, which she described as fornication, and sending nudes, which she was told is considered pornography. She said they were encouraged that they should treat our bodies as temples, avoid masturbation because it would be demonic. Mikela said she took a class called *Theology of the Body* where they said that the right time to have sex is after marriage and discouraged use of pornography, and sexting, warning that use of pornography would impede bonding with a marriage partner.

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you wouldn't grow that bond with your partner. Both girls said that they took the lessons seriously and that religious teachings mattered in their decisions about sex.

But not all girls who discussed religious teachings internalized them as central to their ideas about sex. Lori mentioned that she was Catholic and had recently been confirmed. So, I asked what she had learned in church about sex. She said in preparation for confirmation: "We would have a lot of classes where they would encourage us to not do stuff, whether it be before marriage or stuff in general." Lori also said that she was not particularly religious, but that she thought it was important to get confirmed while she was a teenager because if she wanted later on to get married in the church she would need to be confirmed, and it was better to do the process as a teenager than an adult, and while her friends were also doing it.

Leslie: What kind of stuff would they not want you to do?

Lori: [laughing] They don't want you to have sex before marriage. They don't encourage abortion in general. And I feel like they're stricter against girls than against guys.

Leslie: Why do you think that is?

Lori: I have no clue.

Leslie: What are your feelings about them being stricter with girls than boys?

Lori: I don't know, it's probably something about deeply rooted sexism, in religion in general. Yeah, I don't know.

Leslie: Is this the kind of thing you and your other friends in confirmation class talked about?

Lori: Yeah, we talked about it over text and during when it was happening as well? We would be like, what is going on? Why would they be saying its more okay for men to have sex before marriage but it's not okay for women?

Leslie: Oh, they literally said those words?

Lori: It was something similar. It was like, women's bodies are a temple or something like that.

Leslie: What does that mean?

Lori: I don't know [chuckled].

Leslie: What do you think it means?

Lori: I don't know that you should treat it like it's sacred and it's special?

Leslie: And so, sex before marriage treats it like it's not sacred or special?

Lori: Yeah, because you don't know what's gonna happen with your partner.

Leslie: So, wouldn't the same thing apply to boys?

Lori: Yeah, I have no clue.

Leslie: Did anybody question them about this?

Lori: No.

Leslie: How come?

Lori: There were questions about LGBTQ and stuff, but they said they would support it or whatever. No one really questioned it.

Parental Influence and Trusted Adults   Parents behavior, messaging, and communication influenced whether girls communicated with them, their attitudes towards sex, and the weight alternative sources held in their decision-making and beliefs. Girls who described parents or primary caregivers as open, willing to share dialogue about sex, proactive with information were typically the girls who felt comfortable seeking information from parents or trusted, related adults. Since family is typically the setting where adolescents have most close contact with adults, it is potentially a very important setting through which adolescents should

gain information about sex. However, too often parents and other adults erroneously fear that discussion of sex with adolescents serves to initiate interest in sex or sexual activity (Kaestle, Allen, Wesche and Grafsky, 2021). Their source of advice or information was typically an aunt or a cousin who was a few years older than they were. Girls who felt comfortable talking to an adult family member typically scrutinized information on the internet or from friends more closely and suggested that they did not necessarily depend on internet searches or social media as trustworthy sources. Although there remained narratives of risk aversion, namely a focus on preventing teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, these discussions were also mixed in with ideas of consent, boundary setting, safety, and trust.

Shola (16): She (her mother) sat me down and said listen, your father and your mother had sex to make you. We were young and stupid but we had you. We were not ready, but we managed to see about you. You's my only picknee if you need anything come and tell me, if you like anybody come and tell me. If you having little act ups of things and stuff like that, come and tell me.

Leslie: What kinds of things are those?

Shola: As I said, hormones and sexual attraction.

Leslie: So, she said these things to you when you were eleven? But how did you know what sexual attraction is?

Shola: When I got my period. I was in public when I got my period. I was 12 and in a public place. The security guard came and told me I had a little stain on my clothes, and I looked down and there was blood! And I said let me go call my mom, and she gave me something to cover up.

Leslie: So, then your mom told you more?

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Shola: About the hormones and how you ovulate and that you're supposed to bleed for five days, and she gave me a pouch with pads and talked about carrying extra underwear in case it's heavy. And she told me about hormones and stuff like that and how on your period you will also have cravings, like chocolate and spicy foods and cold things that would make your belly first. What she didn't mention was the cramps....

Leslie: It sounds like your mom has given you a lot of information.

Shola: Yeah.

That theme was echoed by other adolescents as well, such as Zariah, who talked about her close relationship with her mother and how she valued information she received from her over the internet because her mother was open and honest with her.

Zariah: I'm outspoken to my mother so if I see things on Instagram and I don't know what they are (these memes) I go and ask her, Mummy what's this? This stuff comes up on my explore page and sometimes in my feed. Memes, on social media. Like what's trending.

Leslie: What's it like to get this information from her?

Zariah: It's good because she's my mother and hearing from her and knowing she's there to explain these things so I won't go out into the world not knowing, it's good. I don't want to ask Google. Google doesn't always give you the truth. Because it's mostly like people posting stuff. And I just want to hear it from my mother, and I guess it's because she's my mother and I don't think she will lie.

Similarly, Vanessa, who talked extensively about the importance of consent and acknowledging her own personal readiness for sex, described a home where she could always consult adults for information and where independently seeking knowledge was encouraged.

Vanessa: I'm usually the one giving information. Probably there's always been kinda like access in my house. Generally, conversations on not really like specifically about sex, but just access to speaking on topics of like abortion and that kind of stuff. Just safety and how to prevent STDs and that kind of stuff. So, kind of that and like the internet filled in gaps in what I heard outside the internet. I would research something if I didn't fully understand it…. I can't remember one specific time where I've been restricted from information. I feel like I've always kind of known about sexual relationships and how to participate in a healthy and safe way. When I'm looking at information on the internet I do a lot of reading to make sure I'm reading more than one point of view and to make sure what I'm reading is not incorrect. Sometimes when I hear stuff from family I research it, just because I'm an argumentative person. If it's my mom or my brother there's more of a chance I will believe it. The internet isn't really trustworthy.

Overall, in terms of sex, attraction and relationships adolescent girls saw school as a social space — the setting where they learned from peers, where they encountered love interests. They understood the social world of school as separate from their schoolwork and frequently in competition, where they had to prioritize one over the other. I discuss this further below when talking about the choices girls make regarding sex and intimate relationships.

Prioritizing Education: Ambition, Self-Sufficiency, Independence   Education was often implicated in decisions about sex. Girls expressed their desire to be independent and self-sufficient, to achieve or take care of themselves. They talked about prioritizing their studies over boys, about ambitions they had to be independent, have jobs, and be able to take care of themselves. This type of language was coded as arising frequently in their discussions about reasons to delay relationship, or criteria for determining the right time to have sex. Sometimes

they echoed statements made by parents or stated that they were choosing to follow the guidance of their parents. However, often they stated beliefs that they could not handle the juggling of relationships with academic achievement and chose to focus on their education. Coupled with the notion that relationships, and sexual intercourse, or the increased likelihood of sexual activity brought the responsibility of avoiding pregnancy, they chose to focus on the thing that would help them to successfully get to adulthood. Sex was often referred to as an adult thing – something one does when one is entirely legally responsible for oneself and can access sexual and reproductive healthcare independently.

> Leslie: It's been a long time since you had a crush on somebody?
>
> Savielle (15): I'm in school and I have to set my priority on school at the moment because I'm in form 4 and the Form 5s writing cxc next year and I'm right after and that's a lot of work. So, I'm not really focused on that at the moment.
>
> Leslie: So, you can't do both?
>
> Savielle: Yes, but I feel that will be hard because there are some boys that (are) understanding and some that (are) not understanding. They will complain you're always doing work. And they want to talk. I see it from other people.

Anaiya said that the conditions for having sex were being an adult (over 18 years old) because she would be responsible for herself, and having a commitment from her partner. She said that marriage was not a necessity, but some level of commitment was important. When she was asked what being responsible meant she said that she would be the person legally responsible for decisions about her own body, and it could not be considered a parental responsibility. However, despite an adolescence where she experienced attraction to several different boys she was more

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focused on passing her exams. She said particularly in the past year of school in a pandemic the stress of school and ensuring that she passed had been her priority.

