

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of my study is to examine the mainstream, hypersexualized discourse surrounding the high prevalence of STIs and teen pregnancies among Dutch Afro-Caribbean women (specifically, Surinamese and Antillean women of African descent) in the Netherlands, a country with relatively low reproductive statistics. Utilizing methodological elements of oral history and feminist epistemology, I acquired data through semi-structured interviews with Dutch Afro-Caribbean mothers and daughters, and also sexual health professionals. Based on the personal experiences of my interviewees, I provide a counter narrative to the mainstream discourse and an in-depth analysis of how culture influences Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's sexual behavior. Moreover, I briefly investigate the degree of cultural sensitivity in the country's sexual health programs.

In this study, I will argue that positive, sustainable changes need to be made both within the target community and the public institutions in the following areas, which include: breaking down the presence of the sex taboo and gender roles, increasing the importance of safe sex negotiation, relationship competency, and sexual empowerment, and lastly acknowledging the ramifications of colonialism, sexism and racism within the Dutch sexual health landscape.

# Sexual & Reproductive Health of Dutch Afro-Caribbean Women:

An Analysis of Culture, Reproductive Statistics and Black Female  
Sexuality

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Gender Studies Thesis

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To date, we have no comprehensive full-length historical and sociological understanding of the meanings of sex in the lives of women of African descent, wherever they find themselves. In fact, much of the social science research has focused upon the ostensibly negative indicators of an unbridled sexuality: high fertility rates and teenage pregnancies, disproportionately high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)...and “broken” family structures. But the inner sexual lives of black women, how they think about themselves sexually, remain a mystery.

-----Gloria Wekker, 2006

...Western cultures generally consider sex to be a dangerous, destructive, negative force...This culture always treats sex with suspicion. It construes and judges almost any sexual practice in terms of its worst possible expression. Sex is presumed guilty until proven innocent. Virtually all erotic behavior is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established. The most acceptable excuses are marriage, reproduction and love...But the exercise of erotic capacity, intelligence, curiosity, or creativity all require pretexts that are unnecessary for other pleasures, such as the enjoyment of food, fiction, or astronomy

-----Gayle Rubin, 1984

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THE COUNTERNARRATIVE:  
UNVEILING THE CONTROVERSY BEHIND  
DUTCH AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S SEXUALITY

Kamala Kempadoo, college professor and academic scholar, affirmed that “[Afro-] Caribbean sexuality is both hypervisible and obscured” (2009:1). Throughout my stay in Amsterdam, this statement cumulatively gained more significance and clarity of how a black woman’s sexuality is perceived in mainstream society.

With this in mind, The Netherlands is regularly acknowledged for their progressive approaches to sex education and reproductive health. The country’s reputation of being sexually tolerant and their explicit, hands-on sex education methods<sup>1</sup> not only account for the low reproductive statistics (i.e.-teen pregnancy and the number of STI-infected individuals) but also the high contraceptive use among the Dutch population (Rutgers Nisso Groep 2009). However, in this social context, ethnic minority groups, particularly Dutch Afro-Caribbean women, have a higher prevalence to embody these reproductive statistics in a negative manner compared to Dutch-born, white women.

With my paper concentrating on the discourse surrounding teen pregnancy and the prevalence of STI’s among Dutch Afro-Caribbean women, Madelief Bertens provides statistics from 2004 affirming that “Teenage pregnancy rates among first generation migrants from Surinam are 30.1/1000, and 15.9/1000 among second generation migrants. For the Dutch

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<sup>1</sup> Some examples of the country’s explicit, hands-on sex education methods are: the “Long Live Love” program, a voluntary yet widespread sex education curriculum offered to Dutch secondary schools that is subsidized by the government. In addition, the *Nemo Science Center*, a museum for kids, that has a permanent “Let’s Talk About Sex” exhibit with a variety of interactive, educational activities.



Antillean population these rates are 43.4/1000 (first generation) and 13.5/1000 (second generation), compared to 4.4/1000 among native Dutch teenagers” (2008:12). Moreover, in regards to STIs, of all new cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis, in 2003, 12%, 21% and 12% respectively were women from the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam, while they represent only 3% of the general Dutch population (Bertens 2008:12).

I was confounded by the way statistics were presented concerning women of African descent in some Dutch sexual health brochures and research studies. From my perspective, mainstream authorities primarily focused on the sexual practices of these women and implicitly attributed these high figures to promiscuous behavior and unsafe sex (Bertens 2008; Kempadoo 2009; Wekker 2008). This assertion evokes an implicit visibility of the hypersexualized configuration of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women, while the obscurity lies in not concentrating on the underlying reasons behind these sexual practices.

Therefore, I would like to know how Dutch Afro-Caribbean women perceive not only their sexuality, but also their relationship to sexual and reproductive health while living in the Dutch landscape. Since their perspectives and their voices are rarely included in mainstream research (Wekker 2006), I conducted a series of interviews with Dutch Afro-Caribbean mothers and daughters surrounding their sexual development, values, relationships and practices. Furthermore, I also gained insight into each individual’s experience with sex education, both in the public and private spheres. In light of these aspects of inquiry, I would like to examine: To what degree is a Dutch Afro-Caribbean woman’s outlook on her sexual subjectivity consistent with the hypersexualized messages of mainstream Dutch sexual health programs that attempt to tailor prevention and educational programs to their needs? Equally important, by focusing on the micro-level of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women’s personal narratives, I will connect my research

question to the macro-level, where I will furthermore investigate: Do the women's personal narratives reveal the underlying factors associated with the disparity in reproductive statistics? Is the main factor their sexual practices, as stated by mainstream authorities, or is it the presence of cultural insensitivity in the Netherlands' sexual health programs?

As a woman who identifies with her African-American & Chinese-Jamaican roots<sup>2</sup>, I aspire to research this topic in order to gain insight into how the reproductive health framework in this context and for this particular focus group relates to and affects women of color. When reading these mainstream statistics for the first time, I found myself very concerned by the dominant rationale that the hypersexuality of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women would account for these high figures. It is palpable that the mainstream discourse is reinforcing the current negative attitudes about black women's bodies, sexuality and character, while simultaneously, silencing black women's subjective sexual experiences. (Roberts 2010; Terborg 2002; Wekker 2006). Thus, I want to confront this dominant discourse and provide the platform for these women's overlooked stories to be heard. I hope that the perspective from this direct source provides a contributing narrative to disrupt and reconstruct the mainstream discourse, and will bridge the gap for these women to transcend the socially engrained image of the hyper-sexualized black female.

Correspondingly, it is not only time to transform and diversify the collective knowledge of human sexual experiences, but also make space for Dutch Afro-Caribbean women to function as sexual agents instead of sexual objects. Repeatedly, throughout time, the sexuality of black women is othered, subjected, vilified, and exploited. In social scientific studies, black female

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<sup>2</sup> My positionality is further explained in Chapter 2, "The First Stages: My Methodological Journey."

sexuality is seldomly researched; it is even more unlikely to be exposed to black women's perspectives surrounding their passions, desires, pleasures, and dangers that encompass their sexual subjectivities (Roberts 2010; Terborg 2002; Wekker 2006). For this reason, I wonder how Dutch Afro-Caribbean women negotiate and survive amongst the dominant, misconstrued representation of their bodies, sexuality, and culture? In turn, I also question if the lack of research along with the hypersexualized representation places Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's issues at the margins of the country's sexual health programs and public policies?

This research will attend to the contemporary thoughts, perspectives and experiences of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women surrounding their sexuality. On this note, I will acknowledge that while each woman's story is an individual narrative, their stories also represent a collective narrative of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's diversity in sexual subjectivity. I intend to analyze and utilize these stories as a collective to disrupt, challenge and eradicate the dominant, hypersexualized conception of my focus group.

In essence, I desire to raise awareness of the epistemic and systemic violence constructed upon Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's bodies and identities. I hope my paper will illustrate how the disparity in these statistics is not solely the result of a Dutch Afro-Caribbean woman's sexual practices, but instead due to a more complex configuration. My interview sections along with *The Background on Sexual Culture* chapter will illustrate that black women's sexuality is in itself affected by personal, relational, socio-cultural, economical, and historical factors, whether that may be due to power relations and/or gender dynamics in these facets; and how these factors are possibly entrenched in every Dutch Afro-Caribbean woman's sexual identity, beliefs, and practices.

My focus groups are not only Dutch Afro-Caribbean mothers and daughters but also sexual and/or reproductive health professionals who have experience working with the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community. With attention to my second set of interviews, I will analyze how these professionals comment and critique on the dominant approaches surrounding the degree of cultural sensitivity in sexual health programs.

All things considered, I would like my research to contribute to the ongoing discourses of improving cultural sensitivity in sexual & reproductive health programs for ethnic minorities; and provide a counter-narrative to the perceptions and assumptions of black female sexuality that are so dominant in Western society.

## THE FIRST STAGES: MY METHODOLOGICAL JOURNEY

At one level, research methods can be described as the way we set about collecting and analysing data. However, they also reflect philosophical, theoretical and epistemological positions from which we experience and understand the social world in which we live. It is through these positions that understandings are reached about the social realities which we inhabit. (Parry 2002:88)

I was in the field for this qualitative study between two time periods: November to December 2012 and June to August 2013. The study mainly consisted of sixteen, individual in-depth interviews. In order to execute my research, I received approval from the School of International Training (SIT)'s Institutional Review Board in 2012 and Mount Holyoke College's Institutional Review Board in 2013<sup>3</sup>.

For my research, I purposely chose to conduct in-depth interviews, which encompassed elements of oral history and feminist epistemologies. I believe collectively using the foundational principles of these methods would assist me in attempting to legitimize not only the sexual subjectivity of each interviewee, but also the overlooked and underlying factors which contribute to Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's high prevalence in reproductive statistics (i.e.- STIs and teen pregnancies). As I similarly stated before, instead of focusing on the opinions of mainstream authorities, I desire to concentrate on the voices of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women themselves. I aspire to hear their stories, and listen to their thoughts, perspectives, and experiences surrounding their sexuality as black women within the Dutch landscape. The dominant, positivistic methods and epistemologies have invalidated these women's experiences,

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<sup>3</sup> In regards to financial support, I received several scholarships and fellowships which include: Mount Holyoke College's ALANA Research Scholarship, Mount Holyoke College's McCulloch Global Research Fellowship, The Posse Foundation's Summer Leadership Award, and the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship.

and if we continuously map these dominant perspectives onto the interviewees, then we will learn nothing (Etter-Lewis 1996:116).

During this exploration, I will concede to the fact that this is a very complex topic, maybe even beyond the scope of this academic paper. There are so many determinants that can be discussed on what affects the relatively high reproductive statistics of black female sexuality and the approaches behind them. My main goal is not to solve or bestow the ideal answer to my research questions. Instead, I plan to raise more questions about seemingly definitive arguments. In light of this notion, I desire for readers to be involved in my journey of consciousness, where I attempt to make an additional contribution to gaining insight into the discourse about the high prevalence of these reproductive statistics surrounding Dutch Afro-Caribbean women.

Correspondingly, I do not want to play the God-trick where I am unseen, disengaged, and omniscient (Haraway 1988; Wekker 2006). Instead, I will admit that I do not possess the mastery to understand everything that encompasses this issue. I am still learning about the history of Dutch colonization and the culture of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women. Therefore, I desire to be transparent and highlight my moments of doubt and challenge, which in turn, I hope will inspire more conversations and research on this topic.

### Recruitment

In regards to recruiting my interviewees, Yvette Kopijn, one of my SIT advisors at the time, connected me to my study abroad practicum at Profor in 2012. Profor is an organization located in the Bijlmer. The Bijlmer is a neighborhood in the Southeast of Amsterdam that encompasses diverse migrant families of color. “A large section of the population is black, with people from Suriname, the Antilles, and various African nations” (Wekker 2006). Profor’s

mission is to empower the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community in various social facets and provide tools for self-sufficiency.

In exchange for volunteering at the practicum, the foundation of acquiring my interviewees was through Profor's founder and director, Lucia Martis. Participants were recruited by convenience sampling<sup>4</sup> via in-person, telephone, and e-mail. In addition, I obtained participants through snowball or the chain referral method.

### *Interview Sample and Interview Topics*

My primary sample consisted of case studies which included interviewing ten Dutch Afro-Caribbean mothers and daughters. All interviewees were above the age of 18 except for two participants, who were allowed to participate after I received written and verbal parental/guardian consent. For clarification due to my focus group's diverse ethnic makeup, I use the term 'Dutch Afro-Caribbean women' to refer to self-identified, Surinamese and Dutch Antillean women of African descent, who currently reside in the Netherlands<sup>5</sup>. Statistically, as of 2012, the Surinamese population is 2.1 percent of the country's total population (16.7 million), while the Antillean population is 0.9 percent" (Statistics Netherlands 2012: 9). "The size of these groups is increasing, mainly as a result of births of the second generation and to a much lesser extent of the arrival of new immigrants" (Statistics Netherlands 2012: 5). A majority of my participants were from the Bijlmer area and appeared to be conscious of their intersecting

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<sup>4</sup> Convenience sampling is not a form of random sampling. Instead, I recruited and chose interviewees based on their high level of accessibility or 'convenience' to me, as the researcher; and who were in some way involved or connected to Profor's network.

<sup>5</sup> Although my interviewees specifically identify as Surinamese or Antillean, all of them approved of my self-defined term, "Dutch Afro-Caribbean." This is because they considered themselves to be women or descendants of individuals from the Caribbean, as well as people of African descent. Also, they related to the word Dutch because they either live in the Netherlands or acknowledge themselves to be socialized by Dutch culture.

oppressions surrounding their race, sex, and sexuality. Collectively, in their own ways, my interviewees illustrated whether these oppressions were interracial and/or intraracial; and if these oppressions were internalized.

The individual interviews were semi-structured, topical life-story interviews<sup>6</sup> around the framework of sexuality. When I use the word sexuality, I am referring to the complex range of components that make us sexual beings which includes emotional, physical, and sexual aspects, as well as self-identification, behavioral preferences and practices, fantasies, and feelings of affection and emotional affinity (Goren-Watts 2014). Equally important, inspired by Gloria Wekker's construction of sexuality in her work, *The Politics of Passion*, I want to disrupt the concept of sexuality as purely natural, God-given, eternal, and context-free, and instead illustrate that "sexuality in a particular setting is something that people shape collectively on the basis of their cultural archives and changing political and economic circumstances (Wekker 2006: 67).

With this definition in mind, my interview guide consisted of asking mother and daughter participants to share specific moments relating to their sexual development, values and practices.

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<sup>6</sup>In regards to my interview procedure, I introduced myself to each interviewee and explained the "Informed Consent" document. Then, I explained the purpose of my study, benefits of participation, and reassured the interviewee that they are not required to share any information or discuss any topic that would make them feel uncomfortable. Also, I affirmed each participant's right to remain anonymous and the option to withdraw from the interview at any time, without penalty. Agreement was obtained to audio-record each participant using Audacity software on my laptop, and subsequently participants were asked to sign the "Informed Consent" document. If an interviewee was under the age of 18, I obtained parental/guardian consent verbally and in writing. Equally important, all recordings were kept confidential in password-protected files.

A foundational interview guide was used (in Appendix). Some questions were altered or follow-up inquiries were made to attain beneficial information. The interviews were between 1 to 3 hours long and the participant chose the location of the interview. Afterward, I would debrief my participant, which included asking if they had anything else to share and thank them again for their participation. To convey my appreciation, I gave participants the option to receive their interview transcript and/or an electronic copy of my senior thesis. In addition, I gave my participants VVV gift cards (5 euro value), which is redeemable at a variety of retail stores in Amsterdam. Furthermore, I volunteered more than what was required at my study abroad practicum, Profor, to express my appreciation and commitment to my focus group. After the interviews, I took time to analyze the recorded data, which involved transcribing, and exploring the common themes amongst the interviews.



In addition, we discussed intimate relationship history, and their sex education within the home and in the public sphere<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, to connect their personal experiences to the macro-level, I inquired about their opinions on the stereotypes surrounding black female sexuality, the factors contributing to the disparity in reproductive statistics, and if they felt Dutch sexual health programs created projects that were culturally sensitive and beneficial to their community.

In addition to the realm of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women, my secondary participants included two sexual health professionals, who identify to have experience of working with the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community<sup>8</sup>. Specifically, I interviewed a sexual health researcher and a public health educator. Interviews were semi-structured and ranged from fact-finding to opinion interviews. For this set of interviewees, I created a different interview guide; and wanted to know their opinions surrounding the degree of cultural sensitivity in sex education and reproductive services to Dutch Afro-Caribbean women. Equally important, I also asked for their opinions with regards to the factors they feel are contributing to the disparity in teen pregnancies and STIs. Lastly, I inquired about what current approaches are being made by mainstream, Dutch sexual health programs that tailor to the cultural needs of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women to lower their high prevalence in STIs and teen pregnancies.

### *Oral History and Black Feminist Epistemology*

My research process incorporated elements of oral history and black feminist epistemology. In this section, I will elucidate some of the principles of each methodology that I

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<sup>7</sup> For more detailed information about my mother and daughter interviewees, see their interviewee descriptions in Chapter 4.

<sup>8</sup> For more detailed information about the sexual health professionals I interviewed, see their interviewee descriptions in Chapter 5.

took into consideration in order to provide an enlightening counter-narrative to the mainstream, hypersexualizing discourse-----a generalization that is misconstrued and taken for granted about Dutch Afro-Caribbean women. According to feminist researcher and sociologist, Patricia Leavy, she affirms that oral history is a qualitative interview method, where the researcher collects participants' narratives and emphasizes their perspectives in order "to access the experiential knowledge [of these] people living in field sites" (Leavy 2011:3). From the personal narrative material, the researcher examines not only the way participants constructed their stories, but also the meaning of them (Etter-Lewis 1996; Leavy 2011; Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett 2008; Wekker 2006). Oral history seeks to uncover a participant's thought process; and makes connections between their individual experiences and the larger context in which those experiences occur (Leavy 2011:10) In light of this idea, Leavy references Tina Patel's thoughts on the application of oral history in research, where Patel affirms:

As a methodological approach, oral (hi)story interviews seek to access the socially constructed reflective thoughts about an individual's life. That is not only accounts of their life experiences, but also *how* and *why* they have lived their life in the way that they have, and the *thoughts* and *ideas* that have guided their everyday *behaviour* and *interaction* with others (qtd. in Leavy 2011:10)

With this statement in mind, I guided myself throughout this oral history methodology by asking: How do participants construct their narratives? What is the function of their thoughts and experiences to the overall narrative? How does their positionality play a role and where are power relations visible? Last but not least, what information is missing? These questions were kept in my mind while listening to the interviewees' personal stories, which led me closer to gaining understanding about my research questions.

Moreover, not only does oral history value the linkages of personal narratives with cultural, historical and structural phenomena, but the methodology also appreciates the collaborative nature of knowledge production between the researcher and the participant (Etter-Lewis 1996; Leavy 2011; Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett 2008). By practicing this collaborative relationship, I acknowledge that I am challenging the notions of the dominant, unequal hierarchies that researchers mainly have with their interviewees, and also making aware my epistemological privilege and disadvantage. Although I assisted my participants in a colloquial fashion with reflecting and gaining meaning out of their past experiences, sexual subjectivities, and/or the dominant discourse, I still have control of how the narratives are framed. My intention is to maintain the authenticity of my interviewees' stories; however, that is never guaranteed. It is inevitable for some of the meaning of their thoughts and experiences to be distorted or lost in translation. In Chapter 4, I will use direct quotes from all my mother and daughter participants, and frame their experiences and thoughts as a conversation amongst us. In addition, there will be brief sections of analysis and reflection on my part. In light of these notions, as the researcher, I am the intermediary between what my interviewees tell me and what knowledge I choose to disseminate to you, as the reader.

Both oral history and black feminist epistemology acknowledge, respect and empathize with marginalized voices. Their ideologies validate my interviewees' experiences and even give the space for participants to create and express their theoretical perspectives (Collins 1991; Etter-Lewis 1996; Leavy 2011). As the researcher, I am not the only one that will introduce and discuss theories, but my participants are capable of constructing and expressing theory as well (Gundermann 2014). In other words, this notion highlights that Dutch Afro-Caribbean women are capable of speaking for themselves when conceptualizing their sexual subjectivities; and can

also name their experiences and positions of difference. To provide this counter-narrative, it is important to “theorize from the point of view and contexts of marginalized women not in terms of victim status or an essentialized identity but in terms that push us to place women’s agency, their subjectivities and collective consciousness, at the center of our understandings of power and resistance” (Alexander 1991:148).

All things considered, I contemplate how could academia and society, in general, increase the visibility and maintain the space for marginalized, situated discourses? And what would an egalitarian discourse look like in terms of differences in identity, including race and sexuality? As of now, I can say that there needs to be more alternative discourses that eradicate the white, hegemonic power structure, and simultaneously, involve images of agency, empowerment, and resilience for all people, especially women of color.

To elaborate more on the principles and my relationship to black feminist epistemology, the method was first introduced to me in Patricia Hill Collins’ groundbreaking book titled, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. In regards to this epistemology, Collins reclaims the production of knowledge from white, male elites, who not only have historically dominated the creation of ‘legitimate’ knowledge, but who have also distorted and excluded Black women’s experiences as knowledge. In this chapter, Collins explains the framework of Black feminist epistemology, and the four tenets it encompasses, which include: concrete experience as a criterion of knowledge, the use of dialogue in forming connections and communities, the ethic of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability (1991).

Collins challenges positivist research approaches to scientific objectivity, where the requirements include a distanced researcher, absence of emotions, values and ethics, and competitive, scholarly debates to affirm the strongest truths (1991:205). With much influence on my research process, Collins, as a black feminist scholar, reasons how unrewarding and disadvantageous positivist epistemology would be, stating:

Such criteria ask African-American women to objectify ourselves, devalue our emotional life, displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about Black women, and confront in an adversarial relationship those with more social, economic, and professional power. It therefore seems unlikely that Black women would use a positivist epistemological stance in rearticulating a Black women's standpoint (1991:206).

Collins' argument highlights how black feminists are in an interesting position in terms of epistemological stance, because they are a reminder not only of racism within the white, feminist movement, but also of sexism within the Black power movement. Therefore, black women had to become agents themselves to create and define their own epistemology and political perspective. These black feminists created a platform to centralize their knowledge, wisdom and experiences since they "realize[d] that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work" (Hull, Scott, & Smith 1982).

To briefly address each core theme of Black feminist epistemology and how it relates to my research, the first is 'concrete experience as a criterion of meaning'. For this theme, when gathering knowledge, the individuals who actually lived through specific experiences of interest

are more credible than someone who just read or thought indirectly about these experiences (Collins 1991). This knowledge is not based on someone's educational status, but the wisdom they have gathered from directly living these experiences. Pertaining to my research, I interviewed young girls and women of my focus group from all walks of life which included differences in their upbringing, interests, socio-political viewpoints, and romantic relationship experience. To centralize the variety of experiences of these women, their narratives are not only the main focus, but also comprise a great part of my paper, which in turn, acknowledges the legitimacy of their perspectives as credible knowledge. Simultaneously, the diversity of my primary interviewees' narratives on their sexual subjectivity will decenter the contemporary, hypersexualizing discourse of the black female as well.

The second core theme is 'the use of dialogue in forming connections and communities', which addresses the power relations between the researcher and participant. Instead of distancing oneself, the researcher should be aware of their inherent power when conducting interviews; and transform this normally hegemonic relation into a more mutually, self-affirming, egalitarian dialogue. As well, a researcher should be visible and fully immersed into their research. This aspect along with the third core theme 'the ethic of caring', which involves the researcher being able to express their emotions and empathy to their interviewees, will provide not only the discursive resources, but also enrich the dialogues, the analysis, and overall research experience (Collins 1991).

In regards to my research with these themes, I desired to fully immerse myself in my focus group's environment, the Bijlmer. As stated before, I volunteered a majority of my time at a non-profit in the Bijlmer called Profor. Because of this foundational connection I made with the community of my focus group, I attended many cultural events which included going to

Surinamese and Antillean festivals, speaking on an Amsterdam Zuidoost (Southeast) radio station, preparing Surinamese dishes, and serving as a crew member for a Dutch Afro-Caribbean, theatrical play that sparked conversations about sex and sexual diversity. In addition, I took part in commemorating the legacy of a Curacaoan male slave, Tula, and his leadership of the slave revolt in late 18<sup>th</sup> century Curacao. The anniversary along with a recent biopic release of this historical event produced my participation in community discussions about slavery and colonialism within the Dutch landscape. Most importantly, I attained my goal of establishing personal and collaborative connections with my interviewees, with some of whom I still keep in touch today; and where we mutually recognize that no matter the distance, we share similar struggles surrounding our bodies and sexualities as women of the African Diaspora.

Lastly, with the intersecting thread of the fourth theme, “the ethic of personal accountability”, in order to connect with my interviewees, I illustrated my concern, vulnerability, and passion for this research topic, while also taking accountability for my reasoning, doubts and possible errors within my knowledge claims (Collins 1991). Because of my transparency, I was welcomed with open arms and had the opportunity to listen to the personal stories of my interviewees in their community centers, homes, and workplaces. Each interviewee’s capability to quickly resonate with the passionate purpose of my senior thesis, and be vulnerable and authentic to someone they just met, exemplified the benefits of utilizing these four core themes of black feminist epistemology.

Looking beyond these four core themes, black feminist epistemology also values situated knowledges, a term coined by Donna Haraway, who argues that pure objectivity and subjectivity do not exist. She affirms that the world is not unitary and fixed, but that there are multiple perspectives in our real world contexts; and that the knowledge we produce is situated within a

context. Haraway illustrates her argument with scientific knowledge, which has been represented as outside the larger culture in which it is produced. Instead a more refined understanding of how knowledge is produced and evaluated would see science as a part of culture----both influencing and being shaped by its assumptions and preoccupations. Equally important, Haraway privileges the voices and experiences of the subaltern<sup>9</sup>, the people who embody the situated knowledges she values (Haraway 1988).

With all this in mind, my academic paper will display a repeated evocation that our societal structures and dominant discourses of knowledge are eurocentric, androcentric, ethnocentric, and hetero-normative. These supposedly legitimate and credible aspects, distort, oppress and exclude marginalized groups whose situated knowledges, experiences, and voices are just as important.

### *Assumptions and Difficulties*

When conducting a study, it is important for me to situate myself and understand what assumptions I am bringing into my research. In addition, it is also significant to mention some of my difficulties during the research process since it's hardly mentioned in academia. Prior to arriving to Amsterdam for the first time, I originally wanted to conduct a comparative analysis about sex education in the United States and the Netherlands. This was because of my fascination with the latter country's significantly low reproductive statistics. However, at the same time, I didn't know the Dutch had a long history of slavery and colonialism. In light of my unawareness, I didn't think I would encounter any people of color in Amsterdam. When I thought of the word "Dutch", I automatically visualized a tall individual with blonde hair and blue eyes. Nevertheless, when I arrived in the city center of Amsterdam, I immediately saw a

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<sup>9</sup> A subordinate group that is outside of the hegemonic power structure.



woman of African descent, which ironically astounded me. As a result, I went on a personal mission around the city attempting to look for other women like me, but I didn't see many. Therefore I asked myself, where could they be? That is when my SIT Academic Director at the time, Yvette, told me about Dutch colonialism and the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community in the Bijlmer. As soon as I found out this information and further immersed myself in the Bijlmer, my research topic gradually changed to what it is currently.

Furthermore, I assumed that all my participants would be fluent English speakers. During the interviews, my interviewees varied in their English language proficiency. There were moments when I had to use my Dutch-English Dictionary or Google Translate to clarify certain words or phrases which took time.

Similarly, in regards to language, some of my interviewees had particular idiomatic ways of speaking. There was no problem for me to understand them during the interview. However, the choice to incorporate their Caribbean-influenced language or not when transcribing was a difficult decision. I had to decide if I wanted to maintain the authenticity of my interviewees' words or clean it up for academia. Also, by incorporating the Caribbean-influenced language, I didn't want it to appear as if I was fetishizing these women, since in dominant society, their language is relatively considered to be illegitimate to the English language, since that is where power is associated (Gundermann 2014). Given that I am providing a counter-narrative, I decided to transcribe the Caribbean-influenced language if used, and put the English translation in parentheses.

Equally important, I assumed that none of my interviewees would have an issue with being anonymous in my paper. In actuality, this was not the case. Some of my interviewees

strongly felt that by being anonymous, it reinforces the silence they want to disrupt. They wanted to claim their stories and their sexual subjectivities, and part of that was having their name attached to their thoughts and experiences. As a researcher, I had to comply with the IRB (Institutional Review Board) and one of the guidelines on this form was to make my interviewees anonymous. On the other hand, I agreed and deeply appreciated my interviewees' viewpoint; and I tried to figure out how do I negotiate this ethical position I was in? This situation made me question the intentions of the IRB because interviewees are not given the option whether or not to be anonymous within the institutional power of this research form. Although the IRB has the best intentions with making participants anonymous as a form of protection, I feel it emphasizes these implicit notions that my interviewees are underprivileged, unaware and need safety. I'm not saying that all my participants do not need protection from potential harm, however, not giving them the choice reinforces these sensitive institutional structures (Gundermann 2014). To resolve this difficulty since I could not use legal names, I asked interviewees to choose a nickname or a pseudonym of sentimental value.

Moreover, I assumed that every mother and/or daughter I had interviewed consciously thinks about and actively struggles against the dominant hypersexualized ideology of their sexuality; and that an internal conflict about their sexuality is present. In reality, this assumption was also not the case. Even though my interviewees mentioned certain experiences of having temporary difficulties or being misjudged, not all of them expressed having a sustainable internal conflict within themselves surrounding their sexual subjectivities. In addition, I assumed that these women have an alternative perception of their sexual behaviors and sexual culture, which sexual health programs do not take into account. Lastly, I expected that my primary interviewees' perceptions will be insightful towards the improvement of tailoring sexual health

programs to the cultures and ethnicities that my interviewees identify with. For these last two assumptions, when conducting interviews, there was some consistency in perception between my mother and daughter participants and the sexual health professionals. However, my mother and daughter participants mentioned other factors I believe mainstream, sexual health programs should take into consideration.

### *My Positionality and Sexual Subjectivity*

Before I continue with my paper, I believe it is important to position myself. I identify as a 21 year old African-American and Chinese-Jamaican woman who was born and raised in Miami, Florida. I am a senior or fourth-year college student double majoring in Psychology and Gender Studies at Mount Holyoke College (an all-women's college) in Western Massachusetts. I am a lovechild and was raised by my African-American, single mother in a predominantly black, working-class neighborhood. My Chinese-Jamaican father had a marginal presence in my upbringing and never lived with my mother and I. He also had other women in his life besides my mother, which is not uncommon in Jamaican culture. We strangely lost contact when I was in elementary school; and this estrangement has affected my intimate relationship dynamics as I grew older, where I attracted men who are 'unattainable' or who never wanted to commit. Nonetheless, I am currently in a mutually committed relationship that has been long distance internationally for almost a year and six months. In other words, I am in a relationship with an individual who is emotionally attainable; and despite temporary visits, majority of the time,

they're physically unattainable. I am surprisingly at peace with this current situation until my partner can move to the States<sup>10</sup>.

To provide more insight about my sexual subjectivity, since I could remember, the intersecting threads of my race, my body, and my sexual expression have been a fluctuating site of oppression and liberation. Unfortunately, I have experienced more of the prior than the latter. These targeted aspects of myself are an internal conflict I currently struggle with. When I was in my last year of high school, I read black feminist theory literature not only to gain an understanding of the marginalized community I belonged to, but also to find my voice within my black feminine identity and sexuality. With this in mind, I will illustrate through vignettes important moments that encompass my racial and sexual subjectivity, which includes: my racial/gender trauma in early childhood, my freedom of sexual expression through dance and kinship, and how I am presently inspired to reframe these targeted aspects of myself as a site of authentic self-love and sustainable liberation.