Filling the Gap: Peer Communication   Girls in this study identified peer communication as a source of information, but it was questionable as to how significant an impact it had on their general ideas about sex. For many discussions about sex, sharing information that they knew was taboo, asking questions were all part of the social environment at school. This is no surprise since adolescents spend the majority of their time at school. Based on the information shared, sometimes peers are a source of accurate information or there are gaps and misunderstandings. For instance, Marissa shared that she had learned talking about the info on condoms, or the information from boys in school about sex).

> Aisha (16): Also on social media: YouTube, Instagram you see people talking about relationships. YouTube you have couples talking about relationships, posting stuff. E.g Yara and Ken on Instagram, and my cousin. He posts (pictures of) himself and his girlfriend.

In a similar vein Lori described passive engagement with information on the internet. She underscored how talking about sex with adults made her feel awkward and uncomfortable, and if she needed to talk to someone, she was more likely to talk to a female friend of her older brother, because she saw her as experienced and trustworthy.

> Lori: The internet. Just scrolling in general. It's not voluntary. You kinda just see stuff on the internet. I think I initially learnt it from something like YouTube or Twitter.
>
> Leslie: Are these people you follow?

Lori: No. Probably like recommendations from people like look at this video. Just jokes about them being with a girl or with a guy. People online making jokes about relationships and what's going on in their life.

Leslie: Where would you credit as your biggest source?

Lori: I think a lot of people learn about sex on the internet rather than from the adults in their life. I don't know why there would be like you just find something on the internet and you end up watching because you're clueless about everything. I never learned about it from adults. I just learned from the internet.

Leslie: What are these things?

Lori: I think teenagers these days are a lot more open on the internet, like sharing their lives on the internet so...

Leslie: So do teenagers talk about things like having sex?

Lori: Yeah, I think so. Like on TikTok.

Leslie: And on TikTok and you also mentioned Twitter. Is it people you follow or recommendations?

Lori: It's recommendations.

Filling the Gap: Social Media and the Internet   The three primary sources of information about sex that girls typically identified were school, church and the internet. Social media sites, most often Instagram, YouTube and TikTok were by far the site of choice for information. Girls searched for information that they did not understand, or information they heard about in school and wanted to know more about. When they engaged their parents and didn't get answers, or the answers did not satisfy them they sought clarification on the internet. Their interactions with social media sites were both active and passive. Some girls mentioned

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utilizing social media chat applications such as WhatsApp as social meeting places or what seemed to describe a group speed dating pool. Their numbers would be added to a group chat where they would share pictures of themselves and see pictures of other participants. At least two girls said they met boys who were romantic interests in such a way. They also used social media – WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok – to learn information about romantic interests, or to make decisions about what direction a relationship might take. Girls said even when their social media use was restricted, they would sometimes have friends who shared information about boys they liked. They could see whether he was posting about another girl or posting statements they found offensive. At least two girls stated that was a reason for severing ties with boys, and another said that was why their romantic interest in certain boys had waned. Anaiya, Amara, Mikela, Ava Marie, Ashanti and Tiwa all mentioned using social media in this way. These uses of social media seem consistent with emerging scholarship on Black teenage girls' uses of social media to check up on romantic interests' associations, hygiene and style, political leanings, and make decisions about whether they were favorable or not (Weser, Opara, Sands, Fernandes, and Hieftje, 2021). This type of use while not direct communication evidence that girls who use the strategies are being intentional about their engagements and seeking methods in the digital age to scrutinize love interests.

More concerning was a common narrative that surfaced from the interviews was girls' exposure to social media content via algorithms. Most girls who said they consulted or were exposed to information about sex on social media identified Instagram, YouTube and TikTok as the primary sources. Some girls used general internet searches to find out health information, to clarify things they had heard from conversations with peers, or things that had been mentioned in health education classes, but they felt awkward or uncomfortable asking. Among those who said

they searched the internet for information there were two girls who said it was not their primary source, that they typically had an adult they felt comfortable asking questions. Others specifically sought websites because they wanted to know information but did not feel comfortable asking.

Leslie: Of all the places that you've discussed what social media do you use the most for information about relationships and sex?

Amara: TikTok.

Leslie: Oh, you didn't even mention TikTok.

Amara: Yeah, I'm not allowed to be on it but I still watch it.

Leslie: So, you get more info from TikTok that HFLE, your mom, dad, church...

Amara: TikTok or social media. I've seen videos of what you do when a boy likes you.

Leslie: And what do you do with the information?

Amara: Nothing. Tell my best friend. I can't remember right now. (Seemed to be a little cagey, I didn't push).

Leslie: What do you think about the information on TikTok?

Amara: I think it could be misleading, helpful.

Leslie: What are some of the most helpful things you found out about sex, attraction, relationships on TikTok?

Amara: I remember just yesterday I saw a video where they said sperm could stay in your body for 3 days and you could get pregnant. That was really helpful.

Leslie: Sperm could stay in your body if you're having sex without...

Amara: protection.

Leslie: who's having sex without protection.

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Amara: [Shrugged]

Leslie: Now I really want to see that Tiktok.

Amara: It was on for your page from stars in a popular reality show. And I watch them, so I guess it shows what you like. It was a clip from the show.

Leslie: How do you filter and sift through and know what to take and not to take?

Amara: I don't know.

Leslie: So now you just have a lot of information. Are you curious about the stuff you've learned or seen on there? Who would you turn to ask more questions about it? Like a trusted source?

Amara: Google.

Going directly to search engines with questions was mentioned frequently. When girls did not get the answers they wanted, or they weren't comfortable seeking those answers from parents they searched. Anaiya, although she was older and appeared to be perceptive and knowledgeable said that she had compared how her parents interact now to their wedding videos where they displayed love and kissed each other often. She asked them how come they didn't anymore, but they seemed to avoid responding. She dismissed it saying she could find answers on the internet.

Leslie: And what about your parents, what did you observe of them?

Anaiya: They're not affectionate at all.

Leslie: Not even like birthdays, anniversaries.

Anaiya: Nope. Not romantic, not that type.

Leslie: What do you think of that?

Anaiya: I see their wedding video where there were kissy kissy. So yeah, I kinda had a... I watched it a few times. And I was like, how it is allyuh don't kiss no more?

Leslie: And how did they respond?

Anaiya: I don't even remember, I don't think they even take me on, I think they ignored me. I don't think they ever acknowledged the question honestly.

Leslie: And what do you think of that?

Anaiya: Shrugs, Nothing. I still have YouTube; I still have my tablet (chuckled) and I don't care.

Savielle, explained her ability to use the internet for information as a choice she was lucky to have, because teenagers did not have that many years ago. She also shared that she used Instagram for socializing with friends and got information on her explore page about relationships and sex. She said the information she typically saw, relationship memes, videos of couples were not from people she followed, but whatever was suggested by the platform.

It was evident from conversations that girls gather information by searching the internet or are passively exposed to relationship and sexuality information on social media, particularly YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. Both Instagram and TikTok use their landing page (TikTok) or search page (Instagram) to share posts from accounts users typically don't follow. What is shared is based on algorithms based on who individuals follow and how they engage with accounts on social media. The brief multimedia posts known as Reels on Instagram, and the default format on TikTok offer quick, entertaining clips that engage users to comment and remain on the apps (Baker, Doyle and Yan, 2020). These offerings are based on your engagement with content. For example, in a previous version of Instagram a message appeared on the rows of suggested posts

that stated they were based on people you follow or posts you have liked. Currently the platform places reels – their latest method of engagement, that copies the brief, mixed media clip format from the viral TikTok – in the middle of an account holder's feed. These are not reels from people you follow, but again, based on the algorithm., TikTok is considered more a performative, entertainment platform, rather than a lifestyle platform like Instagram where the content creators document their lives in polished curated posts. The spontaneous and engaging elements of TikTok are thought to contribute to its viral impact and seen as a mechanism that draws viewers in for long periods (Khan & Vong, 2014).