### **Racial/Gender Trauma**

“Whether we speak or not, we suffer” (Lorde, 1984, p.42). In order to transform the silence into language and action, as Lorde writes, I had to face the terror within myself, the terror that kept me from speaking.”

- “Do You Have Eyelashes?” by Hyo-Jung Kim (1991: 209)

During my elementary school years, I attended a Christian-affiliated and predominantly white academic institution. Since the age of seven years old, I was occasionally teased and picked on by students, because I was considered to be ‘different.’ Based on the conversations I had with my mother, I associated this difference to my level of maturity and defying gender

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<sup>10</sup> My positionality I expressed with the reader thus far is very similar to the culture of the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community. This similarity includes the prevalence of matrifocal households and fathers having a marginal presence in their child(ren)’s upbringing. In addition, it is also common for men to have concurrent romantic relationships. These aspects of the Afro-Caribbean culture is explained in more detail in Chapter 3, *Background in Sexual Culture*.

norms as an outspoken, tomboy at the time. Provided the fact that I was teased, students' harmful words bothered me minimally because I possessed a high self-esteem, had friends outside of school, and was a professional at entertaining myself since I was an only child. Equally important, I had no problem using my go-to phrase "I know what you are, but what am I?", and using my fists if I needed to defend myself physically. However, at the age of ten, a traumatic experience changed this self-conscious association of 'difference', where this notion shifted from my character to the color of my skin.

To make a long story short, my first encounter surrounding the oppression of my black feminine identity was made when I was sexually molested in the fourth grade by an older, black male student of my class. Supposedly, he had a crush on me, and he made his feelings well-known amongst our peers. Nevertheless, I did not accept his advances, which generated embarrassment on his part; and therefore he decided to force himself upon me in the middle of the playground during recess. As soon as I was able to fight the male student off of me, I instantly ran to my white, male teacher, while my clothes were obviously disheveled. Emotionally distraught, I attempted to tell my teacher how I was inappropriately touched, and he interrupts asserting, "So what did you do, to make him jump on top of you? Go to the bathroom, wipe your tears, and clean yourself up in time for math." At that moment, the issue was brushed off and I instantly felt devalued. I felt neither my body nor my voice mattered. No one stood up for me. It perplexed me even more, because two weeks prior, when one of my white, female peers was spit on by the same black, male student, he was suspended without question. The school conduct policies felt very blurred. Moreover, I asked myself, "What made me different from her?", and I finally attributed the answer to my black feminine identity. I was silent about the incident for a week blaming myself, because I didn't want anyone to view me negatively,

especially my mother. However, in order to heal, I told my mother how I was molested, and eventually received the proper support I needed.

It wasn't until I got older that I understood why my teacher responded the way he did and also my feelings of self-blame. Similar to some of the thoughts and experiences of my primary interviewees, I had to learn that my black, female body and voice are fatedly colonized and seen as other within our white, patriarchal structure. The implications of these unconscious, negative images surrounding the Black female made my teacher inquire what was my role in provoking the male student, which was a question unaddressed to my white, female peer. Unfortunately, the response I received from him was unconsciously mediated by race. Ironically, I had to prove the purity, value and legitimacy of my voice, body, and sexuality even as a child! For this reason, my story and also my research reinforces the importance of how various systemic forms of oppression need to be disrupted and dismantled immediately.

### **My Freedom of Sexual Expression**

“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.” - Maya Angelou

I was raised by a family who are very open with discussing so-called “taboo” topics. I never truly had the one-time sex talk with my mother, because the sex-talk was an everyday discussion not only with my mother, but with other relatives in my family. My relatives have a principle that if she is brave enough to ask, then she is definitely brave enough to know the answer; there was no beating around the bush. Because of this, I am very comfortable talking about sex and reproductive health because it was not shunned to any extent in my home. The women of my family made me feel proud about my sexuality and encouraged me to feel comfortable in my own skin. We even have celebrations, for women only, where women of

different generations in my family share stories about their perspective of being a woman whether in relationships, health, or just in daily life. These gatherings are prompted when a girl, who is also the guest of honor, begins her menstrual cycle<sup>11</sup>.

Although I had this form of support and empowerment in my home, ballet was an extracurricular activity in the public sphere I had to negotiate. As soon as I entered high school, my black feminine body began to fill out, and I developed a noticeable bust and derriere. At the predominantly white ballet studio I was attending at the time, I endured many micro-aggressions that reminded me that my body did not belong. I recall my dance peers mocking me for not being thin enough, in-class costumes not being able to fit around my butt, waist or bust, and my teacher consistently telling me to put my butt down lower during stretching, when it was already at its lowest mark. In due time, I got frustrated and had enough because I attributed these micro-aggressions not only to my body, but to my race.

Therefore, to be in a more body-positive environment, I decided to join an African-American dance company that incorporated jazz, ballet, hip-hop and modern dance. In this space, my dance teacher exposed us to the empowering lyrics and sensual sounds of Nina Simone's "Four Women", Eric Benet's "Femininity", and India Arie's "Brown Skin." For the first time in my life, I was able to artistically experience, express, and feel the multiple narratives of black femininity and sexuality. I was able to accentuate my black arms, hips, butt, legs, thighs, and breasts without restrictions. These movements of strength and sensuality catalyzed a feeling of passion. For once, I had an unforgettable feeling that encompassed my love and acceptance for my black, feminine body and identity.

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<sup>11</sup> Unlike my experience, in the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community, the sex taboo has a strong influence in daily interactions. It is very unlikely for sex to be spoken candidly within the home and in the public sphere. The sex taboo is explained in further detail in Chapter 3, *Background in Sexual Culture*.

This narrative highlights how I strongly view my black body as a walking contradiction. Since whiteness is the standard of beauty, I and some of my primary interviewees note that our dark skin, the width of our noses, the fullness of our lips, our natural hair, and especially, our curvaceous body type facilitate implicit controversy in mainstream society<sup>12</sup>. We are constantly reminded that if we (or make ourselves) look more white, not only will we be perceived as more beautiful, but mainstream society will feel more comfortable about the way we express our sexuality. In order to experience my artistic freedom of sexual expression, I had to defy these social norms and find a communal space where I and other “Sister Outsiders” (Lorde 1984) could illustrate our Black femininity and sexual agency freely without judgment. Seeing the importance of this form of self-empowerment, I intended for my interviews to provide a safe space where my Dutch Afro-Caribbean mothers and daughters could self-reflect and express their various sexual subjectivities candidly.

### **My Attempt to Reframe Black Femininity and Sexuality**

These narratives along with how they have affected my perspective about black, female identity has influenced my research tremendously. I will acknowledge with me being in the position of a young, black academic researcher, this paper is not only for my academic goals but also a personal affinity to these women’s stories. I may never truly experience what these women go through in their everyday lives, but I am confident that our commonality as women of color will help us find a common ground and establish rapport. I will also admit that I am coming into this project with an outsider’s perspective. I have not personally experienced the sex education and reproductive health services in the Netherlands. I can only make conclusions based on my

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<sup>12</sup> Some of my primary interviewees expressed similar notions surrounding the controversy of their bodies, and the relationship of how their bodies are perceived and framed by mainstream society. Explicit examples are provided in Chapter 4, *HerStory: Voices of Dutch Afro-Caribbean Mothers and Daughters*.



prior knowledge of past readings and attending lectures; and also from the experiences and opinions of my interviewees. Therefore, “I am one with them, yet not one of them” (qtd in Wekker 2006: 15). This balance of positionality benefited me in receiving the information I needed from interviewees.

Correspondingly, being exposed to feminist research and literature has made me more aware of my power and positionality as a woman of color researcher. I enjoy discovering new ways of observing and constructing knowledge. Being exposed to this theory and praxis, has inherently transformed my frame of thinking where I automatically question and critically analyze the knowledge that is being disseminated to me. On the other end, feminist research and literature has made me more aware of how I should conduct steps in my own research process, which includes holding myself accountable, rejecting universality, and acknowledging my reflexivity, responsibility and sense of agency.

Given the important facet of my positionality and sexual subjectivity, I want to underline three ideologies that deeply influence me to provide this counter-narrative, which are: 1) Sexuality and race are deeply connected for my focus group, due to the ramifications of slavery and colonialism; 2) The presence of the sex taboo makes an individual’s development of their sexual subjectivity more strenuous and complicated. 3) Black women’s bodies and sexualities are a worldly, societal crisis.

As I share my personal narratives, it is amazing to see where I started and how far I came. My journey of finding my voice and reframing my body and sexuality as a site of authentic self-love and sustainable liberation has not been an easy one. Similar to my primary interviewees’ experiences, I know the pain of my silence. However, I eventually realized that I needed to

speaking. In each situation, I was motivated to express myself, not only to hold myself and others accountable, but the fact that if I didn't work towards liberating my mind, my body, my voice and sexuality from the beginning, who will?

## BACKGROUND ON SEXUAL CULTURE:

### MY FRAME OF BLACK AND CARIBBEAN FEMINIST THEORY

#### **Introduction**

Prior to researching for literary sources about my focus group's intriguing yet controversial sexual culture, I felt that it was going to be a challenge to find scholarly texts in English that involve an in-depth look on the self-perceptions of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's sexuality. With this in mind, I found some helpful literature<sup>13</sup>, but information was limited as expected due to the lack of prior research conducted. Therefore, I perform this exploratory and analytical study mainly through a U.S. Black Feminist Theory lens along with Caribbean Feminist Theory. Although I have more of a background in U.S. Black Feminist Theory, my interviewees reminded me constantly that even though we are from two different countries, our internal and external struggles as women of the African diaspora are very similar. Because of this circumstance, I became more confident in U.S. Black Feminist Theory's transnational context and principles. To convey transnationalism, intersectionality is a core theme of this politic, where black feminists are:

actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as... [their] particular task the development of integrated analysis

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<sup>13</sup> I mainly obtained my literary sources from four places. In Amsterdam, I used part of my research funds to pay for a library membership and gained access to the physical collection and electronic databases of Amsterdam's public library, *Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (OBA)* and *Aletta*, an archive and library that carries international literature on women's history and gender relations. Furthermore, I obtained resources at Amsterdam's Municipal Health Center's library, *GGD*. Lastly, I acquired literature through the Five College library system in Western Massachusetts. When gathering literature, I discovered and referenced resources which encompassed, but are not limited to: (1) Black feminist theory and Caribbean feminist theory surrounding the historical and socio-political ideology of black female sexuality; (2) Social scientific studies mainly conducted in the Netherlands which dissect the contemporary, sexual culture of the Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Antillean community. (3) Documentation from Amsterdam's Municipal Health Center entailing their past and current projects towards people of color communities. (4) Background on the sexual culture and gender relations of Dutch Afro-Caribbean communities.

and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking...Black feminism [is]...the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face (Combahee River Collective 1986: 13)

With this intention, I find it fascinating to apply the two distinct, yet overlapping political perspectives in pursuance of disrupting the Western European socio-cultural discourse affecting women of color. My interviewees' experiences and the literature I have collected throughout my research process have provided me more insight about the positionality of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women in the Netherlands.

Correspondingly, I discovered that my Black Feminist Theory lens along with my application of Caribbean Feminist Theory are very beneficial throughout my research process since they both challenge the hegemonic discourses of knowledge, redress the socially constructed misrepresentations of the black female, and most importantly, make room for these valuable voices that were once excluded or considered illegitimate. These theories combat dichotomies or binaries while acknowledging the multi-dimensionality of identity. 'Mainstream' and 'normal' are words of comfort, and feminists of color take the readers outside of their comfort zone in order to raise awareness about the white, patriarchal structure that we are living in. Black and Caribbean Feminist Theory values what I value---community, inclusiveness, and multiplicities of knowledge. These political perspectives bring societal oppressions to the forefront, where it has the opportunity to be addressed, deconstructed, challenged and eventually changed for the betterment of our social and political dynamics as a whole. In essence, black feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins, describes Black feminism as "a process of self-conscious

struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist<sup>14</sup> vision of community” (1991:39).

Furthermore, an overarching theme of my research and an important concept that influenced Black and Caribbean Feminist Theory is the notion that the ‘personal is the political’, which highlights that not only do personal issues need to be brought to the public sphere, but also that individual behaviors, collective actions and societal structures are mutually interdependent and political (Combahee River Collective 1986:17; Collins 1991). Due to the voices and activism of black feminists and allies, one of the personal issues that have institutionally become political is black female sexuality. Without surprise, mainstream societies are obsessed with sex, but fear the sexuality of black women<sup>15</sup> (West 2001; Collins 1991; Hull, Scott, & Smith 1982). This fear is generated by mainly two factors: perceiving black women as a threat, or the perception of black women provoking or inviting sexual energy from others. Historically and even until this day, black women were thought to be a problem; and for this reason, we’re<sup>16</sup> impulsively blamed for our homogenized and misrepresented hypersexual behaviors (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Ellerbe-Dueck 2011; Terborg 2002; Wekker 2006; West 2001). In actuality, this racist discourse was not only used to maintain hegemonic control, but was also at the root in the attempt to deflect attention from white authorities’ fear of explicitly displaying desire and captivation by

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<sup>14</sup> The term “humanist” could be received as a problematic concept, since theoretically, this philosophical framework is deeply embedded in racism and sexism. Not to mention, humanism promoted a universalized, Eurocentric perspective surrounding the discourse and practice of human rights. In spite of the prior impression, I believe Collins frames the term as a “humanist” utopia where she visualizes a community that is without prejudice and oppression, which respects situated knowledges, and is inclusive and equitable.

<sup>15</sup> This is similar to other marginalized social groups that are framed as hypersexual and perceived as sexually threatening to the majority such as gay men and unmarried women.

<sup>16</sup> I chose the word “we” to include myself in this collective term. I want to recognize the fact that I also have been affected by the mainstream hypersexualized construction because of my positionality as a young, black woman in a white, patriarchal context.

black sexuality. In essence, there is a contradictory framework of otherness and yearning toward black women (Wekker 2006). Correspondingly to this ‘forbidden’ attraction, Patricia Hill Collins further explains how white authorities have a fear of embodying the very sexual stereotypes that they project onto the black community. Collins even argues that the black community is used as scapegoats while white authorities covertly attempt to repress these aspects within themselves (1991:196). To maintain control of this fear, profeminist Black male scholar, Cornel West, argues:

White supremacist ideology is based first and foremost on the degradation of black bodies in order to control them. One of the best ways to instill fear in people is to terrorize them. Yet this fear is best sustained by convincing them that their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture is less civilized, and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples...this white dehumanizing endeavor has left its toll in the psychic scars and personal wounds now inscribed in the souls of black folk. These scars and wounds are clearly etched on the canvass of black female sexuality (2001:303).

West illustrates how sexual perceptions facilitate racial and sexual oppression. Within this framework of white supremacy, black women’s bodies and sexualities have continuously been targeted and attacked to ensure that we are reminded of our marginalized identity as a woman and as a black individual<sup>17</sup>. Unfortunately, black women, along with Black and Caribbean Feminist Theory, appear to be ideologically located in a vulnerable position between

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<sup>17</sup> I want to acknowledge that these identities, black and woman, are still intersectional.

gender and race, “where the [real] Black female subject is not seen and has no voice” (Hammonds 1994:133).

Moreover, prominent black feminist scholars, Dorothy Roberts and Evelyn Hammonds, convey that black women’s bodies have been sexually exploited through silence and display, whose origins surround the sexual transgressions of enslaved black women and girls by white, patriarchal society (Hammonds 1994; Roberts 2010). The history of slavery and its repercussions are very much embedded and still present in the supposedly “post-racial” policies, societies, and governments all over the world---the Netherlands being one of them, where Dutch Afro-Caribbean women feel trapped by multiple oppressions constructed by the dominant discourses in their white, patriarchal structure (Ellerbe-Dueck 2011; Essed 1991; Wekker 2009).