This impersonal and somewhat passive form of information consumption is an engagement with a largely unregulated, unknown, and foreign system of information sharing (and information gathering). Because several adolescents said their parents limited, frowned-upon, or outright prohibited their use of social media, a lot of social media activity was clandestine, and thus quite unsupervised. Thus, girls would have twice the disincentive to seek out advice or verification from known family members who presumably, they felt safe or reliably believed had their interests at heart. Unlike, for instance, Vanessa, who, because she's been exposed to information, has used things like the internet and outside sources as addenda or additional sources for information because her primary sources have been from the environment that she's in, and people that she knows and trusts.

Baldwin and Cossy (2018) discuss the progress of feminist advocacy through Caribbean cyberfeminism. I wonder the extent to which social class, education, or even race mediate young people's use of online media for advocacy and even the effects or mechanisms by which the realm of online information impacts their lived experiences. For instance, most adolescents in this study discussed their use of social media. It often occured in the absence of parental

supervision. Girls characterized their parents' oversight as policing and they would attempt to hide their social media activity, or they had received clear or mixed messages about social media use. For instance, they were not allowed on social media during school hours or during the school term, or use was limited to the evenings after homework. Alternatively, social media was prohibited, but WhatsApp, which is used as a main mode of communication between parents and children, was innovated as a place where youth could have group chats with peers and share and receive information not sanctioned by parents. WhatsApp is a private space, and its content is purportedly not surveilled. The content shared on the messaging platform, unlike more open social media platforms, is not subject to the algorithms that govern content sharing on sites like TikTok, YouTube and Instagram. However, adolescents use the platform in innovative ways and combine that usage with traditional social media platforms. They described picture and phone number sharing in WhatsApp group chats, and similar surveillance of love interests as described in their use of typical social media. Almost every adolescent girl who said she saw information about sex or relationships on social media indicated that it was not typically from people they follow, rather, from their explore pages or suggested content pages.

TikTok has become one of the most widely used and influential social media networks globally, particularly among young people (Iqbal, 2020). But it is not a space that cultivates meaningful interpersonal connections nor discourse (Zulli and Zulli, 2, 2020). Therefore, it is not necessarily the best setting for young people to find out information that may be sensitive or important for how they navigate sexual awareness and decision-making. Moreover, the viral element and communication via memes along with the way the platform is designed to encourage miming or recreating content suggests that TikTok, inculcates an environment where

deep, meaningful interpersonal connections are downplayed and processes of imitation and replication are prioritized (Zulli and Zulli, 2, 2020).

Self-deprecating humor plus content that viewers find funny increases a sense of authenticity and "closes the distance" between fans and viewers on these platforms (Su, Baker, Doyle, and Yan, 2020, 44). Also, the idea of unpolished, relatable content may increase the likelihood of believability. Considering how many adolescents admitted their aversion to talking to trusted known adults and identified trust as an important in making decisions about sex, I wonder about the social shifts in a society where information exchange is global, the lines between what is real or factual and what is marketing or fictional narrative are blurred.

Trauma and Neglect

Although not a central aspect of the themes discussed in this dissertation, the subject of trauma and neglect is an important element of the narratives of some girls but was considered separate from the main analysis. Six girls who were interviewed for this study resided in a community residence for expectant or teenage mothers. Their narratives included multiple accounts of neglect, abuse, sexual abuse and assault. These accounts were typically the basis for their removal from parental custody and their pregnancies or new motherhood, the reason they were placed at the facility. Their narratives were sufficiently distinct that they form a unique aspect of the examination of sexual agency among adolescent girls. For this reason, I only discuss the theme of trauma and neglect briefly. I believe that an examination of their narratives is worthy of a separate analysis and thus beyond the scope of the present study. However, a few points should be noted from analysis of their interviews. Although many girls described experiences of trauma and neglect, several of them had pursued relationships, some with boys who were also minors subsequent to experiences of trauma or sexual violence. They articulated

agency, speaking of intentionally choosing the right partner; being wary of certain types of men because of traumatic experiences they had. They discussed their ambitions and goals and prioritized independence and self-sufficiency, the ability to care for their children and to achieve educational and career goals despite the challenges of teenage motherhood.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the main themes analyzed from the semi-structured interviews with adolescent girls in T&T. The findings indicate that adolescent girls describe a manifestation of agency in knowing and acknowledging feelings of attraction, and awareness of their feelings. Because they are aware of these feelings of desire, their actions pertaining to attraction – to communicate their feelings, to hide them from parents or other adults in authority, to seek information, to evaluate their interests on social media – are a manifestation of agency. Secondly, girls evidence agency in communicating or withholding information about their attraction and desire. They control the timing and contexts of relational action; express preferences for the types of behaviors they value in love interests; decide and sometimes articulate how they wish to be treated; and whose affections they reject or entertain.

The third prominent theme analyzed was communication: the gaps, silences and sources of information. Communication around sex is primarily from adults or childhood friends. Girls are informed about sex from informal social networks (peers, school acquaintances); about risks of sex through educational programs and curricula in their schools; and through information shared by parents and other caregivers. Adults focus on risk avoidance, religious beliefs, and counsel or admonish girls to focus on education. Peers – typically boys – share their sexual experiences, opinions, fantasies, often while at school. They may communicate, sexually explicit, sometimes inaccurate information, but in the silence created by adults who share very

little of the specific types of information girls want to hear, peer information is noteworthy.

These two types of communication – the silence of adults, or incomplete ways that they speak

about sex, and the non-authoritative type from peers – create a gap that must be fulfilled.

Adolescent girls are resourceful, thus evidencing their agentic behavior. They see education, not

simply as a source receive passive, limiting education about biology, risk, and reproduction, but

a pathway to self-sufficiency and independence. They seek information outside the purview of

caregiving adults, sometimes from trusted adults who are usually aunts or older sisters, but more

often from social media and the internet. Their behavior demonstrates how they are feeling the

social environment, making meaning of what adults communicate about sex, and forging their

own pathways to understanding.

In the next chapter I shall provide implications and conclusions, discuss limitations and

future directions for this study.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

I began this project by asking several questions about the sexual agency of adolescent girls. As I conclude my study I address broadly how the themes analyzed in Chapter 5 answer these questions. First, I asked how adolescent girls identify and articulate their sexuality. Adolescent girls identify and articulate their sexual agency in the early stages as liking. For younger girls it was typically an emotional attachment. However, they could clearly distinguish between a platonic or filial liking of a parent, sibling or friend, and the feelings of attraction they experienced as butterflies in their stomach, sweaty palms, feeling nervous, always wanting to be around someone to whom they were attracted. They could indicate the age at which they first experienced these feelings. Girls also described ways of knowing and approving of behavior or how a love interest might treat them, or carry themselves in public. They utilized social media, exchanges with peers, who also surveilled love interests on social media to determine whether the prospects were favorable or not with someone to whom they were attracted, or who had expressed interest in them.

The second thing I was curious about pertained to how culture and society shaped girls' understanding and articulation of their sexuality. From the interview data girls communicated that education is a major factor in shaping their understanding of what adults want them to know about sex, and about what knowledge they seek and prioritize. They frequently talked about what they learned in school. Few girls learned about sex from parents or guardians, and those who did, tended to have more open communication with parents, though not explicitly so. At least six girls said they had conversations with parents. But the information they receive is largely biological and medical. This does not meet their needs. To fill the gap, girls seek out information on the

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internet. They conduct subject-based searches on topics they wish to understand and share information with friends. They also engage with information passively through the pages suggested by algorithms on social media. They also actively seek out information about love interests on social media.

Specifically, what are adolescent girls' perceptions of communication about sex, both in intimate spaces – with family members and peers – and publicly, with teachers, adults in their community, and messages from the broader society? Girls perceive communication from adults about sex as taboo. They sense from the types of messages from school, church and their caregivers, that there should be no mention of sex, because if they do, it suggests that they are sexually active or planning to be sexually active. Thus, the threat of suspicion and the ensuing restrictions or admonishment from adults leads them to seek information elsewhere. They understand the silence as prohibition.

My interview was guided by a desire to know how do adolescents recount their sexuality, if they do at all, and how does that shape the ways in which they embody their sexual agency? And the themes analyzed suggest that adolescent recounting of sexuality is complicated by their limited experience – most of the girls (19) in this study were not, nor had they ever been sexually active. Therefore, their recounting and knowledge about how the erotic experience shapes their sexual agency was largely limited to emotional arousal. Intellectually girls understood arousal, they used words like "hormones" and "act ups" to describe being physically attracted but their experience with sex was limited. The six girls who were sexually active were the girls who were in a teenage mother's home. Five of those girls recounted histories of childhood sexual abuse, often by family members, and other types of abuse and neglect. Thus, their feelings and narration of physical attraction were complicated by experiences of trauma. Only one of those girls said

that she had not experienced sexual abuse. She was also the only girl who talked specifically about pleasure – about the importance of having good sex, and knowing what to do. Her knowledge was extensive, but, because most of it came from peers at school, there was evidence of misinformation. Consequently, the articulation of embodying sexual agency is not fully fleshed out in adolescents.

This does not mean that we cannot understand adolescent sexual engagement and retelling of their erotic feelings. It simply underscores how the physical is tied to the emotional things girls know to be true, and therefore, it is an important part of sexual agency. Everything that is going on in your head and your heart is tied to the erotic. Girls desire to feel safe, to have trust with a love interest evidenced an understanding of how these values were implicated in the erotic.

Consequently, girls' negotiations around sexual or romantic attraction, the decisiveness in who to choose, how to proceed, even the decision to not have sex represents their articulation of sexual agency. Their accounts of utilizing social media, knowing when and from whom they could seek information, prioritizing trust and safety, the specific ways that they use education indicate how girls negotiate within the limits of society, and navigate the evolution of their developing sexual agency. In this study I have examined how adolescent girls in T&T see themselves in negotiations of intimacy; and where they locate themselves in a society that does typically have open, meaningful discussions about sex. My enquiry was about how they relate to the cultural norms and societal expectations regarding sexual behavior, how they negotiate within the existing social structure and the contexts they create for themselves regarding sex. Sexual agency is a term that is deeply personal and interior, but very much influenced by our understanding and internalizing of what we have learned and been exposed to in our social

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environments. Listening to the girls, understanding their social worlds, the information they choose to keep secret, the sources they trust, the worlds they enter, I considered how girls engage, as subjects minoritized by age and gender, and even by socioeconomic status, with an adult world that has considerable control over their lives. Their narratives describe how adolescent girls, despite the warnings and restrictions they receive, act in agentic ways to actualize their sexuality.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Black women's and girls' sexuality it has been characterized by tropes and stereotypes. These stereotypes are located in the history of chattel slavery and the continuity of plantations under a history of colonialism that violently subjugated Black people (Turner 2017; Spillers 1987). Thus interiority, a culture of secrecy around sexual desire and conditions of propriety became tied both tied to social progress, and a yoke to control the life of women of lesser means (Hammond 2004; Edmonson 2003; Hine Clarke 1989). One of the purposes conducting interviews was to elucidate adolescent girls' attitudes and beliefs about sex, to observe whether or how they articulated desire, whether the preoccupations of interiority exist for adolescent girls in the way they have historically been presented for older women, and how their interactions with adults – influential people who have symbolic and material power over their lives – have shaped their views. My findings suggest that girls read the messaging and silences from adults about sex. They observe adult behavior and draw conclusions about the adults in close relationship to them, even when they do not communicate this. Because most adults typically are not open, adolescents learn, even before adolescence that discussions of sex are taboo and that they may risk accusations of precocity or lasciviousness if they enquire about sex. This is consistent with Denise Narain's (2002) analysis, described in Chapter 2, of the characterization of mother-daughter communication about sex in Jamaica Kincaid's novel, *Annie*

John. Thus, instead of access to information from trusted adults that girls desire, there is silence and suspicion, and girls seek other sources to fill the void.

Parent-child communication about sex is crucial for sexual development. When parents are open and honest children recognize it and respond favorably (Pariera, Katrina, L. and Brody, Evan, 2018). Consequently, girls who described openly communicative relationships with parents, guardians or close adult relatives, particularly when the relative was a woman, appeared to be more knowledgeable with facts about sex. They tended to have an awareness of the risks of sex, but also an open and comfortable attitude to talking about arousal, consent, setting boundaries, and not judging the actions of other teens.

How Frameworks Connect to the Themes Analyzed

Intersectionality: How Race and Class Hierarchies Matter in the Caribbean

I focused in the dissertation on gender and the age of girls, but I understand the cultural context of the Caribbean matters; therefore, hierarchies of race and class matter. Although not always explicitly expressed, the intersections of race and class are implicated in their attitudes and beliefs about sex, how they prioritize, and manifest agency. Girls across class in this study talked about using education to actualize their life goals. This maps onto what we already know about women in the Caribbean. For decades Caribbean women have had access to education and employment and evidence supports that they have needed twice as many qualifications and to work harder than men to achieve the same economic gains (Bailey, 2002). Caribbean women, like women in most societies, have also shouldered heavier burdens of care work. Far too often the industries in which they earn their livelihoods are discounted or overlooked as indicators of economic development and denied access to the types of financing that can exponentially change their material conditions (Barriteau, 2001). All girls in this study talk about using education.

However, their class positions may lead them to use it differently, or dramatically change the level of urgency in their articulation of a dependency on education. Girls who described their class status as higher or upper middle class talked about focusing on education, but that was not the central part of their narrative. They expected that they would have access to higher education, even, costly higher education outside of T&T. Consequently, when they talked about making decisions about sex they were more focused on how partners navigated consent and boundaries, and perhaps had less worry about advancement. Although girls didn't necessarily say that if they didn't focus on education right now their material conditions would not change, they certainly understood and spoke about how their focus on education would allow them to access the material conditions they hoped to have. They expressed that the partners they chose needed to be consistent with their ambitions and support their life goals. They were clear on the imperatives of social support, specifying that having a partner who was collaborative, and could give encouragement was equally important in deciding when and with whom to have sex. As such it was evident that simply having someone who provided material support was not enough, they value partners who can take care of themselves, but also provide emotional support. As discussed in this paper, adolescent girls' sexual agency is shaped by information and contexts of their social environment – the information they receive from their intimate social environments, the institutions with which they interact, and socio-cultural and socio-political information that they receive.

In the Caribbean proximity to whiteness can allow you to negotiate class hierarchies. This is embedded in the context of slavery, the rape of enslaved Black women produced offspring who were often, but not always enslaved. Sometimes their features and paternity granted access to freedom and inheritance. The modern Caribbean and T&T has not divested itself of these

notions of colorism. When girls such as Anaiya so clearly articulated the outspoken racial

preferences of boys in her school, it underscores that these contexts are still meaningful.

How Systems of Power Shape Agency

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) theorizes that power is created and obtains validity through an

interplay between structure and agency, both the social structure and actors must be considered.

Social explanations for behavior must account for how people understand their world

subjectively, the preconscious practices (habitus) in which those categories are articulated, the

power exercised in social stratification. Therefore, the attitudes, ideas and beliefs that adolescent

girls may develop in response to objective conditions – social mores, communication, limited

privacy, authority (the law), and social stratification shape how they navigate sexual engagement

and develop agency. However, it is important when interrogating and theorizing about

Trinbagonian girls' sexual agency to understand the complexity and nuance of agency in a

postcolonial Caribbean setting (Mahmoud, 2004). Despite decades of research on adolescent

sexual desire, and critiques of its over emphasis on risk, pathology and pregnancy avoidance,

those narratives appear to prevail, in social and intimate settings, and in school curricula. When

adolescent girls experience these teachings as excessively foreboding, judgmental or too

biological and cautionary in nature, they are less likely to respond or internalize the messages in

ways that make them proactive and open in discourse about sex.