In turn, the perpetuation of this concept influences the contemporary, hypersexualizing attitudes of black women’s bodies, sexuality, and character. The conceptual framework of ‘silence and display’ has constructed black women as promiscuous, sexually accessible, exotic, lewd, pathological and countless other negative stereotypes. This is used to control all aspects of a black woman and signifies the social construction that her body and sexuality are ‘predestinedly colonized’ (Hammonds 1994). Also, because of slavery and colonialism, negative connotations are predisposed on black women, and their “bodies and behavior are so easily seen as depraved” (Roberts 2010: 52). Black women have little agency over their own bodies and sexuality. We are tired of being scapegoated for social ills, and still to this day, fight for bodily integrity.

In the Dutch context, I discovered sex is used to liberate, and yet at the same time, the core site to oppress Dutch Afro-Caribbean women. In this function, these women have been viewed as the embodiment of sex, while simultaneously, being rendered invisible. And under

these circumstances, their multiple sexual subjectivities are overshadowed by the hypersexualized stereotype (Hammonds 1994; Roberts 2010).

Rooted in the history of European colonial dominance, the hypersexualizing ideology placed upon Dutch Afro-Caribbean women dichotomized and made them inferior to the supposedly normative, Dutch-born white woman. Also, the ideology legitimized the sexual violence forced upon Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's bodies throughout slavery; and currently rationalizes the socio-political inequalities within Dutch society today. Based on my interviews, not only is there a pervasive silence within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community about sexuality, but the impact of the long-lasting oppression is also internalized by contemporary Dutch Afro-Caribbean women, and has created more obstacles for their everyday realities (Ellerbe-Dueck 2011; Essed 1991; Oostindie 1996; Terborg 2002). Correspondingly, European Black feminist scholar, Cassandra Ellerbe-Dueck, highlighted that "Many European countries have been reluctant to deal with the unpleasant aspects of their own colonial histories" (2011:148). Provided this assertion, I realized that in the mainstream sphere of the Netherlands, the history of Dutch colonization and slavery is minimized and rarely discussed (Ellerbe-Dueck 2011; Essed 1991).

In light of this silence, implicit racism is evident with regards to the dichotomous ethnic identity terms, 'allochtonen'<sup>18</sup> and 'autochtonen'<sup>19</sup>, which is unique to the Dutch and more general European landscape. According to Kramer's New Dutch Dictionary, 'allochtoon' means "came from elsewhere" or originating from another country, while the word 'autochtoon' means "pure, indigenous; came from the land." (Bishop 2004). Allochtoon evolved from the words

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<sup>18</sup> In plural form. Singular form is 'allochtoon'.

<sup>19</sup> In plural form. Singular form is 'autochtoon'



‘ethnic minority’ and ‘immigrant’, which were respectively replaced due to their conveyance of dehumanization and lack of settlement<sup>20</sup> within Holland. (Bishop 2004; Wekker and Lutz 2001). I was not able to find the exact year of when these terms originated. Then again, they are believed to have emerged around the time when the country shifted from a self-perceived homogeneous, ethnic landscape to a more, heterogeneous one. This shift was the result of a consistent, fifty-year immigration to the Netherlands starting from 1940 (Bishop 2004). Acknowledging this change, the country’s authorities felt the need to establish a form of language to distinguish their indigenous and immigrant inhabitants. Nevertheless, given this information, the line appears to be very blurred in terms of who would be categorized as an allochtoon and who would be categorized as an autochtoon. Is this distinction mainly based on country of origin or race?

Academic scholar, Eboné Bishop, affirms that allochtoon is used differently in Dutch government compared to Dutch society. Referencing a researcher at the Dutch Ministry of Justice, Bishop states that the constructed term, allochtoon is used in government to “differentiate native white Dutch from others” living in the Netherlands (2004). The government classifies allochtonen as individuals who have at least one parent born outside of the Netherlands. The second generation descendants are considered allochtonen as well because they’re perceived as not being fully socialized or integrated into Dutch culture and society. Eventually, a child of the third generation, whose second generation parents are both born in the Netherlands, is autochtoon, since the government perceives the child to be fully integrated. Moreover, an individual who was born abroad, but both of their parents was born in the

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<sup>20</sup> In other words, lack of Dutch socialization and integration within Holland, which perpetuates this notion that immigrants are not capable or will never be recognized as “Dutch.”

Netherlands, is considered to be autochtoon. Dutch citizenship is primarily based on birth to 'Dutch' parents, regardless of place of birth (Bishop 2004; Statistics Netherlands 2014). With this in mind, the term allochtonen is additionally categorized into Western versus Non-Western, which therefore, creates another layer of societal division (Bishop 2004).

In comparison, allochtonen has more of a racial focus in Dutch society; and is a stigmatizing term that is applied *primarily* to communities of color, such as Surinamese, Moroccans, Turks, and Antilleans, irrespective if they are a third generation Netherlands-born individual. In other words, not every non-native Dutch individual (i.e. - white German or white Swiss individual) is considered to be allochtoon in everyday language. And communities of color that are defined as allochtonen are perceived not only as other but also as a societal problem (i.e.- criminality) (Bishop 2004; Wekker and Lutz 2001). In essence, Bishop affirms that "The message sent is a contradictory one: On one hand, governmental rhetoric appears aimed towards full integration and participation within Dutch society. Yet in actual practice, those that attempt to participate fully are seen as threatening and problematic" (Bishop 2004). Within both contexts, the terminology constructed defines who is 'Dutch enough', or who belongs and who does not belong in the Dutch nation. These dichotomous terms, especially allochtonen, homogenize individual communities based on who is white and who is not white. In turn, ethnic and cultural specificity, difference and individuality are lost due to the presence of institutional racism. Nonetheless, because of the excessive contradictions surrounding the terminology use and its' reinforcement of societal controversy by the "us vs. them" discourse, the Amsterdam city council decided to ban the words, allochtonen and autochtonen, from official city documentation in February 2013. Instead, individuals living in the Netherlands will now be described more specifically as a "Surinamese Amsterdammer" or a "Moroccan Amsterdammer" (Dutch News

2013; RtlNieuws 2013). From my understanding, these dichotomous terms are not fully eradicated since this change has only been implemented city-wide and not nation-wide.

Collective silence along with the hypervisibility of the worst representation of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women perpetuates racist, sexual stereotypes in the Dutch social landscape, while the variety of black women's sexual, subjective experiences remain in the shadows. A woman's identity needs to be acknowledged as complex, multiple, intersecting, shifting, and at times, contradictory, instead of being reduced to fit inside a universal, neatly, coiled box. (Hammonds 1994; Roberts 2010; Wieringa 2002). Like heterosexual serial monogamy, the subjective meaning of 'hypersexuality' is only one of many lived realities, and neither one deserves less respect than the others due to the varying degrees of societal normativity.

To increase the visibility of black women's diverse sexual subjectivities, Hammonds suggests an alternative strategy by bringing attention to the work of black feminist literary critics, she argues:

To date...we know more about the elision of sexuality by Black women than we do about the possible varieties of expression of sexual desire. Thus what we have is a very narrow view of Black women's sexuality... The restrictive, repressive and dangerous aspects of Black female sexuality have been emphasized by Black feminist writers while pleasure, exploration, and agency have gone underanalyzed (1994:134).

Similarly, Gloria Wekker, a Dutch Afro-Caribbean feminist anthropologist, also critiques academia to emphasize how black women's bodies are repeatedly made hypervisible to maintain

negative perceptions, instead of making space for more positive and liberatory accounts asserting:

To date, we have no comprehensive full-length historical and sociological understanding of the meanings of sex in the lives of women of African descent, wherever they find themselves. In fact, much of the social science research has focused upon the ostensibly negative indicators of an unbridled sexuality: high fertility rates and teenage pregnancies, disproportionately high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)...and “broken” family structures. But the inner sexual lives of black women, how they think about themselves sexually, remain a mystery (2006:76).

These arguments convey the importance of why Black women’s voices and especially their lived experiences need to be heard more in academia. As I reflect on my interviews with these women from at least two different generations, I am very confident that these once silenced, narratives will positively transform the mainstream discourse on black female sexuality, since these discussions go beyond the heteronormative experience and attempt to reshape black female sexuality as a fluid, multi-dimensional phenomenon, instead of it being fixed and homogenized. Moreover, I believe my interviewees’ experiences will allow people to see that sex is interconnected to our mental, emotional, spiritual and physical selves; and that it is time to make room for the visibility, respect and recognition it deserves.

Acknowledging the ramifications of colonization and slavery on black female sexuality, Hortense Spillers asserts that “black women are the beached whales of the sexual universe, unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting *their* verb” (qtd. in Hammonds 1994:131; Sharpe and Pinto 2006:247). This compelling argument illustrates the importance of Dutch Afro-Caribbean

women not only reclaiming their bodies and experiences, but also possessing agency over their sex lives in these marginal, hypervisible sex spaces. It is time for Dutch Afro-Caribbean women “to possess the power to define their own realities, and establish their own identities” (Ellerbe-Dueck 2011: 147). It is also time to gain control and eventually get rid of stereotypes that were forced upon them, in order to improve self-development and gender relations within the community (Terborg 2002). In essence, Dutch Afro-Caribbean enacting agency illustrates and symbolizes their right to public space.

Historically, black women have attempted to counteract these hypersexualized notions through the culture of dissemblance. By attempting to shield our inner sexualities from our oppressors, this respectability politic didn’t achieve the goal of ending racist, sexual stereotyping, and actually, silenced the diverse range of black women’s sexual subjectivities (Hammonds 1994; Roberts 2010). Respectability politics is an “elite vision of Culture” which restricts black women, and therefore puts our sexual subjectivities at risk (Sharpe and Pinto 2006; 258). With this in mind, I argue that in order to combat these hegemonic, hypersexualized discourses, we should implement a culture of pleasure as a form of agency and resistance. Inspired by the words of the unparalleled Audre Lorde, “that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength” (*Transformation of Silence* 1984:42). I believe this political strategy, which is also our greatest strength, will motivate black women to articulate and express all conceptions of their sexuality. I imagine a culture of pleasure to embody what I believe Gloria Wekker, Evelyn Hammonds, and Audre Lorde hope for----more positive, liberatory accounts of our sexuality through expression and daily conversations to outweigh the negative, racist stereotyping. In a culture of pleasure, I envision that as black women, we will stop policing one another as if there is only one lived sexual reality, and instead

embrace multiple, sexual subjectivities. We will ensure that oneself and fellow “Sister Outsiders” (Lorde 1984) have the knowledge, skills, and resources to protect ourselves and have fulfilling lives. In turn, this will enhance our power surrounding our choices and positions, instead of having to forfeit or risk our sexual integrity (hooks 2000). Black women will have the space to not be sexual as well, and there’ll be more of an emphasis on our “sexual desires, pleasures and decision-making capacity” (Roberts 2010: 48). In essence, we will carry our sexual subjectivity with pride, self-assertion and self-love, instead of shame and judgement.

We can achieve a culture of pleasure through what Lorde describes as, the power of the erotic. “The erotic is a sensorial survivorship that is deeply attuned to the spiritual power of one’s own body” (Lorde 2014). The erotic allows us to feel at our full capacity and is the root to our power, passion, self-reflection, self-determination and social consciousness. To maintain hegemonic power, women have been told to feel contempt, to devalue, and suspect the erotic because it makes us dangerous even beyond the sexual sphere (Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic*, 1984). Lorde affirms that the erotic is feared by the hegemonic power because:

we [black women] 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, becomes 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.” (*Uses of the Erotic*, 1984: 57)

Lorde highlights how the erotic power is connected to other vital areas of our lives besides sex; and to refuse the erotic is to maintain status quo (*Uses of the Erotic*, 1984). I argue

that this subversive form of agency has been misconstrued as hypersexuality. However, when women act unsafely or forfeit their sexual integrity, I think that is when agency is lost. For this reason, it is important that we make the personal, communal and institutional changes needed, so black women can nurture their sexual identities. bell hooks describes perfectly the type of erotic power application we need in this world stating that:

[it] is founded on the principle that we have a right to express sexual desire as the spirit moves us and to find in sexual pleasure a life-affirming ethos. Erotic connection calls us...into community...we will all be free to choose those sexual practices which affirm and nurture our growth. Those practices may range from choosing promiscuity or celibacy, from embracing one specific sexual identity and preference or choosing a roaming uncharted desire...with specific individuals with whom we feel the spark of erotic recognition no matter their sex, race, class, or even their sexual preference. Radical feminist dialogues about sexuality must surface so that the movement towards sexual freedom can begin again (2000: 92).

As can be seen through my lens of Black and Caribbean Feminist theory, Dutch Afro-Caribbean women need to reclaim their sexuality in order to transform the negative discourses surrounding their relationship to sexual and reproductive health. Given this assertion, readers will observe how these women are at different stages of encountering and reclaiming their erotic power. They will also see how the emotional, physical, psychological and sensual aspects are connected to the political as well. In this case, feasible strategies to reform social values, public policies and economic realities need to be created, along with the initiation of a politics of articulation and a culture of pleasure, especially within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community, to transcend the repercussions of slavery. In essence, in order to achieve a more equitable society,

we need to identify, disrupt and destroy appearances of the white hegemonic power structure, while persistently contributing towards freedom, accessibility and compassion.

### **Background on Sexual Culture**

Minorities from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles constitute the second and fourth largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands general population (Bertens 2008). Due to these two minority populations having prominent representation in the Netherlands, I could imagine that their sexual behavior would be of much concern to authorities and mainstream research. With attention to the relatively high prevalence of STI-infected individuals and unwanted pregnancies, Bertens illustrates the hypersexual discourse in mainstream research stating:

Surveys indicate high levels of sexual risk behavior for the Afro-Surinamese, Dutch Antillean and Aruban population, especially among men. These behaviors include: unprotected sex, inconsistent condom use, high numbers of sex partners, high rates of partner change, concurrent relationships, and sexual contacts outside existing steady relationships” (Bertens 2008:11).

With this in mind, the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community’s sexual practices are made hypervisible to account for the disparity between them and the Dutch-born white community, while at the same time reinforcing the “us vs. them” discourse. Gloria Wekker emphasizes that Euro-American dominant discourses have configured black female sexuality to be “immoral...animal-like... [and] an instrument of destruction (Wekker 2006: 76). Instead of taking the time to invest and provide culturally-sensitive information, resources, and services, it is easier for mainstream authorities to perpetuate the unquestioned, negative stereotypes for the



presence of the disparity. Dominant discourses always place responsibility on unsafe sex or promiscuity rather than fully delving into and acknowledging the social conditions that affect black women's sexual decisions and relationships (Roberts 2010). As stated before, the stereotypes tend to be made hypervisible, while the social conditions remain obscure. In light of this lack of investment of delving into and acknowledging these social conditions, I wonder if this hypersexualized discourse is meant to persuade the marginalized community to accept Dutch norms and reject their indigenous culture?

Provided this argument, I would like to briefly address various aspects of the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community's sexual culture that has sparked so much controversy. This contention is due to their culture challenging many dominant, heteronormative, white European notions of gender relations, marriage, family, and sexuality (Mohammed 2002; Wekker 2006). I have utilized Black and Caribbean Feminist Theory to frame and provide another perspective to the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community's sexual culture. Not all of these aspects are mentioned by my interviewees in the interview chapters; however, I personally feel they will contribute to the expansion of your erotic intelligence, awareness, and understanding about this marginalized group.