How the Themes Connect to Previous Research

One of the things that surfaces repeatedly in this study is the impact of social media. The

psychological impacts of social media, the use of social media for dating and sex; youth usage of

social media for social engagement and education are being discussed in the literature. What is

hardly being discussed, I believe, the complex ways that adolescents are utilizing social media as

an agent of sexual agency, and certainly not in this way in the Caribbean. That is an area that needs to be explored. Adolescents are reading their contemporary environment in a way that adults are not, and they are seeking out what for girls in T&T is the missing discourse. When Kempadoo (2009) critiques the medicalizing of discourse on adolescent sex; when Morgan (2015) says that we must focus not only on inequality, but also pleasure politics, adolescent girls in T&T affirm these scholars' positions. They want to know more than just the risks and biology of sex. They demand that we invoke pleasure and agency in the Caribbean discourse on sex. The gap between what schools and parents provide and what girls want to know is vast and they have rapidly adapted their information seeking to utilize the internet.

Broader Implications

Adolescent girls value and seek information about trust, boundaries, choosing the right partner making something of themselves. They are actively seeking that information. They are aware that they have choices. As such it is contingent on adults to examine the forms of information adolescents receive, the gaps and in information, the impact of their communication with adolescent girls. This study underscores the importance of addressing those informational gaps so to meet the needs of adolescents, and to shape institutional responses to adolescent sexuality.

When I first conceived of this project I was working as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselor, providing therapy to employees, and their spouses and children. For the first time after many years of working exclusively with adults it allowed me a closer interaction with teenagers. I had always been keen to work with adolescents and young adults, in part because of the dynamic and promising nature of that stage of life; but also, because their opinions and power are often overlooked and undermined. Adolescents brought to therapy by their parents

were almost always seen as a problem to be fixed, and girls, almost always as needing their sexuality to be suppressed. It became clear from so many interactions that desire was misunderstood, but also that it was being formed in a socio-cultural (and political) context that was not simply about the individual, but about Trinbagonian and Caribbean society itself. Three years after I first thought about this misalignment of ideas and motivations (to fix them, to be free), I was fortunate to have the responsibility of working with adolescents who experienced significantly more trauma and upheaval in their lives. They too, despite some personal histories of trauma and adverse events, often expressed desire. They formed familial alliances in community residences, safe houses and temporary care, where they had not received them from their families of origin. They also found passion, desire and love, both straight and queer. They talked about love while also talking about the violence they had experienced or witnessed and while they made impassioned pleas for more privileges, justice or fairness. These acts of agency and determination were occurring while systems around them corralled them into particular settings designed to manage their behavior, where adults lamented the behavior of these children, but so few thought about how their discourse, and the challenges they faced reflected the missing discourses in the body politic about youth agency, about adolescents and sex, or even about adults and sex. However, I did not simply want to understand adolescent girls, I was interested in how young women – presumably legal autonomous agents of their lives – navigated the actualization of their sexuality, their interior lives, with their lived experiences personally and in society. To do that I thought it necessary to explore the genesis of sexuality, desire and agency to understand how it evolved across time. Thus, this project is but a beginning for my exploration of young women and girls in the Caribbean. In reality the inquiry was both about adolescent girls and about the adults around them. Their discourse reflected the sources from which they derived

information, their internalizations of the attitudes and beliefs of adults around them but also their rejections.

Knowing your own feelings, desires and thoughts apart from those who are most influential in your life: your parents and guardians, peers, teachers is integral to sexual agency. I wondered whether girls articulate degrees of attraction based on their own private knowledge of self or what was communicated to them or for them. How did they articulate their desires and what did they do with these desires? All girls identified ways of distinguishing their attraction from platonic feelings of love or attraction. Many of them, particularly younger girls, stated that they did not act on these feelings, either because they did not feel comfortable doing so, were unsure whether the person felt the same way, or they did not want to focus on feelings of attraction or a relationship. Sometimes the reluctance to pursue a relationship was due to not feeling it would be permitted by parents, but it was equally because girls were not interested in a relationship. These responses came early in the interview as they were tied to the questions: Have you ever 'liked' somebody? How did you know? What did you do? As mentioned previously almost every girl had a similar reaction to the first question – giggling while affirming they had experienced those feelings.

Almost consistently girls talked about acquiring information, or actively seeking it from sources other than parents and guardians. Even in the few situations when they felt comfortable talking to parents or guardians and identified them as people they trusted, they sought information independently. Perhaps, it reflects, as some of them said, that they felt weird talking about sex with parents; but this turning away also reflected their understanding that any discourse on sex would raise alarm bells for parents that interest equaled action. What my participants' responses showed me was that even for girls who were young, and girls who

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believed they should not be engaged in sexual activity or had no desire to initiate sexual activity until adulthood, they understood sexual attraction, they had opinions and beliefs and they actualized their opinions and beliefs in agentic ways outside the purview of their parents. It demonstrates that adolescents avoid discussion with parents and guardians not simply because they feel uncomfortable, but because they sense too that their parents are not prepared (or willing or able) to have these conversations. Certainly, in preparing to interview adolescents I had my own anxieties about whether parents would feel comfortable with me broaching the subject. That was far from the case. In fact, most parents were enthusiastic about having me speak with their daughters, and one parent thanked me for the opportunity. I wondered whether it was because some of the girls' opinions were not typically solicited for research, or if it was the topic. At least two of the girls told me they had thoughts and opinions on the topic prior to communicating with me. Their interpretations of a lack of communication from their parents made me wonder whether they were glad, or at least curious about having an adult to converse with. Even when girls seemed shy or squirmed at some of my questions, when I followed-up with them they were motivated to talk. To me what this reflects is the need for both personalized and national conversations on sex and sexuality.

As with the work of Fine and McClellan (2012) discourse on sex was often linked with a heteronormative discourse on prevention, and very few girls talked about pleasure. But the notion of pleasure and agency was absolutely present. Girls understood what it meant to be sexually attracted and that it was distinct from an emotional and platonic liking. Many of them, particularly younger girls, framed those feelings as emotional, but still distinguished them from the strong feelings of love they had for close family members. They observed what they recognized as sexual attraction in others, they articulated socially "responsible" parameters in

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which sex should occur, but left room for defying the rules of marriage or adulthood if the conditions of safety, consent and prioritizing their personal well-being were met.

To understand life in the Caribbean is to acknowledge and account for how history links to the cultural, economic, political and social considerations of today – it is to connect the colonial past to the postcolonial present, acknowledging that the afterlife is predicated upon and continually affected by what has happened before. Girls in this study did not talk about the economic and social conditions of women in T&T; but their descriptions of their families' economic conditions suggested that they understood the importance of being able to care for oneself. The language they used suggested that girls see sex in terms of creating a family first. When asked about risks, about what is important in making decisions about sex, what they wanted in an idea relationship they talked about forming a family. Interestingly, their desires and associations of sex with family making did not necessarily match their families of origins, but perhaps an ideal to which they aspire. Eight girls in the study lived in a two-parent household, three of them with their mother and father, and five with one parent and a stepparent. Eight girls lived with their mothers and of those five had fathers who were involved in their lives and a system of kinship care where other relatives such as aunts and or grandparents were involved in raising them. Four girls' mothers were deceased, and six girls were currently in residential care and thus not in the custody of their parents; but among those six five came from homes where they described instability e.g., loss of parents due to death or abandonment, death of primary caregivers, movement from house to house, running away. Thus, their experiences of family and care evidenced instability. Almost all the girls associated the risk or outcome of having sex with pregnancy and so, when asked about what was important, they said it was being married or having a stable partner, and the means to provide for themselves and their children. Although

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many would not be described as originating from the stereotypical two-parent nuclear family, their family compositions appeared to reflect that of Caribbean society: "elaborate systems of transnational kinship relations" (Brown et al., 2017, 3); higher rates of children born to single mothers with more emphasis on the mother-child bond than bonds between partners (Blank, 2013); matrifocal households (Momsen, 2002; Rowley, 2002). Nevertheless, many integrated within their rationale for waiting to have sex or delaying further sexual activity, the desire to have a husband with whom to have children.

Reflecting on my own perspective this is not surprising. I was raised in a two-parent household, but it was that of my great-aunt and grandmother. My parents, married in a very traditional Church of England wedding, allowed my grandmother to take me with her to Trinidad when I was a baby. They divorced by the time I was four years old. Both remarried and had other children. Meanwhile, my grandmother, though she continued to receive financial support and, for a time, to provide some care for my grandfather, doing his laundry for a time, and giving him meals, had been separated from him for perhaps a decade before I was born. My great-aunt, and all their other sisters, had never married, only their brothers did. Although I witnessed and experienced diverse types of families in my home, and my community, marriage and a family (not a family alone, not marriage alone) seemed to always be the preferred option. Thus, girls' claimed agency around sex while balancing the need to prepare for and be responsible for a family. Often their articulations about safety, stability, independence and prioritizing self-sufficiency belied narratives of being on their own. Therefore, eschewed a reliance on anyone, or planned for being able to take care of themselves should they become responsible for a child. However, girls who have open and trusting relationships with parents, extended family, or community evidenced less discomfort talking about sex combined with knowledge of the risks

associated with sexually transmitted diseases and the responsibility. They were more likely to talk about consent, to understand satisfaction or pleasure and to talk in terms of permissiveness or liberal views while managing personal and developmentally appropriate safety. Girls identified friends, aunts, older cousins, and sexual partners as non-parental sources of information about sex.

There is a connection between the lack of discourse of pleasure or the identification of enjoyment of sex. I'm theorizing that there's a connection between this lack of identification and ownership of pleasure and agency and women's role in the public sphere. Without question men are supposed to enjoy sex, many girls spoke about their romantic interests as people who were interested in sex, initiated discussions about sex, were already sexually active or spoke openly with them and among their friends about being sexually active. So, there is a tacit understanding that the pleasures of sex are the domain of the man, and this idea is clearly entrenched at an early age. It is possible that as girls mature, they too claim the sexual space as a site of pleasure. Certainly, this is echoed in a lot of the media they consume both internationally and from local culture. But contemplating who possesses the right to claim a space for intimate pleasure among genders, particularly in young cisgender heterosexual relationships girls are playing catch up to boys and men who already, in their eyes, command the social, political and economic landscapes. Consequently, even in the domain of the personal unequal gender systems inscribe and continuously reinforce inequality for women and girls (Barriteau, 2001; 2003) Through differential roles for women, imbalanced responsibilities or perception of responsibilities for raising family and caring children, the need to maintain secrecy of one's sexual and intimate desires so as to subdue any unnecessary concern about sexual activity, girls are party to the already existent gender imbalances.

Nevertheless, girls are not cowed by the expectations that they respond only to risk. Although they heed these messages, they also seek alternatives to the examples laid out by parents, and the lessons taught in school. Lorde (1984) warns us to intentionally pursue and cling to the erotic. She says it has often been misnamed and abused, conflated with pornography confused with things we do, rather than who we are. But erotic pleasure is not just about sex, Lorde is theorizing the erotic as a measure of the consequences for women and freedom. As a therapist what was evident to me when talking to young women was that tapping into their erotic power served as a conduit for feeling in control of their lives. When they were able to focus on their own pleasure and desires, to prioritize those desires they acted in agentic, empowered, and self-caring ways. Adolescent girls who in the face of hardship could share stories of love, desire and attraction were displacing the standards and requirements that they deny pleasure in themselves. This could not be understood only as an individualistic phenomenon because it was so deeply tied to the limitations and preconceptions imposed by society, and the structural barriers to feeling the erotic. Lorde (1984) says,

> Once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, become a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives (57).

There is personal power and fulfillment in connecting with our erotic selves. An awareness and openness of desires and wants is therefore a mechanism for adolescent girls privilege their own desires and needs.

Future Directions

I would like to expand this work to include adult women. In the long run I hope to direct the administration of a national survey of sexual health in the Caribbean: longitudinal research on sexual health and well-being that moves away from eroticism, that is tied to globalization and serving imperialist desires. In mapping the field of Caribbean sexuality Kempadoo (2000, 2009) demonstrates how the custom of focusing on pathology, a focus on ABC models, prevention of pregnancy, HIV and deviance is an intractable problem. A focus on the social, structural and relational aspects of sexuality is emerging in the Caribbean and should be encouraged and facilitated by policy makers and those who control resources. To understand agency as not only important for adolescent girls, but a deeper understanding is also imperative for society at large.

Six participants in this study were teenage girls residing in a community residence for teenage mothers. Most of them had experienced sexual violence, trauma, abuse and neglect. Their narratives constituted in my view unique standpoint that warranted separate and further exploration. Future study will include an analysis of the data derived from their interviews and an examination of the impacts of social welfare policies and safety nets for vulnerable girls in T&T. Future work will also investigate sexual agency with adult women and a more ethnically diverse sample in T&T, comparison with boys and young men, and comparison in the region.

I desire to see rich longitudinal qualitative research on sexual health and well-being in the Caribbean and beyond. For example, qualitative data can inform the creation of national databases on sexual health and well-being. These initiatives can fill empirical gaps in the literature, and they influence the affective gaps – the silences where institutions and communities fall short of adolescent girls' needs.

In my stating of the problem in Chapter 1 I discussed the implications for not understanding adolescent sexual agency for health and education providers, how their blind spots would affect the way they can support young people. The themes analyzed in this study indicate that much is required from the people who love and care for adolescents, and those who command institutional power over systems that serve and protect adolescent girls and young women. I want feminist sociological research to inform science and practice. I desire to see clinicians integrate feminist frameworks into their work. It is impossible to consider the Caribbean without understanding the contexts of slavery and colonialism. There is no sanitized institutional space. Intersectional sociological contexts show up in medical and legal settings and feminist theory teaches us to consider the intersecting axes of oppression; how our identities and positionalities impact our lived experiences, the work we do, the treatment we receive. This is particularly important when people in power are engaging with people who are oppressed. What the girls in this study have said is that the information they are receiving is not enough. It is because they too have a tacit understanding of the exigencies of feminist theory.

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Appendix A

MEMORANDUM

DATE:	January 18, 2022
TO:	Andrea N Baldwin, Leslie Ann Camile Toney
FROM:	Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE:	The Sexual Agency of Adolescent Girls: A Case Study of Trinidad & Tobago
IRB NUMBER:	**21-920**

Effective January 14, 2022, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	**Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
Protocol Approval Date:	**January 14, 2022**
Progress Review Date:	**January 14, 2023**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Appendix B

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Title of research study: The Sexual Agency of Adolescent Girls: A Case Study of Trinidad & Tobago **IRB #:** 21-920

Date

Dear_____,

My name is Leslie-Ann Robertson Toney. I am a doctoral student in the Department Sociology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). I am conducting research examining adolescent girls' attitudes, beliefs and behaviors about intimate relationships and sex. My research is entitled *The Sexual Agency of Adolescent Girls: A Case Study of Trinidad and Tobago, IRB # 21-920.* The study focuses on when, how and what adolescent girls learn about sex from their family, peers and messages they receive in Trinidad and Tobago society and media. My research necessitates that I conduct interviews. I would like to know whether you would be willing to have your daughter volunteer to participate in this study.

This study is largely about attitudes and beliefs and presumes that girls are exposed to information both in their home environments and in the community. It is hoped that by speaking to them privately and conducting this type of research we are able to hear their opinions in a safe, non-judgmental environment, understand what they know and how they make decisions about their own behavior. Responses from this research will not quote any specific girl, but will speak collectively about their opinions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. The interviews will last between 30 and 90 minutes and will be audio recorded.

I would like to recruit a group of girls that are representative of the community, which is why I would like to know whether you could allow your daughter to participate. If you are interested in more information, I will be willing to provide you with additional background about my research and to set up a time convenient for us to meet face-to-face or to talk on the phone. Before the interview can take place, I would send you via email a permission form that explains participation in detail so you can have time to review it. If you allow your daughter to participate you will need to sign the form and return it to me before we can begin the interview.

I appreciate your time and consideration. I can be contacted via email at lesliecrt@vt.edu or mobile phone at 774-2160.

Sincerely,

………………

Leslie-Ann C. R. Toney

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Permission for Minor to Take Part in a Research Study

Title of research study: The Sexual Agency of Adolescent Girls: A Case Study of Trinidad & Tobago IRB #21-920

Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea N. Baldwin, email: andreanb@vt.edu; 770-722-9610

Other study contact(s): *Leslie-Ann C. R. Toney, email: lesliecrt@vt.edu; 774-2160; 240-424-5507*

Key Information: The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether your daughter can be a part of this study. More detailed information is listed later on in this form. This research focuses on what adolescent girls in Trinidad and Tobago learn from parents/ guardians, peers, social media and society at large about intimate relationships and sex, their attitudes and beliefs and the decisions they make as a result of their social environment. Sexual agency is used to describe personal ideas and beliefs and decisions about sex and sexuality, it does not mean that adolescent girls must be engaged in any sexual activity at all. It simply means their opinions and how they make decisions.