### *Double Standard of Sexual Behavior*

In the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community's sexual culture, men have more agency and mobility in expressing their sexuality compared to women, whose gender and respectability politic restricts them. Caribbean theorist, Barry Chevannes, highlights the root of this double standard, affirming that men's sexual expression is attributed to the public sphere and is meant to be noticed and visible, while women's sexual expression is attributed to the private sphere and is meant to be unnoticed and invisible (2002). In turn, a man's active sexual expression is more

likely to be celebrated, in contrast to the moral judgement women would receive if they expressed their sexuality actively in public (Chevannes 2002). Men are expected to be dominant in the sexual sphere, which involves taking initiative with sexual interactions, having multiple, concurrent partners and engaging in casual relationships. The number of sexual partners especially outside women or ‘buitenvrouwen’<sup>21</sup>, from a steady relationship is an indicator of manliness and an embedded cultural practice. On the other hand, women are expected to be sexually passive and submissive as well as possess the tendency to have one, steady partner (Bertens et al. 2008; Chevannes 2002; Terborg 2002; van Veen et al. 2011). Terborg further elaborates on this adherence to monogamous behavior asserting that “women are strongly inclined to behave monogamously in accordance with the norms of female respectability... [and that] women will conform to the norms of sexual morality, especially in public, namely not to take sexual initiatives...not to use sexual language and pretend sexual inexperience” (2002: 278).

While women’s sexual behavior is policed by the respectability politic, historically, men feel the need to prove their masculinity through sexual hypervirility. This sexual expression is rooted in Dutch Afro-Caribbean men attempting to gain access to patriarchal power and privilege during colonial times. These marginalized men were oppressed and emasculated by white authorities at the time who ensured black men were exploited and had meager wages. This working situation contributed to a marginal presence of black fathers in the home and made it difficult for black men to provide for their families. Because black men could not prove their masculinity by obtaining a suitable job and financially providing for their families, they resorted to sexual hypervirility (Lindsay 2002; Terborg 2002). Additionally, the black family structure had a strong tendency to be broken during slavery since marriage was not allowed and family

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<sup>21</sup> Meaning outside women in the Surinamese Dutch language

members were constantly being sold or traded (Momsen 2002; Terborg 2002). Due to this instability, it was likely for black slaves to mate and have children with multiple people. Furthermore, black men even attempted to mimic the sexual behavior of their colonizer through the dual marriage system, where “an upper-class white man had a white wife and a Creole or black concubine---[This] has transformed itself from an originally white and Jewish male colonial phenomenon, via a Creole manifestation, to a truly Surinamese male script” (Wekker 2001:176). This historical information reflects how black men were constantly emasculated from achieving power and status; and therefore, resorted to appropriating this colonial phenomenon of dual marriage to the extreme. As a matter of fact, I argue that this extreme appropriation has not only absolved white colonizers from being the initiators of this sexual behavior, but also illustrates the ramifications of colonialism on current gender relations within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community.

Equally important, Madelief Bertens and her colleagues conducted one of the few research studies that examined beyond the reasons of unsafe sex and promiscuity to account for the disparity in sexual statistics. In contrast, they actually investigated the influence of gender roles and the social context on sexual decision-making and safe-sex negotiation among Dutch Afro-Caribbean women in the Netherlands (2008). The overarching concept of their study is to understand Dutch Afro-Caribbean women’s attempt to maintain a balance between responsibility (aka being a woman) and respectability (aka feeling like a woman). The two traits complement but also conflict with each other in terms of a Dutch Afro-Caribbean woman’s sexual decision-making. A woman’s responsibility is linked to her independence and authority in the matrifocal household, which is a gateway to more power and self-assertiveness to negotiate safe sex. However, respectability limits this assertiveness and makes a woman vulnerable because they

desire love, care and attention from men. Under these circumstances, the need to be respectable hinders sexual decision-making capacity because respectable women are perceived to only involve themselves in serious, monogamous relationships, which are considered inherently safe. Therefore, the use of condoms or safe-sex negotiation is perceived as irrelevant or unnecessary, for a respectable woman which puts Dutch Afro-Caribbean women at risk (Bertens et al. 2008).

Moreover, in the researchers' study, they found that condoms are perceived to be the responsibility of the men, and that condoms are associated with distrust, promiscuity or infidelity (Bertens et al. 2008; Reubsaet and Ineichen 1996). If a woman asked her male partner to wear a condom, it was perceived that she was accusing him of these three traits or implying that she is sexually active outside of the relationship, which is regarded as not respectable. Lastly, a woman who possesses a sense of emotional and/or financial dependency, could renounce her intentions to negotiate safe sex in order to keep a man. (Bertens et al. 2008).

In this aspect, Dutch Afro-Caribbean women do not utilize their sexual agency. The skills and sexual decision-making capacity needed to enact this agency is encompassed in the matrifocal household. However, this association is not made in terms of preventing the risk of the respectability notion. The double standard limits a woman's ability to discuss sexuality and negotiate safe-sex (Bertens et al 2008). Nevertheless, a woman can enact her agency when she engages in multiple, concurrent relationships outside of her steady relationship due to her sexual and/or financial dissatisfaction with her male partner. Even though she is compromising her respectability, compensating for this probable inadequacy on the outside would be an attack on a male partner's masculinity and self-image within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community (Bertens et al. 2008; Terborg 2002). All things considered, Dutch Afro-Caribbean gender relations are at a state of unease. It appears black men and women of the Caribbean community adopted particular

values and attitudes to survive as a people during colonization and slavery. Unfortunately, some of these values and actions sustained patriarchal notions and increased the tension amongst Dutch Afro-Caribbean men and women. For this reason, gender resocialization needs to occur in order to reevaluate anachronistic and/or adverse gender roles or stereotypes; and replace these previous gender relations with interactions based on “mutual respect and equality” (Lewis 2002: 529).

### *Matrifocality and Kinship*

According to Madelief Bertens in her work, *Uma Tori*, matrifocality is very prominent in the Dutch Antillean and Afro-Surinamese culture. In the Netherlands, “An estimated 40% of Dutch Antillean women and 33% of Surinamese women are single-parents compared to 8% of Dutch [sic] women. Nine out of ten Surinamese and Dutch-Antillean single parent households are female headed” (2008:40). This sociological term is described in a framework where the woman is the central, independent figure of the household and the main provider for her children. Unlike the mother, the father tends to have a marginal presence in the family (Bertens 2008; Hodge 2002; Lindsay 2002; Momsen 2002; Terborg 2002; Wekker 2006). “The male partner does have financial responsibilities for his children, but rarely intervenes in the upbringing of his children” (Bertens 2008:39). So, why are there more matrifocal families within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community? From a historical standpoint, due to the damage done by colonialism and slavery, black gender relations have been inflicted by deeply-embedded instability ever since. As stated before, this instability is by means of the dual marriage structure, black family members torn apart and constantly being exchanged or sold, and black men not having the opportunity to prove their masculinity, both financially and emotionally, to their families (Momsen 2002; Terborg 2002; Wekker 2001). Under these circumstances, Afro-

Caribbean men were emasculated, while Afro-Caribbean women were relatively able to extend their notions of femininity (Parry 2002: 95). To provide an example, Momsen affirms that:

Women in the Caribbean exhibit higher levels of economic autonomy than are found in most parts of the South. This has usually been explained in terms of the legacy of slavery reinforced by male-out migration, leaving a female majority in the population. In the anglophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, women have long had equal rights to land ownership which has been an enabling factor in allowing women's rejection of patriarchal control and has provided the physical basis of the matrilocal settlement pattern (2002:50).

Although Afro-Caribbean women had this privilege, their power and control was limited to the domestic sphere, as mothers or mother figures. I want to clarify that even though these women were central in terms of social order within the home, Afro-Caribbean women were not central in regards to the social order of public institutions-----men still had control in that domain. The society was matrifocal, not matriarchal. (Rowley 2002:23-24). Therefore, at the time of post-slavery, Afro-Caribbean women wanted men mainly for financial support. In exchange, these women strategically provided sex and recited the proverb, *I am a gold coin*<sup>22</sup>, to acknowledge their situations (Wekker 2006). Wekker elaborates more on the dynamics of transactional sex stating: "The extent to which a man is forthcoming with money often determines whether a woman will enter into or continue a relationship. The more a man spends on a woman, the more secure her financial position [and social status] becomes...furthermore,

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<sup>22</sup> Refer to *I am a gold coin* section in this chapter to receive a better understanding of this proverb.

[the proverb implicitly highlights] the exchange relation many working-class women perceive between money and sex” (2006:112).

In this context, I wonder who had agency in this relationship? Based on the man and woman’s desires, the agency appears to be very interdependent. As of now, I can assert that Afro-Caribbean women were very much aware of gender inequalities, and did their best to take advantage of opportunities in order to survive. Another example of their sensorial survivorship in this time was the need to have children. Afro-Caribbean women expected children to take care of them during their old age; and found them to be more stable and committed compared to men or *mati*<sup>23</sup> (Wekker 2001 and 2006).

Equally important, in contemporary Afro-Caribbean society, the marriage rate is very low and for various reasons, men and women prefer to be in a visiting relationship (Terborg 2002; Wekker 2006 and 2009). One reason for this social dynamic is that Afro-Caribbean women perceive marriage and motherhood as mutually exclusive (Rowley 2002; Hodge 2002). In other words, they don’t feel the need to get married in order to have children. Similarly, Afro-Caribbean women tend to be skeptical about the benefits of legal marriage and perceive it as a useless, social construction. In particular, Rowley notes that “the two categories appeared in a hierarchal relationship with marriage being a stage which required training, as opposed to the perceived “naturalness” of mothering. The women knew “innately” how to be mothers, but not how to be wives” (2002:35). From a historical standpoint, marriage was very unpopular because during slavery, marriage was forced upon the slave population in the Dutch Caribbean colonies. After the prohibition of the slave trade, white authorities thought marriage would augment

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<sup>23</sup> Refer to *Mati Work* section in the chapter to obtain an understanding of who a ‘*mati*’ is.

propagation and expand their labor force (Rowley 2002; Terborg 2002). Because of this, Afro-Caribbean women were particularly targeted because they were the source to perpetuate patriarchy and capitalism. White authorities needed to keep them oppressed and to abide by Dutch norms in order for the slave institution, at the time, to be maintained (Momsen 2002; Terborg 2002). Not only is marriage associated to the trauma of colonialism, but contemporary Afro-Caribbean women also perceived marriage as a path to losing their independence and sense of self (Bertens et al. 2008; Chevannes 2002; Rowley 2002; Wekker 2006). Bertens and her colleagues specifically highlight that “To be married means women are economically dependent and should be loyal to a husband. This would only restrict their freedom in household management and limit help from their kin or their female network” (Bertens et al. 2008: 557). This quote highlights that some Afro-Caribbean women perceive more obligations and restrictions with marriage, and didn’t see too many benefits, especially when it was probably expected that their potential spouse would have outside women as well. In this case, visiting relations appear to be the best option in order to maintain their independence.

Furthermore, Afro-Caribbean mothers have been judged and targeted by mainstream society due to the perception of raising a child alone. On the other hand, Caribbean feminist scholar, Merle Hodge argues that the definition of family is not limited to the nuclear family, but in the Caribbean, family means a network of people or kin (2002: 475). According to Gloria Wekker, kinships in the Afro-Caribbean community are based more on “consanguineal bonds than on the conjugal relationship” (2006: 119). Due to the unstable relationships with men, women would rely mainly on their female kinship networks that involved meaningful, long-lasting bonds (Momsen 2002; Wekker 2006). In these kinships, women would rely on one another for advice, to handle financial matters and also to raise children. This support system



gave Afro-Caribbean women more flexibility to continue their education, find jobs, and migrate when needed (Bertens et al. 2008: 553-554; Momsen 2002: 48). Moreover, Hodge even argues about what a kinship network encompasses in comparison to what a nuclear family lacks. She mentions how in a kinship network, a family doesn't need to be centralized around a sexual union; and that Afro-Caribbean women have the option to keep their sex life and family life separate. Also, in the Caribbean, a kinship network is a better source of stability for children than a sexual union (Hodge 2002: 479). Last but not least, Hodge underlines the inclusivity of the support system affirming:

the Western nuclear family as an organization [is] designed primarily to cater for the needs of children and of husbands. A Caribbean family, on the other hand, is as much an organization for the support of adults as for the rearing of children....older people, adolescents and unemployed or unattached adults traditionally were not cut loose to fend for themselves, and today Caribbean people, by and large, still feel a deep sense of responsibility for such family members. We are given, no credit, however, for this family value (Hodge 2002: 480).

All these benefits considered, Afro-Caribbean culture challenges the dominant notion of the nuclear family as being natural or universal, when in actuality, it is one among many types of families, which all deserve equal recognition.

In essence, in white European mainstream culture, we hear extensively more about the negative aspects of matrifocality and kinships, instead of the benefits and where the power/agency lies within these family structures. Instead of mainstream society and institutions

placing blame on these marginalized family structures, they should try to understand this family type and observe how “present-day conditions have affected the functioning of this family” (Hodge 2002: 484).

### Sex Taboo

Sex is considered to be a taboo within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community (Bertens, 2008; Kempadoo 2009; Terborg, 2002; Wekker 2006 and 2009). In other words, this forbidden fruit is inclined to be unspoken among people because sex “... [is seen] as sin, as disease, as excess, as danger, as losing control” (Wekker, 2009, 196). Sex already has a pre-determined negative connotation and consequently remains unmentionable with many behavioral restrictions. Gloria Wekker elucidates this argument in her academic analysis, *Afro-Surinamese Women’s Sexual Culture and the Long Shadows of the Past*, where she quotes theorist, Gayle Rubin stating:

This [Western] culture always treats sex with suspicion. It construes and judges almost any sexual practice in terms of its worst possible expression. Sex is presumed guilty until proven innocent. Virtually all erotic behavior is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established. The most acceptable excuses are marriage, reproduction and love...But the exercise of erotic capacity, intelligence, curiosity, or creativity all require pretexts that are unnecessary for other pleasures such as the enjoyment of food, fiction, astronomy (2009:196).

In light of this quote, it perplexes me if sex has always been a taboo within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community, or if the imposed beliefs that manifested during colonization and slavery are still deeply embedded within contemporary, Dutch Afro-Caribbean culture? I say this

because there is an evident contradiction in terms of how sexuality is communally expressed within the private sphere and the public sphere. To provide a specific example, Terborg notes that:

There exists a big discrepancy between the public sexual culture and the private sexual culture. The public sexual culture is dominated by the belief that Caribbean people, and in particular black people, are naturally endowed with sexual skills and that sex is always a source of pleasure. Although in public people tend to behave in accordance with this myth, we see a private sexual practice that is characterized by reluctance, shame, ignorance and lack of sexual skills, sexual dissatisfaction, and cultural sexual taboos which hinder an open communication (2002: 279).

I believe this quote is the epitome of how Dutch Afro-Caribbean individuals struggle to find a middle-ground between Dutch norms and their indigenous culture, while also attempting to reconcile the hypersexualized ideology imposed upon them. It appears that the community is accustomed to being displayed by mainstream society, that they have no issue with expressing themselves sexually in the public sphere. Nevertheless, are there individuals who feel an internal conflict to fulfill this hypersexualized mainstream construction of their identity? Or could this public expression be the beginning of a form of resistance to validate their sexual subjectivities, such as through Caribbean ‘slackness<sup>24</sup>’? Either way, this conceals the real issue at hand surrounding the impact of the enduring silence about sex within the home .

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<sup>24</sup> Refers to overall vulgarity in Caribbean idioms, behavior and music. Particularly, with the musical genre, Dancehall, for its sexually explicit lyrics, performances, and dance routines.

### Proving Fertility

In Dutch Afro-Caribbean culture, proving one's fertility is not only linked to one's reproductive capability, but also social status and identity (Bertens 2008; Kempadoo 2009; Rowley 2002; Terborg 2002; Wekker 2006). Historically, men prove their sexual hypervirility by producing as many children as possible, even with multiple women, and tend to not be socially responsible for their offspring. For women, Kempadoo highlights that "the majority of young women think that children satisfy the most important goal of womanhood and are women's greatest (and lasting) contribution" (2009: 9). In essence, pregnancy has a central role in defining womanhood in which marriage lacks. In the Caribbean community, womanhood is not fully achieved by intercourse, but explicitly defined as 'being with child' (Hodge 2002; Rowley 2002).

Correspondingly, when pregnant, the female individual's social status changes from girl to woman and she is regarded as more responsible, independent and socially mature. She is no longer a child, but an adult in the eyes of her community (Bertens et al. 2008; Rowley 2002). Because of children being linked to achieving true womanhood and gaining social status, Bertens and colleagues affirm that this perceived sexual belief could account for the high number of teenage pregnancies, since some young girls get pregnant to prove their independence and/or to gain recognition as a woman (2008). In regards to a more current situation in the Netherlands, Terborg asserts that Dutch Afro-Caribbean women have had fewer children because of attaining higher education and also access to contraceptives. Equally important, more young men now reject the prior notion of proving their sexual hypervirility and perceive it as socially irresponsible. (Terborg 2002).

*Mati work (mati wroko)*

Mati work is a practice and subculture that is mainly associated with working-class Afro-Surinamese individuals in Suriname (Tinsley 2011; Wekker 2006). However, mati work's principles are also practiced in other parts of the Caribbean which include Jamaica, Curacao, and St. Vincent (Wekker 1997). Gloria Wekker defines the practice as "...entail[ing] both men and women having sexual and erotic relations with partners of the same and of the opposite sex, either simultaneously or consecutively... [it was] first documented in colonial literature in 1912" (2009: 193). With this in mind, mati work occurs prominently among working-class Afro-Surinamese women who love and engage in mutual, intimate relations with other women in Suriname (Tinsley 2011; Wekker 2006).

Mati is creolized from the Dutch word 'maatje', meaning 'mate' and is used to indicate female friends or lovers (Sharpe and Pinto 2006: 262; Tinsley 2011:243; Wekker 1997 and 2006). Besides their same-sex relations, "*Mati* are women who typically have children, [and] who may be in a variety of relationships with men (e.g., marriage, concubinage, visiting relationships) [as well]" (Wekker 1997: 336) Wekker asserts that the practice emerged around the early 1900s, when working-class men left the country's capital, Paramaribo, to take part in migrant labor. From this, these men had an excess amount of money and spent a significant part of it towards prostitution. As a result, working-class women engaged in mati work as a form of resistance towards "the commodification of heterosexual relations...[They upgraded] their sense of worth, which was evident in all aspects of Creole culture, proverbs and songs...[and] women then started to have sexual relationships with each other (Wekker 2006: 31). For practitioners, mati work is perceived as 'what you do' and doesn't define or claim 'who you are' in terms of

sexual identity or orientation. In other words, the practice is a performative construction of gender roles (Bertens 2008; Sharpe and Pinto 2006; Tinsley 2011; Wekker 2006 and 2009).

In regards to relationship dynamics, girls, as young as thirteen, are usually initiated into this practice by significantly older women, who express interest. There are no feelings of indecency surrounding the considerable age difference. It is rare that mati live together, but male and female gender roles are a natural occurrence in female mati relationships. The woman who plays the man “is the partner who approaches the woman to express sexual interest; [The ‘man’ would shower the ‘woman’ with gifts and] helps with the woman’s rent, food, and clothing” (Tinsley 2011: 247). The ‘man’ has the right to have other female mati, however, the ‘woman’ is only allowed to have one *female* lover, which is her female mati in the male role. For clarification, there is no issue if either woman engages in sexual relations with men outside of the mati relationship. However, if the ‘woman’ partner is intimate with another woman, they risk anger, jealousy, and violence from the ‘man’ partner. This difference in reaction depending on if the ‘woman’ partner sleeps with a man or a woman is due to the subculture’s perception that men are temporary, and are a vehicle towards more money and having children. On the other hand, there is presumed to be more of an emotional attachment with a woman; and if the ‘woman’ partner is compensating elsewhere, it hinders the ‘man’ partner’s self-esteem, since this outside relationship could signify their inadequacy within the mati relationship (Tinsley 2011; Wekker 2006). In light of the previous example, the mati life is a very passionate one, Wekker emphasizes how mati work encompasses “love, obligations, friendship and companionship”, but also violence, ranting and jealousy if a partner felt offended in some way (Wekker 2006:33). The latter is used to sustain the passion in the relationship, especially jealousy, because it is perceived that the partner innately cares for the other, and is a sign of true love. Mati work goes beyond

engaging in sexual relations with a woman, but also supporting one another socially, emotionally, and financially (Tinsley 2011; Wekker 1997 and 2006).

Mati work is also a very communal culture that values kinship networks in order to share financial and childcare responsibilities. Wekker further emphasizes the significance of these kinships stating that “Family connections are not only made in opposite-sexed spheres but also between mati. These family ties remain intact, even when the women involved have separated or have died” (Wekker 2006: 24) Furthermore, these kinship networks among mati also served as a resource to gain and exchange sexual knowledge. Women who practiced mati focused more on genital stimulation (i.e. - cunnilingus and rubbing<sup>25</sup>) rather than penetration. With attention to their communal nature, mostly female mati would gather together frequently and take part in community performances that publicizes their desires called ‘lobisingi’<sup>26</sup>. At these social gatherings, women perform poetry, shout, dance, and sing love songs to each other. When singing, a woman can express her grievances about her mati if she feels her mati violated a code of behavior as a lover (Tinsley 2011: 243-244).

Mati appear to be deeply attuned to their erotic power as a vital form of survival. With their kinship networks, they provide the skills, information and resources needed among themselves, and “refuse to reproduce the patriarchal colonial order” (Tinsley 2011: 249). They actively express and articulate their sexual subjectivities, and as a matter of fact, feel at their utmost capacity. They are in charge of fulfilling their own sexual pleasures and desires, and embody a working-class moral code that is not founded on respectability values (Sharpe and

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<sup>25</sup> Similar to tribadism

<sup>26</sup> Means ‘love songs’ in Sranan Tongo, the local creole or first language of Suriname

Pinto 2006: 262). They unapologetically subvert the hegemonic notion of heteronormativity. To illustrate this argument and a mati's sense of agency, Wekker affirms:

They talk about it [sex] openly, within parameters of mutual trust....“Sexual death” in bed was unheard of; according to all accounts, mati are active sexual partners and it is possible in their universe not only to make distinctions between sex with men and women, but also to disentangle sex from love, without the moralistic overtones...Mati work challenges received notions of female sexuality as passive, muted, and non-genital...It is active, vocal, often genitally oriented and above all, self-driven.... Mati work presents a configuration where erotic and sexual relations between women are public, acknowledged, validated, and often openly celebrated. (2006: 73).

With this in mind, mati in Suriname tend to not be stigmatized by their own working-class community. However, higher class backgrounds of society tend to not agree with their lifestyle (Sharpe and Pinto 2006; Wekker 1997). Nevertheless, mati work exemplifies women who resist the dominant discourse and take control of the hypersexualized ideology. As a matter of fact, they publicly demand space and validation for their more fluid, heterogeneous sexuality that is beyond mainstream society's understanding of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In the Netherlands, mati work is still practiced today among Afro-Surinamese women, but it is not as prevalent in the Dutch homeland in comparison to Suriname. Afro-Surinamese women in Holland who engage in mati work host mati parties, take part in leisurely activities (i.e.-dancing, eating together, and flirting), and establish networks to support one another financially and socially (Wekker 2006: 233).



*I am a Gold Coin*

The working-class Afro-Surinamese community in Suriname is a culture of oral tradition. They value *odo*, or proverbs, which transmit and sustain marginalized wisdom from generation to generation. Also, these proverbs can serve as a guide for action in order to persevere through life's challenges (Wekker 1997 and 2006). Wekker calls attention to a proverb among working-class Afro-Surinamese women that is related to their perception of their own sexual subjectivity. The proverb states that "I am a gold coin, I pass through everyone's hands, but I do not lose my value" (Wekker 2006:111). In light of this proverb, Wekker elaborates further with her interpretation of its meaning. She states: "the *odo* translates to: it does not matter how many sexual relationships I may have had, either with men or with women, what counts, what you should judge me by, is my inherent value, how I have carried myself through life, including how I have taken care of those entrusted to me" (Wekker 2001). This oral wisdom, which is prevalent for *mati* as well, illustrates that even if a working-class Afro-Surinamese woman has numerous partners, she does not lose her value and integrity as a human being. Also, under these circumstances of living in a patriarchal society, several Caribbean feminists acknowledged that these multiple partnerships also served more as a survival strategy (Kempadoo 2009; Terborg 2002; Wekker 2001 and 2006).

Interestingly enough, this proverb associates a woman's sexual behavior to money. Not only is a woman compared to a coin made of Suriname's most desirable metal, but also women enter these relationships with men to gain more financial support. On one end, Wekker underlines that this proverb refers to women as full sexual beings with desires; and bestows them a sense of positive self-esteem and agency. She indicates how sexuality is only one part of these women; and that society should not focus so much on 'what' she does, but 'how' she does it and

‘how’ it affects others. On the other end, it also bestows Afro-Surinamese women a sense of social consciousness to their oppression by the ramifications of colonialism, slavery and patriarchy. This proverb reminded women of their self-value despite personal and communal trauma for centuries. I am curious if this proverb or some aspect of its meaning is still prevalent to accommodate Dutch Afro-Caribbean women in order to negotiate, reconcile, and/or survive these contemporary, hypersexualized notions?

## HERSTORY: VOICES OF DUTCH AFRO-CARIBBEAN MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood (Lorde, *Transformation of Silence* 1984:40)

In this chapter, my interviewees and I desire to speak the unspoken, which includes: the hypersexualized notions and silence surrounding black female sexual subjectivities, the ramifications of colonialism and slavery, and the degree of cultural sensitivity of mainstream Dutch sexual health programs. The country's liberal and tolerant idealization needs to be confronted in order to underline the impact of implicit racism on Dutch Afro-Caribbean women. Inspired by the words of European Black feminist scholar, Cassandra Ellerbe-Dueck, I want my interviewees to not only "break free from an isolated existence, discover and articulate their distinct voices [but also]...create a space for themselves as participants in the making of the new social, cultural and political fabric of Europe" (Ellerbe-Dueck 2011; 157). I want readers to observe how these women are at different stages of encountering and reclaiming their erotic power; and how their emotional, physical, psychological and sensual aspects of themselves are connected to the political as well.

Moreover, my Dutch Afro-Caribbean mother and daughter participants have been very cooperative throughout the interview process; and it astounds me to this day how much you can learn about yourself and the world around you through an individual's self-reflection. I hope these stories will stimulate every reader's consciousness and emotions, as well as provoke the reader to tap into their own sexual subjectivity, and realize the importance and power of this process.

Equally important, in this chapter, I will create a collage of direct quotes from my interviewees to frame their thoughts and experiences as a conversation amongst us. Their responses will be organized by pertinent themes (i.e.- Home Communication) along with an interweavement of brief analysis and reflection on my part.<sup>28</sup> I have made a conscious choice to not summarize the interviewees' responses and have it absorbed by long segments of my analysis as a researcher. This structure has occurred too much in academia and other mainstream institutions regarding "at-risk populations." Instead, I will have my brief points of analysis to not only claim my subjective presence, responsibility and personal embodiment throughout this research, but also use interviewees' direct quotes to convey that they possess an intellectual consciousness and are fully capable of expressing themselves. I want to respect and give value to the fact that my interviewees already have voices and that I am only providing the platform.

I feel many of these stories were told to me intelligibly despite the minute language barrier, however, I must admit that since I serve as the medium between my interviewees and the reader, it is inevitable for some of the meaning of their thoughts and experiences to be lost in translation. With this in mind, I will do my best to share their stories as faithfully and honorably as they were told to me. My participants included:

*Elizabeth and Cheryl Lynn*

I interviewed Elizabeth and her daughter Cheryl Lynn at the office of Profor on November 15, 2012. They are of Antillean descent and live together in one household. Elizabeth was sixty-four years old at the time of the interview and was born and raised in Curacao. She moved to Amsterdam when she was 44 years old and also has two other daughters and a son, who are older than Cheryl Lynn. She only has a high school degree and self-identifies as middle-

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<sup>28</sup> My brief points of analysis to the interviewees' responses will be in italics.

class. In relation to her career, she is retired but possesses work experience as a secretary for a banking company and also was a managing director of a business in Curacao. In her later years, she started a daycare in Holland. Presently, she is not married, but is in a committed, monogamous relationship with an Afro-Caribbean man sixteen years her junior.

Furthermore, Cheryl Lynn was twenty-four years old at the time of the interview and was born in Curacao. Her mother migrated to Holland when she was four years old and she separates her time between Rotterdam and Amsterdam. Cheryl Lynn also self-identifies as middle class and she's simultaneously studying fashion design along with completing her MBO<sup>29</sup> degree in the field of social work. Currently, she is not in a relationship.

*Sandie Power, Crisha Cannon, Akosua Minaj*

I interviewed Sandie Power on July 8, 2013 at Profor, and her daughters, Crisha Cannon and Akosua Minaj the day after at the same location. Sandie was thirty-nine years old at the time of interview. She was born in the Dominican Republic, mainly raised in Curacao, and migrated to Amsterdam around the age of 21. Sandie's mother is Dominican and her father is Antillean. She is currently not in a relationship. Sandie has a total of five children, 4 girls and 1 boy. In Curacao, she had her first child, a girl, at the age of 16 with her Dominican ex-boyfriend. Afterward, her next significant relationship was with her African ex-husband of seventeen years. They had the other four children together and are both involved in raising them, even though they separated. Two of their children are Crisha Cannon and Akosua Minaj.

Crisha was sixteen years old and Akosua was thirteen years old at the time of their interviews. Both of them are students. The girls and their mother identify as middle class. Sandie

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<sup>29</sup> The MBO is a tertiary level degree in the Dutch educational system that is oriented towards vocational training.

has previous work experience as a hairdresser and has a HAVO<sup>30</sup> degree. She is currently working at Profor while studying to obtain a tertiary level, professional degree to become a social worker.

### Miss Soldier

I interviewed Miss Soldier on August 2, 2013 at a park in Amsterdam Zuidoost, a retreat that she goes to for peace, self-reflection, and self-rejuvenation. She was thirty-seven years old at the time of the interview and is of Surinamese descent. Miss Soldier was born in Holland and grew up without parents. Therefore, during the early years of her life, she lived on the streets hustling and mainly taking care of herself starting at the age of nine. Miss Soldier emphasized that she didn't want to use drugs or sell her body like other girls in her situation, so she joined a supportive, family-like collective of male gangsters who not only protected but respected her. Miss Soldier has educational training in barbering and entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, her passion is the world of entertainment, where she is currently a contracted hip-hop dancer and a choreographer with her own dance company. Her company has toured all over Europe.

Furthermore, Miss Soldier is not involved in a romantic relationship. She is a single mom of two boys, one 18 and one 12. Miss Soldier also has an 18 year old daughter whom she took in at the age of five based on a mutual agreement she had with the child's mother, who was a heavy alcoholic at the time. Miss Soldier encountered her daughter when giving her dance lessons and they mutually recognize each other as family.

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<sup>30</sup> HAVO is equivalent to a high school diploma in the United States.

### Silayah

I interviewed Silayah on August 8, 2013 at Miss Soldier's home in Amsterdam. Silayah was thirty years old at the time of the interview and she is best friends with Miss Soldier. She was born in Amsterdam and raised as an only child by her Indonesian mother and maternal grandfather in a religiously strict home. Silayah's Afro-Surinamese father had a marginal presence in her upbringing. She identifies as working class and is on the academic path to obtain her Master's degree in social and cultural anthropology. Besides her work as a student, Silayah is also a social worker who conducts house visits and helps individuals that are mentally handicapped. In regards to her relationship status, Silayah has been involved in a committed, monogamous relationship with her Afro-Caribbean male partner for five years.