In this research 15-20 English-speaking adolescent girls in Trinidad and Tobago will be recruited to participate in interviews. The interviews will last between 30 and 90 minutes and will be audio recorded. This research will be used for publication of research about adolescent girls' ideas about sex and what sorts of lessons they have learned from people in their environment, the things that are important in creating the opinions they have and influencing their behavior.

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 questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt your daughter, talk to the research team at: Andrea N. Baldwin *andreanb@vt.edu 770-722-9610 or lesliecrt@vt.edu 868-774-2160*

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may communicate with them at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu if:

- You have questions about your rights as a research subject
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team
- You cannot reach the research team

- You want to talk to someone besides the research team to provide feedback about this research

How many people will be studied?

We plan to include about 15-20 people in this research study.

All participants in this study will be located in Trinidad & Tobago.

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

- This research will involve an interview using questions to guide the conversation. The interview should last approximately 30 minutes to 1.5 hours in length. Interviews will be held at a place of yours and your daughter's choosing and where she is comfortable talking openly about this topic and where the researcher can guarantee that she has privacy to speak — to minimize the likelihood that our conversation will be overheard. These interviews will be audio recorded.
- Your daughter will interact with only the researcher while the interview is taking place.
- The interview will be done when we have covered all the topics suggested in the interview guide, when your daughter decides that she would like to end the interview, or if for some reason the researcher believes it is necessary to end the interview.
- During the interview your daughter will be asked questions concerning her personal life. Some examples of these questions include questions about what she knows, understands, and believes about sex and intimate relationships, where and who she learned from, the decisions she makes about sex or intimate relationships, and about her identities (e.g. race, gender, class).
- These interviews will take place at a time that is convenient for you and your daughter and in agreement with the researcher.
- Interviews are expected to take place only once; however, in a few circumstances the researcher may call or request to meet again for clarification. This is expected to be a rare occurrence. If your daughter would like to meet with the researcher a second time to add or clarify information she may do so by contacting her using the contact information listed on this form.
- An audio recorder will be used to record your daughter's interviews. A tablet will be used to review and sign permission and assent forms and paper copies of assent and permission forms will be available for you and your daughter to keep if you desire.

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

Your daughter can leave the research at any time, for any reason, and it will not be held against her. It is important for you to know that she is free to withdraw from this study at any time, 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.

If she decides to leave the research, there will be no adverse consequences for her.

If she decides to withdraw from the research, contact the investigator so that the investigator can delete her audio recordings and remove her information from the participants list. Data pertaining to her will be withdrawn from the study. The researcher will report in summary results in the writing up of this research the number of people who withdrew after being interviewed; however, no identifying information will be included in that report.

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

This research involves discussing your daughter's personal attitudes, beliefs, about sex and intimate relationships. It involves her talking about her experiences and opinions. There may be questions asked in the interview that make her feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. If there are any questions she would rather not answer or does not feel comfortable answering, she can tell the researcher, and she will move on to the next question. There is a minimal risk that by being a part of this study your daughter could experience psychological or emotional distress. The likelihood of her experiencing psychological or emotional distress is considered low. It if becomes evident that she is experiencing psychological or emotional distress the interview will stop.

This study is not meant to gather information about specific individuals. The information provided will be combined anonymously with that of other research participants to gather information. There is a risk that the final research paper for this project may include information that will make it possible for anyone who knows your daughter to identify her based on details she provides and about her life. Her name, and the names of other individual participants will <u>not</u> be used in any part of the final paper. In agreeing to let her participate in this interview you are agreeing to accept possible identification as a risk. Given the steps being taken to maintain anonymity, the risk of identification is expected to be very low.

By your daughter participating in this study, you may incur some costs. The researcher intends to travel to you for interviews; however, if you choose to travel to the researcher the cost would include travelling to the location that you choose to have the interview. Costs would include taxi or bus fare if you take public transport. You will not be reimbursed for those travelling costs.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Only the principal investigator, Dr. Andrea Baldwin, and the researcher, Leslie Toney, will have access to research materials, which will be stored securely on Virginia Tech's Google cloud services – using a secure, password-protected account with two-step authentication. Other than permission and assent forms we will use pseudonyms (fake names) for participants involved in this research. The audio recordings will be deleted following completion of study activities: transcription, coding and analysis. We will make every effort to limit the use and disclosure of your daughter's personal information only to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete confidentiality.

Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB, Human Research Protection Program, and other authorized representatives of Virginia Tech. Information regarding abuse or neglect of a child may be reported to the appropriate child protective agency — The Children's Authority.

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

If identifiers are removed from your daughter's private information 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/ permission or assent.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

The person in charge of the research study can remove your daughter from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include if it appears that your daughter has assented to be interviewed, but she appears very uncomfortable or unwilling to respond, or if she shows extreme reactions to questions as evidenced by prolonged silence, crying, anger. Also, if she appears to have difficulty understanding questions after various attempts to explain; or if she arrives for interviews with forms signed but she states that she is unwilling to be interviewed she may be withdrawn from participation.

What else do I need to know?

If you and your daughter agree to take part in this research study, there is no compensation for participation; however, she will receive a small, non-monetary token of appreciation for her time.

Signature Block for Adult granting permission

Your signature documents your permission for your daughter to take part in this research. Your daughter will also sign a similar form assenting to take part in this research. We 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 permission	Date

_____
Printed name of person obtaining permission

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Assent to Take Part in a Research Study

Title of research study: The Sexual Agency of Adolescent Girls: A Case Study of Trinidad & Tobago IRB #21-920

Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea N. Baldwin, email: andreanb@vt.edu; 770-722-9610

Other study contact(s): *Leslie-Ann C. R. Toney, email: lesliecrt@vt.edu; 774-2160; 240-424-5507*

What Is A Research Study?

We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. A research study is a way to learn new information about a topic.

Why Are We Doing This Research? For this research study, we would like to learn more about what adolescent girls in Trinidad and Tobago learn from parents/ guardians, peers, social media and society about intimate relationships and sex. We want to know your thoughts and beliefs about when girls like someone in a way that is different from the feelings you have for your friends or parents. We want to know what you think and believe, what types of information you have learned from your parents and guardians, your friends, television, social media about having these types of feelings and if you have learned about sex. We want to know your opinions on the information you have learned and the decisions you make based on what you have learned. Sexual agency is a term used to describe having your own ideas, opinions and decisions you make for yourself. Agency means doing or not doing something because you want to, not because you are forced to do it. For example, deciding to study for a test, or to not cheat on the test is using your agency. When you agree to participate in this study, we ask permission from your parents for you to participate because you are a minor, but when you to state in your own words that you want to participate you are using your own agency. We are interested in how you have learned and made all kinds of opinions, beliefs and decisions about attraction, intimacy and sex, we are not judging whether those decisions are right or wrong. We simply want to know what you think.

This research will be used for publication of research about adolescent girls' ideas about sex and what sorts of lessons they have learned from people in their environment, the things that are important in creating the opinions they have and influencing their behavior.

Why Am I Being Asked to Join This Research?

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are an adolescent girl between the ages of 12 and 17 in Trinidad and Tobago who speaks English.

What Would Happen If I Join This Research?

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do an interview that should last approximately 30 minutes to 1.5 hours in length and will be audio recorded. The interview will be held at a place of your choosing and where you are comfortable in talking openly about this topic and where the researcher can guarantee that you have privacy to speak. We want you to feel comfortable to share whatever information you wish to share without fear that someone may overhear our conversation. It is important to us that you feel comfortable doing the interview.