### Mayaah

I interviewed Mayaah on November 23, 2012 at Profor. Mayaah was twenty-one years old at the time of the interview and is of Surinamese descent. She was born in Paramaribo, Suriname and her family eventually settled in Amsterdam when she was eight years old. Mayaah self-identifies as middle-class. She is an MBO student and has work experience in the field of social work and psychology. In regards to her immediate family, Mayaah has perceived herself as having no stability in the household because her mother had relationships interchangeably with three men at different points in her life, including with Mayaah's biological father. Mayaah only considers one of those men, a white, Dutch man, who is not her biological father, to be her dad because he was present during the formative years of her life and they still maintain contact. In light of this, she even carries his last name. Her mother is presently married to her second stepfather and Mayaah is involved in a romantic relationship. At the time of the interview,

Mayaah was involved in a committed, monogamous relationship with a man for three months. This relationship has ended; and she is now involved in a committed, monogamous relationship with her female partner, Livingston.

Livington

I interviewed Livingston on July 29, 2013 at her family's home in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Livingston was twenty-two years old at the time of the interview and was born and raised in Amsterdam. Her Surinamese mother and Native American father are both from Suriname and are no longer romantically involved. However, they had nine children together (5 boys and 4 girls) including Livingston. As of now, Livingston lives with her mom and four siblings. At the time of the interview, Livingston was trying to find the right fit career wise and was exploring various academic programs to obtain her Bachelor's degree. In regards to her relationship status, she is presently involved in a committed, monogamous relationship with Mayaah.

Kelsey

I interviewed Kelsey on August 19, 2013 at Profor. She was thirty-one years old at the time of the interview. She was born and raised in Amsterdam and is of Surinamese descent. While growing up, Kelsey lived with her mother and father, whom are married, and with two older sisters and one younger sister. She self-identifies as working class, has obtained her MBO degree and has work experience in Administration. Kelsey's current household consists of herself and her two sons, the oldest is almost ten and the other son is five years old. As of now, she is not involved in a romantic relationship.



## Interviews

Before I start this section of my chapter, I want readers to be aware that I conducted these interviews at different time periods. Excerpts from my interviewees' responses have been collectively organized to illustrate their stories and highlight important aspects of their sexual subjectivities and erotic knowledges. As I stated before in my methods chapter, some of my interviewees have particular idiomatic ways of speaking. I am mindful that this is the case and made a conscious choice to not correct them grammatically. Given that I am providing a counter-narrative, I decided to transcribe their particular idioms if used, and put the English translation in parentheses.

### Theme #1: Home Communication

**Crystal: While growing up, was sex and sexuality ever discussed in the home? If so, with whom and what were the conversations like?**

#### Elizabeth's response to the question(s) describing home communication in her youth:

No, not really because in that time even when you get your menstruation your first time, they were not so open. If a boy comes along, they [family members] told me that I would get pregnant, so don't let anyone touch you. I lived with my grandma and she was too old and ashamed. My grandmother was very severe so I was very scared of her. She was very strict and...I was always scared to have a relationship. So, you didn't know anything, it was later in school, with friends that you get to know everything about sexual things.

#### Cheryl Lynn's thoughts to the main question(s):

Yes, and with my mother [Elizabeth]. Me and my mom we never really had secrets, so when I wanted to know something, I always answered my mom and she always answered me. Even when I was little, she knows how to answer the things I wanted to know. I can't remember an age [of when we first talked about sex] but she was always very open about it, so we could discuss anything at any time. She is someone that I can trust and I know that I could tell her anything without her looking weird at me. So, she accepts me for everything.

She teach me little things like sex positions or sex tricks and then she tells me "Hey! You are a different generation, maybe you can teach me something" that is the kind of talks we would have. But that's like me and my mom. Not every parent is like the same because some feel ashamed. But, I think it's a shame that you don't discuss it with your children because your children will

maybe do things that are not good or they do things behind your back or they do things that are not good for them because they [the children] don't know better. But, if you tell them what's good and what's not good and what you can do and what you can't do, it's comfortable for them because they can have someone that they can trust and can talk with it about.

**Elizabeth's sentiments regarding her communication with Cheryl Lynn:**

I told her [Cheryl Lynn] everything because I said "What I've been through, I won't have my daughter go through." We don't have secrets from another. I think she knows how to protect herself because she knows the consequences. I have been telling her about the consequences and don't let your life be a life of choosing a child as a teenager because that's no life and she was well prepared. Always.

*\*Elizabeth and Cheryl Lynn highlight that the sex taboo is highly prevalent in the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community regardless of the generation and local context. In addition, they emphasize the importance of a politics of articulation in the home. Elizabeth appears to have struggled not having an older relative to communicate with about sex and sexuality, instead there was a climate of fear and shame. Therefore, she decided to provide a more open and informative environment for her children including Cheryl Lynn, where they explicitly share their sexual experiences and mutually accept each other's sexual subjectivities. With this in mind, Elizabeth's teachings also refer to the notion of proving fertility, where she wants Cheryl Lynn's definition of womanhood to be beyond having a baby.*

**Sandie Power's reply to the main question(s):**

No, not at all. The talks were more like "Don't do it" and "If you do that, I will kill you." When I was young, it was very difficult...I remember my mother she want the best for me. I was hanging out with boys than the girls, but [I] didn't do this to be together....You find me better with a boy, laughing, and playing football and handball. Girls are too much. But, my mother was thinking that I was doing something, but it's not like that.

My mother would bring me to the gynecologist to see if I were virgin or not, and this has made me every time angry because mommy I had to tell her "you have to trust me ...I don't do nothing I don't do nothing". I feel very shame that every time when she think that I'm busy doing something she take me ...So I was angry that's why when I was fifteen and I get angry I went to vacation to Santo Domingo...Then, she go and bring me again to the doctor. "Mommy, you made me angry, now I'm gonna do it [have sex]" And I do it once and I got pregnant. So, never my mother never tell me you have to use something to not get pregnant, she never tell she don't have to do something. If she see [me] talking to a boy, she beat me in front of everyone. She beat me very hard. I know because she be scared I'd do something and in the end she wanted to do it in....good way [but it] came bad and only way she did got me more aggressive. I am not as difficult as my mother because I don't want to make the same mistake.

I talk with my kids and I tell “Be careful, don’t do that.” I tell them about HIV and SOA<sup>31</sup>. And tell them if you do that without that you’ll get sick. I tell them “it be better to start if they can wait the right age to do sex...you have all time for you [and]... your whole life so what do you have to start early? I had it early, it was very difficult for me.” The one who is sixteen [Crisha Cannon] is very shy and don’t like to talk about sex. The thirteen one laughs and likes to talk about it too much [Akosua Minaj]. I tell them “Look, if you’ll be easy for the man, he will just do the thing for you and leave you...I try to...give them, the children, some principle. I say I know they don't do nothing yet. Sometimes I try to ask, “When do you break your virgin?” And they say, “Mama, I am still virgin” because you don't know. I don’t know. So I let them go with friends, they go to school...the freedom I didn't get, I give to them. So, I don't know if they made some appointment or going to something strange. I don't put my hand on fire for them. So she say “no,” so I have to believe what she say.

**Crisha’s comment to the question(s):**

No, I don’t like that [sex talks] cause my mother would make fun. It's like we have a conversation and Ms. Minaj comes in the room, and they always make jokes and then it's not serious anymore. So, I try to talk to my older sister...I didn't do that [ask questions] because I don't feel like I'm ready for that [sex]. She comes up to me sometimes, but then I don’t listen because it makes me uncomfortable.

**Akosua Minaj’s feelings to the main question(s) above:**

Well, I don't wanna laugh because I'm too big for laugh. I get mad because she [Sandie] always think that I already have sex, but that's not true. I too shy to have sex, I tell her. Because my body is so nice, no sike (laughs), yeah, my mind is not on that. But sometimes she [Sandie] is arrogant. She say "Oh, no? Okay" But in her mind, she like "Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! You do it." My mom thinks this because my style from dancing...I twerk in front of her face and she say "Hmm. Why you do that?" And I say, “Because I like it.” And then she say, "Hmm. You like that?" And then, she start about the sex and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah... Actually sex just looks so painful. I'm so afraid because one time at school, someone brought a sex tape...and then I saw the woman [in the tape] screaming and shouting, and that made me afraid. If she have pleasure, she must laugh and not "aaahhh!" (makes orgasmic sex sounds).

*\*Sandie’s reflection highlights the impact of the sex taboo as well and how it relates to her mother’s infringement upon her sexual development. Since trust and communication was not established, Sandie unknowingly had unsafe sex in order to retaliate against her mother and got pregnant. Because of this experience, Sandie attempts to raise her children differently with more open communication, trust and freedom. She even uses this incident of becoming a teen mom as a teaching tool to her daughters. However, there appears to be an inconsistency in regards to how Sandie and her daughters, especially Akosua, perceive their open communication. Sandie’s suspicion of her daughters’ sexual activity appears to be unconsciously similar to her mother’s intentions, but has manifested in another way.*

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<sup>31</sup> Acronym for sexually transmitted infections in Dutch.

**Miss Soldier's response to the main question(s):**

When I was younger, nobody told me actually. I learned because of TV, you know, commercials, movies, TV shows, and in Holland, people just talk about sex. It's not the family, but just outside and maybe friends, girlfriends, so, yeah...and I was smart myself and had big ears, so I knew the things.

**Miss Soldier's remarks regarding not having conversations about sex within the home; and a reflection of her past relationship with her parents:**

I don't know because I was aware of so many things (*things*) already, and yeah....I thought it was normal for your parents to just don't talk. They [Miss Soldier's parents] been fighting a lot. And my momma, she was a person...[that] loves herself. But, I don't know why she took children because she don't give a damn about her kids or nothing. Only going out and just showing herself, and just be important to other people...There was never a bond between us. She always yelled at me. She been beat me up like crazy when I was three years old. She then put a knife at my throat and things like that...my daddy was hitting her and he had so many women and other children. Yeah, and one day...I was like "I'm living in a big black whole and I can't find light or the way out. And every time I try to climb out, people just kick me back in the black whole."...I was afraid every day. I was afraid of life. It was tough...And when I noticed one day that I'm afraid of almost everything, I was afraid of being afraid, and tired. So, I step out, turned it around and hanged out with the Gs [Gangstas]. Yeah, and became a "Miss Soldier." I am not a lady lady, or a woman woman, but a soldier miss.

I got a spoken word that says "When people ask me, 'Do you regret any of those things?' or 'Do you think you're sorry?'" I said, "No! You know why? Because it made me the woman I am, and the mother I am for my kids." So God gave me what I could handle. So, it's okay and I'm happy. I enjoy life the fullest because I know how it is to be unhappy. And you know, I love to have sex, and just throw it all out, like "AAAHHHHHHhh." "

**Miss Soldier's feelings regarding her home communication with her children:**

I'm free, you know. When it goes about my children, they can talk about everything with me... I wanna know the real children I have. The kids inside, not only the kids outside their body, but how dey tink (*they think*), and what an experience is. And because I didn't have those things, so I give my kids those things and I talk a lot with them and tell them everything they need to know. And when they got questions, they can just ask me just how they want to ask me...But, only be respectful because I'm your momma, that's all. I just talk wit dem (*with them*) like a momma to protect them. But, it's not that I feel myself guilty of talk to dem (*them*) about those things, or like awkward, not at all. It's the nature. And you got to know nature before you get start, you know? Yeah.

*\*Miss Soldier highlights the gender crisis within Dutch Afro-Caribbean families. Her pseudonym is a reminder not only of her struggle, but also of her strength. It appears Miss Soldier is at peace with her sexual subjectivity. She utilizes this peaceful energy to teach and communicate*

*with her children from a realistic standpoint----in order to know and accept them for who they are.*

**Silayah's response to the main question(s):**

In my home, it wasn't really talked about, but it was an issue. It was always there because sexuality was something bad. It was a taboo...there was always the warning... "Boys only want one thing, so stay away from them!" And the word sex was never mentioned, but I knew that I had to be good to my body, always cover myself and be decent. I cannot be promiscuous. And those things were really, really taught. The message was "She has to be beautiful and smart and all those things, but she cannot show her sexual side. You have to get married first. Thinking about sex is only within a marriage and when you really want to have children. And not necessarily because you have urges or because you want to have fun or because it feels good, sex wasn't something really to enjoy."

My mother was very, very strict ...and that's because my grandfather was a very devout Catholic. Also, after my grandmother passed away when my mom was very young, she didn't have a female older person that could teach and communicate with her about the things she was gonna develop. Her father did not explain to her what it was. She had to figure it out for herself. So my mother was already raised in an environment where shame was very much present. I guess she took that in...The Bible was really important and I was also very much influenced by religion cause I actually wanted to become a nun when I was five years old.

Also, I did have a cousin and she was seven years older than I was. And she had lived with us for two to three years. She was promiscuous and she had a lot of boyfriends. But, boys would talk about her in a disrespectful manner ...and parents found her too sexy.... when I got older, there was a fear created around this whole sexuality thing. And my cousin was the proof for me that it always works out the wrong way.... in a way, I was looking down on girls that were being promiscuous and were being confident. But, it was also insecurity. I actually kind of wanted to be like them, but in my head I could never reach that. I could never be as pretty as them. I could never be as desired as them. I just wasn't that interesting.

**Silayah's moment of reflection with how these home conversations made her feel:**

Shame. And very self-aware. It also made me very inhibited toward boys and toward men. It was always something in the back of my mind that told me "... be careful, and don't let any man take advantage of you. And, if you let a man take advantage of you, especially you, you are the guilty one or you are the one that gets the biggest problem afterwards." Cause for a guy, it's okay if he has sex with everybody, but for a girl, you have pregnancy.

I actually forgot to tell you one thing because as I got older, about eighteen, the relationship with my mother got way better. And I came to the stage where I could actually discuss my feelings for friends and boys...And my mother would actually be more open about her love life and things she done sneakily. Sexuality was discussed, but it was more in the way that you weren't really talking about the sexual aspect of it, but more of the love aspect. So more as in how a man

should treat you, what you would have to want out of a relationship, but not really the technical aspect of it.

I actually did ask her how that change came about. And she said “Well, you live in a neighborhood where there are a lot of teenage pregnancies, where there are a lot of girls that have problems with boys, but after seventeen years, I see that I can just trust you.... I actually see that you are practicing what I preached.” So she understood that I had a good head on my shoulders... My mother also became aware of the fact that I would probably tell her when that time would be ready for me to actually have sex with somebody. I think that also assured her and she became more relaxed about it.

This change was such a relief! It kind of defined the relationship with my mother that she was my mother and I was her daughter. It kind of built a bridge to talking about current situations...And she would also make clear to me...that she realized I was wise enough to make my own decisions, but that she would still like it if she could advise me. So that changed everything. I also have to be honest about the fact that my mother passed away when I was twenty-one...So that moment when we were already so close that we could actually discuss these things with each other, I didn't really get to that point. After my mother passed away, I was kind of alone. I didn't really have people around me or relatives around me that I could really relate to or bond with.

*\*Silayah's upbringing within the home highlights how sex has a pre-determined negative connotation; and the impact of the sex taboo also provided her a home climate of fear and shame surrounding sex and sexuality. In turn, Silayah developed an internal conflict in regards to respectability politics. This principle of respectability affected her self-esteem and also made her feel insecure about her sexual desires (She tried to negotiate this by wanting to become a nun). Silayah had to prove her high level of respectability in order to receive open communication from her mother regarding romantic relationship competency, self-agency and values. Although better late than never, I believe it would have been more beneficial to the mother-daughter relationship and Saliyah's sexual development if the open communication started earlier.*

### **Mayaah's thoughts to the main question(s):**

Nobody discussed sex and sexuality with me at home. It's a very double feeling. On one hand, I was like "Yeah! I don't have to have these awkward conversations." I would always just talk about it with my friends. It was like, you know what it is, you know how it's supposed to go, but that's pretty much it. And on the other hand, when I reached a certain age, I noticed that boys were kinda interested in me now, and I thought what do you do when he grabs for your pants, you know? Is that weird? So yeah, I was like "Mom, you could at least give me the basics?" (Laughs)

Well, I actually tried having a conversation like: “Mom, there is this guy I like...” [and she responds] “I'm getting you a virginity belt. No! We are from God and not do these things before marriage...We're not discussing this. We're discussing this when you're 18!” That's what she always said. [Mother continues] “...because then you're a natural adult. And then you should

think about these things, not now. I don't want to hear about it now." ...So she [Mayaah's mother] was not really open to it, and her reaction made me freak out as well. So, I just stopped asking after trying so many times. I was feeling like "Wow! Fuck you! And I'm just gonna get my information elsewhere."....Yeah, you get older and you're like everyone is talking about it. And I don't know shit, and I can read it and stuff, but it's not the same. Yeah, it's weird, and at the end you just shove it under the table.