- You will interact with only the researcher while the interview is taking place.
- The interview will be finished when we have covered all the topics in the interview guide, when you decide that you would like to end the interview, or if for some reason the researcher believes it is necessary to end the interview.
- Interviews are expected to take place only once; however, in a few situations the researcher may call or request to meet again for clarification. This is expected to be a rare occurrence. If you would like to meet with the researcher a second time to add or clarify information you can do so by contacting her using the contact information listed on this form.
- An audio recorder will be used to record your interview. Paper copies of assent and permission forms will be available for you and your parent/guardian to keep if you desire.

Could Bad Things Happen If I Join This Research?

Possible risks involved with this research study include: This research involves discussing your personal attitudes, beliefs, about sex and intimate relationships. It involves you talking about your experiences and opinions. There may be questions asked in the interview that make you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. If there are any questions you would rather not answer or do not feel comfortable answering, you can tell me, and I will move on to the next question. There is a small risk that by being a part of this study you could experience psychological or emotional distress. The likelihood of you experiencing psychological or emotional distress is considered low. It if becomes evident that you are experiencing psychological or emotional distress the interview will stop.

This study is not meant to gather information about specific individuals. The information provided will be combined anonymously with that of other research participants to gather information. There is a risk that the final research paper 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, and the names of other individual participants will not be used in any part of the final paper. In agreeing to participate in this interview you are agreeing to accept possible identification as a risk. Given the steps being taken to maintain anonymity — that no one knows the names of the girls who participated other than the researchers. The risk of identification is expected to be very low.

Could the Research Help Me?

We do not know if you will be helped by being in this study. We may learn something that will help adults to better understand how adolescent girls think about intimate relationships and sex and how they learn information. This may help us to communicate better with adolescent girls like you.

What If I Have Questions About the Research?

You can ask Dr. Andrea Baldwin, the principal investigator, and Leslie Toney, the researcher (contact information listed above) questions at any time about anything in this study. You can also ask your parent or guardian any questions you might have about this study.

If you have questions, are angry or are upset about something that happened while in the study, and/or are unable to reach the researchers, please tell your parent or guardian to contact the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board ("IRB") at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu.

What If I Don't Want to Join This Research?

You do not have to join this research study. It is up to you. You can change your mind or stop at any time. No one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

What Else Should I Know About This Research?

You will receive a small non-monetary token of appreciation for participating in this research.

If you would like to be in this study, please print and sign your name in the spaces below. We will give you a copy of this form to keep for yourself.

Signature Block for Children

_____

Participant's Printed Name
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Printed name of person obtaining assent

_____   _____

Signature of person obtaining assent   Date

Appendix E

Title of research study: The Sexual Agency of Adolescent Girls: A Case Study of Trinidad & Tobago IRB #21-920

Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea N. Baldwin, email: andreanb@vt.edu; 770-722-9610

Other study contact(s): Leslie-Ann C. R. Toney, email: lesliecrt@vt.edu; 774-2160; 240-424-5507

IRB #: 21-920

Appendix E Semi-Structured Interview Question Guide

Interview guide

Hello _____. Thank you for agreeing to let me interview you for my research project. I have a list of questions to guide me so I can remember the topics I want to cover, but it is just a guide, as it may be more comfortable for us to just have a conversation. However, as we discussed in the assent form before, I will need to take note of the things you are saying so that I can remember. To help me do that I will be audio recording as we discussed. If at any time you would like me to stop the tape recorder, just let me know. Do you have any questions for me? If not, let's get started.

Section One: Demographic Questions:

● How old are you?

● What form or class are you in? (If not in school enquire about why and what, if any alternative daily activities they are engaged in).

●   Tell me about your school.

●   How would you describe your race or the ethnic group you belong to? Prompt: would you consider yourself Black or of African descent, East Indian, Chinese, Syrian/Lebanese, White, mixed (if mixed ask them to identify what groups)? *While phenotypically some in T&T appear to be or might be identified as Black or of African descent, they self-identify as mixed. It's important to note the distinction as perhaps there is some evidence that it connects to sexual agency in some way.

○   How would you describe your complexion?

●   Income and class question: What do you know about what your family can afford? For example, toys, games, clothes, vacations, electronics or gadgets compared to other people in your form (form is the word used for the class/year/grade students are in), compared to other people in your community, compared to your extended family.

Follow-up explanation if participants ask what extended family means:

Extended family usually means people in your family who are not your caregivers at home, but are related to you, for example, aunts and uncles, cousins, step siblings who don't live with you or don't come to stay at your home temporarily. That can include godparents, god-siblings if you have a close relationship with them and they are frequently a part of your life.

●   What kinds of conversations do you hear, or have with your parents about money or things you afford to buy?

●   What would you say your social class is? Would you say your family is rich, poor, working class, middle, higher or lower end of middle? Follow-up: Why would you say that?

●   What jobs do your parents have?

● How many people are there in your immediate family (people who live in your home)? Follow up: who lives in your home?

● What area do you live in?

● Is there anything else about you, your family or community I have not asked about this section that you would like to share?

Section two: Sexual Agency (sources of information, development, experience; opinions on attraction, intimate relationships, and sex; how decisions are made).

1. Have you ever thought somebody was cute? Has anyone you know "liked" somebody else not in the way you would like a sister or brother or a friend?

2. How did you know (for yourself, how did you know they thought so, how did you know you felt they were cute)?

3. Do you/have you ever like(d) somebody? (Also how did you know/ describe what that is like for me)?

4. What did you say or do when you realized you like somebody, or somebody said they liked you? What did you think of that? What did you say or do?

5. Have you told anybody that you liked someone? Who did you tell? Did you tell your parents/guardians or another adult (in your family/who looks after you)? Why/why not?

6. What do they (the caregiving adults mentioned above) or other grown-ups close to you think about you liking somebody?

7. Have they ever talked to you about "liking" people – boys or girls? What have they said?

8. What have you heard from other people about "liking" someone?

9. What have you heard about what people who "like" other people do, or what do you think they do? What is that like? What about your parent(s)/guardian(s)?

10. What about sex? (Do you know what it is?) Tell me more about that.

a. Guideline: If they don't know what sex is then move on. If there are any trends of younger girls not knowing, but indicating they have had feelings for others, or understand having feelings ask what they understand at an early age even if it is does not include ideations about physical sex acts.

11. When you hear the term sexual attraction, what do you think about it?

12. Remember we talked about "liking" people earlier? How is sexual attraction similar or related to "liking" people?

13. Does "liking" people mean you have to do anything? Or can you know what it is and not do anything about it?

14. What have you learned, if anything, about sex or sexual attraction? Can you describe how you learnt about sex and sexual relationships? Did you turn to anyone to learn about sex and sexual relationships? If not, why? If yes: Who did you turn to or who was available for you to ask questions?

15. Do you have any memories of liking someone in a way that was more than just friendship? If so, can you describe your earliest memories of liking someone in a sexual way (OR "in a way that was more than just friendship")?

16. Was (is) that a positive or negative experience? Can you tell me more about that?

17. Has anyone ever told you that they liked (were attracted to) you in a way that was more than just friendship? If no, move onto question 18. If yes, when was the earliest you can

remember being told this and by whom? Follow on questions to a yes response - describe the person - age, race, where/how did you come to know them.

18.   Besides talking to people whom you know about sex where else do you find out about it. Is there anywhere else you get information for example television, social media, things you read, places you go, activities you participate in?

19.   Have you ever thought about having or ever had sex?

If the response is no, haven't thought about it: move on.

If response is thought about it, but haven't had sex:

What made you decide not to have sex?

        If response is yes:

a.   What was that experience like for you?

b.   Was the person your age or younger or older?

c.   Do your parents/guardians/caregivers know?

d.   Why did you tell them or why didn't you tell them?

e.   What made you decide to have sex?

f.   Are you currently sexually active?

g.   Why or why not (what has informed their decision)?

20.   What is the ideal/perfect relationship to you (in terms of how people are with each other, things you might do or say for example)? How do people in the ideal relationship treat each other?

a.   How do you want to be treated in an ideal relationship?

b.   If someone didn't treat you that way, what would you do?

21.   What is important to people in making decisions about sex? What is important to you?

Section three - The wrap up

1.   Is there anything that you didn't discuss before that you would like to tell me?

2.   Do you have any questions about the questions I have asked you today?

3.   What questions do you have for me?