It wasn't until I was 16 that I reconnected with my dad [white, Dutch man], 6 years after they [Mom and Dad] broke up. He was very superficial when it came to that [sex conversation]. I could talk to him about it, but he necessarily didn't go into detail. However, it was already too late, because I already did it [sex] by then, so I didn't feel the need to talk about it because I already knew what it was....But, I would go to my dad about things like bellyache, which is weird, because you are supposed to go to your mom for that because she is a woman too... He would call my mom and tell her everything, and tell her not to scream and she would take me. My mom during that time was very aggressive. She had very good intentions, but everything was "No" immediately and very paranoid. I was always scared of my mom even if she had good intentions.

*\* Her mother's extreme sense of foreclosures and authoritarian parenting style was not only discouraging, but also emotionally afflicting for Mayaah. She tried to use her dad to facilitate the communication between her and her mom, nevertheless, Mayaah eventually learned that she is unlikely to gain a sense of understanding from her mother. Similar to Miss Soldier, Mayaah turned to the public sphere to learn about sex and sexuality.*

### **Livington's answer to the main question(s):**

Yes, because my mother wants us to know that you just can't go with people and just have sex. And she didn't put it on us when we were little, only when we get to age so... The real conversation was when I was 12 because I get on my period, so she got scared about that, she said "I'm going to tell you about it." (Both Laugh). So, yeah, I was about 12 and she told me about the "Bloemen en Bijen,"<sup>32</sup> and when I was 15, 16 then she said more about it... If I had any questions I could go to my mom. But for her I think it was pretty easy because I wasn't interested in sex because I mature really late...I was always playing outside with my friends, climbing trees...[and]when school was out, I was always inside, so she didn't worry about it. Also, my mom was really open with me and my sisters, so I never felt shy about it....it was never hard when I say I was in love with someone, it was never hard for me to talk about it because we have an open relationship with each other. The first time my mom talked about it, it was private because she wanted to do it one on one, but after that it was well, it was with my sister or my mom alone, but never secret, never.

The lessons [my mother taught me] were that you can't trust everybody. Sometimes people come to you because they like you or they are attracted to you, and that they are two different things. If they like you, they will show they interested in the things that you do, and if only they are

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<sup>32</sup> The Dutch term for "Flowers and Bees."

attracted to you, they semi try to looked interested in your life...it's pretty clear they make sure they want to have sex with you, only sex. So then when my mom told me, I notice when someone try to contact me only for sex. So I was like "No! No! We're not going there." So people didn't get a chance to make a move on me because I would block it right away. Keep good people in my circle.

*\*Because of her mother's gradual open communication, and instilling relationship and sexual competency as a normalized aspect of development, Livingston produced a steadily form of sexual agency as a part of her sexual subjectivity.*

### **Kelsey's remarks to the main question(s):**

Nope, no one talked about it. In the period my mother was raised up in Suriname, sex wasn't discussed about, at all! I think that how she's raised up, she didn't know how to talk about it with us. So, like sisters, we would talk about it when we were growing up, we were like thirteen or fourteen years old, discovering things, when you fall in love, when you see a boy, things like that. We would talk about it. And my father, in his first marriage, he also got two daughters, which we also grew up, so I consider them like my real sisters, and with them, we would talk about sex.... [It wasn't] until when I was like sixteen years or something like that when I met my first boyfriend, then I asked something like why didn't my mother or father discuss sex with us? But, if you don't know about it, if you don't grow up with it, you don't know better...So that didn't bother me for that. Just when I got older and older, then I asked myself "Why?" Maybe because I didn't need it and when I wanted to talk about it, I had my sisters. My big sister, whose 11 years older and like a second mother always told me that "You as a woman have to protect your body...You don't have to wear sexy things like that for a man can see you. You have to wait until you find a real man, who really loves you for who you are."

### **Kelsey's sentiments about home communication with her children:**

Yes, we communicate all day long to the point I'm like "Oh my god! Shut up." (Both Laugh) We talk about things from auto racecars to "Mommy, I met a girl." Sometimes I look at them and I'm like "Boy! What do you know?!" I'm glad they feel comfortable to talk with me in any way. When they have a stomach ache, when they are nervous, in any way. And every day, when they go to sleep, I tell them, "I love you and if there is something you want to talk about with me, just tell me. I maybe get mad. I maybe will cry, but you have to tell me, so we can talk about it and look forward on how to solve this. Just talk to me." Every day, I'm telling them that, every day.

*\*Kelsey relied on her kinship network amongst her older sisters for information, since she did not receive sex education from her parents. Similar to Elizabeth and Sandie Power, because of the impact of the sex taboo in the home, Kelsey ensures that there is open communication with her children. In essence, these women, who have been deeply affected by the sex taboo, are now embracing a politics of articulation in the home, which could be seen as a form of resistance against the politics of silence and the hypersexualized ideology.*



**Theme #2: Sex Education at School and in the Public Sphere**

**Crystal: Did any of you have sex education in school? If so, when? Was the sex education class part of another class or on its own? From what you can remember, what was the content in this class, and did you find the class to be informative?**

**Elizabeth's response to her school's sex education in Curacao:**

Yes, a little bit but not very much...[It was] a class on its own...You only learned the human parts or the physical, so you mainly had to experience everything by yourself...[Also] the class was informative in a way. You get to see how a baby is coming into the world. But, they don't talk about intercourse or what you can feel.

**Cheryl Lynn's reflection of her school's sex education in Holland:**

Yes, I think when I was 10 or 11. But, they don't tell you about "real sex", but they tell you that a man and a woman can make a child. And when you get older and go to the other school, then you get like the "real" stuff. They tell you about the sickness<sup>33</sup> and the way to protect yourself because you can't tell a child that is ten years that they have to take a pill or something. I was like 12 or 13 years when they really start to tell you like the way it goes. Like this is a penis. This is a vagina. When they get together and the sperm...They tell you about condoms, woman condoms, and the pills you have to take as a woman so you won't get pregnant. I don't know how you say it in English, but the class was part of, we call it biologie<sup>34</sup>. It starts with plants and then you come to a chapter where humans are, and that's the chapter when they start to tell you about sex and illness and all those things..... And yes, it was informative because the schools here really explain everything that you need to know. But it's you, that have to take it home with you.

**Sandie Power's thoughts to the main question(s):**

No, not at all. Even in Santo Domingo, sex was a taboo. They don't talk about sex there. That's why when I come here, I find it strange that in Holland the children get that in the classes.

**Crisha explains her experience of her school's sex education:**

My sex education class was part of my biology class. I took it this year and it was like two months. I learned about the human body and how it works, how a boy gets a boner, yes, that I learn. Yeah, about pregnancy, like before you get your period, like your 10 or something, then you can be pregnant. The teacher told me exactly when you can get pregnant and when not... [and about] SOA. The class was informative [and] it was fun. I felt more comfortable learning about sex in school [because]....At school, it's like I'm not alone, so it's not meant to me, but the

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<sup>33</sup> Meaning STIs and HIV.

<sup>34</sup> The Dutch word for "Biology."

whole class, and when it's at home, everything what they say is on me and it's like too much to handle.

**Akosua's opinion regarding her school's sex education:**

Yes, I only had one sex education lesson, by itself, for an hour because my class is too busy. Like there are too much distractions. They [the students] don't listen, and yeah, like that, they don't want to give us sex education...Um, in the lesson they talk about, what comes when you have a boner. They talk what comes out of it. They talk what comes out a woman. And that is all cause we only had one hour. It [the class] wasn't interesting and it was a waste of time cause I already knew the information. To make the class more interesting, I want to go to a porn club in the Red Light District, so I can see it for myself and listen to the teacher at the same time. I just don't want to read it. I want to see it!

**Miss Soldier's remarks regarding her school's sex education:**

I was like 14 years old when I took my first sex education class [and it was] a class on its own for a whole year. It was about condoms and birth control, and how you can put even things in your mouth...I thought "Okay, but I know already." But, it was funny because the teacher showed us everything....she had a popsicle and she said "This is what I do with my man. And he likes it." She was too open, you know, for our age (Both laugh)... But, she showed me also things I don't know, like how the vagina looks like. And really, she gave us a little mirror, and let us go to the toilet, and just look. And just drew it on paper. And yeah, so I thought, "Oh! I only know the outside. But, it looks like this." ....they show pictures of SOA, and what can happen if you do something unprotected.... [and] how you can take kinds of positions, she was like with this or that, it is more comfortable and much easier for a woman to cum because much women can't cum. But, I played with myself when I was very young, so I thought, "I know. I know where it tickles me." And so, I thought "Okay, she's right because I know how it feels." She was crazy! (Laughs)...It was informative. And it was a lot of fun, yeah.

**Silayah compares her sex education experiences in primary school and high school:**

I was about eleven years old. I actually had a male, Surinamese teacher for two years and I think he was somewhere in his fifties. So, it was actually groundbreaking that someone from his generation would address sex issues...His class wasn't officially sex education, we had the same teacher the whole year through, and you would have a daily schedule you worked through ...But, in between, he would address issues about sex and then give us a little bit of sex education without calling it that way. So, he used his knowledge and how it works in the Caribbean community to teach us about sex, to teach us how women and men act towards each other, and I think to say like in a global way, he was actually already discussing gender roles with us. And he also talked about the consequences that sexual behavior can carry... Like he would put everything out in the open. So even if it was shameful for us, he kind of forced us to at least think about it.

There was a strange vibe going on and he would break the taboo by making us laugh about it, and take the heavy load off to make it discussable. He would also talk about how if somebody

would be in love, in class, he was like “Oh! you guys are in love? oh, then you should bring her chocolate then.” So like small hints that actually tell you how a woman should be treated. So, also boys without a role model, they would still have him as a role model.

But, when I went to high school it was purely technical. At fourteen, in my Home Economics class, the teacher just put in the movie, *Kids*, one day with no discussion or warning and I thought “[It] was really bad. Wow! It’s like how can you tell us the technical stuff and then show us this movie? What does it tell you? Does it tell you that that is the reality? That’s how it goes or how it should go?” So, I remember that being really shocking to me. I mean this memory that I have is the only thing I can tell you about the sex education that I had in high school. That was it!

**Silayah’s response with regards to if she thought one or both of her sex education experiences in school was informative:**

Well, the one when I was fourteen, no. It actually conjured up more fear with me. I actually became more insecure again because it gave me such a bad image...And it was also technical and cold. There was no emotional aspect in it...But, I have to say, that the teacher who taught me when I was eleven or twelve, that was a learning experience for me. But, it was more about the fact that he could talk about it so freely. I guess it was the same thing when my mother started talking more freely to me about sex. It gave me a sense of relief and a sense of empowerment that an older person would talk about it without any shame...So it’s like don’t be silly, don’t be giggly about it, it’s normal! Just talk about it. You don’t have to go into detail, but you have to know your facts. You have to know what it does to your well being. That attitude, that was the biggest learning experience for me.

**Mayaah’s thoughts regarding her school’s sex education:**

Well, it was my first year of high school, I was 11. It was one class and part of my biology class. They hired a special guy and we got instructions like what is a condom, how do you open the package, how do you roll it on and etc. Then, they would have pictures of the guy’s balls and explain the risk of the withdrawal method. They also gave us information about STDs and mainly told us to be careful. It was informative...but I think that if they would have continuously done this, like made up a course for two months, where they take it step by step and go into detail with you and get you over that feeling of shame and just put everyone in line and say ‘Look, this is the banana and you are all going to do it then I think slowly the information would have gotten through. But, if it is just one class...you will just forget it. The only information you really remember is that you put the key in the ignition and that you put a rubber over the key. The rest you just block out because you are ashamed.

**Livington’s remarks regarding her school’s sex education:**

So, I first learn in basic school at 11 or 12 that a man and a woman can have babies. And then I was gone to high school, first and second class, they completely show you how it works and what happens when a man and woman, or a boy and girl have sex, and what they can do in same-

sex relationships as well, and diseases and things like that. It was part of my biology class and it was three class sessions, and then you get guest teachers for four class sessions after the three classes, and they would come in and share their experiences with sex. We had four of them as guest teachers, one hetero man, one hetero woman, one gay lady, and one gay man. And one guest teacher, they didn't put an age on it. They said if your feeling is right about it, go ahead and do your thing. But if you don't feel it, then don't do it because someone is telling you to do it. And when a woman says no or a man says no, don't push it, just stop it right away.

The class was informative because the guest teachers, they told their own stories. Their life stories and what they learned about it, and how they would do it if they could, and how they would do it differently. This was not only from the books, but from people's point of views and how they experience things.

**Kelsey's regarding her school's sex education:**

I had three to four days talking about sex in my physical education class. I was twelve. We didn't have education about sex. It was more about...your future self [as in bodily changes and development], your period, when do you start with sex, and when do you say, yes or no. And that's it....I don't know [if the class was informative]. We were twelve and we were like "Okay."

**Crystal: And can some of you please share any other outside resources to learn about sex and sexuality besides school and in the home?**

**Elizabeth's response to about her outside sources:**

Friends. The girls that are bigger than you, they have already been in a relationship and they tell you about how to do or what to do; and I think in those days you experience it yourself by kissing, touching each other, then the emotions arise and you try it.

**Cheryl Lynn's reflection about one of her outside sources:**

I was around 13. There was something in my neighborhood in Rotterdam. We call it a broodhuis, like a place that children from 12 to 16 can come after school and then they can like play pool, do their homework, chill together and there was like a class each Thursday, and everybody around the neighborhood would come and sit around a table and we would just get different themes sometimes about sex, sometimes about sickness, sometimes about other things. But, they mention sex also and they give us condoms and told us how to use it.

**Miss Soldier's remarks to her outside sources:**

A few girlfriends because they were sexually active already at an early age. But, back in the days, you know, I'm still very old school...Yeah, I love sex a lot, but not from here to there, you know. Just one person... [and] when I know the person is healthy, and then I can be very naughty, but you know some people mix things up. Don't be a whore, just keep it classy. You can be horny and classy. No pressure. So know where you're going when you like to have sex. So just don't go out and take any person, you know? I'm naughty, but I'm aware to be naughty.

**Silayah shares several of her outside sources stating:**

I read books in the library, read erotic columns in teen magazines, and there was a TV program, I think seven years ago....called “Neuken doe je zo!” and that means “Fucking Goes Like This!” It was just on a normal cable channel and it was around 7 or 8pm...And they were actually showing people having sex and just dubbing out the noises, or they perform some sexual act. There would be like a friendly woman’s voice over...and then she would just explain it to you...and you can get your knowledge from TV. The GGD<sup>35</sup> also had campaigns to learn more about safe sex and STDs.

Also, around twenty-one or twenty-two, I think it was a year or maybe a year and a half after my mother passed away, that I met Miss Soldier at a dance practice and she became my sister. Miss Soldier was one of the defining people in my life, when it comes to the sex topic because I think she was the first person that I actually openly talked to about my desires and about things I would like. But, before of course, it was just curiosity. And the thing is she also really taught me to love myself, to value myself and that there is no shame in enjoying sex. And she mainly did that by sharing her own personal stories with me. And by being the woman that she is with the way she carries herself, and the way she thought about life, thought about relationships, that really made me think back on my cousin and I was like “So there are actually different shades of grey.” It’s not like there’s the nun or the whore, but there’s also big, big, big spaces in between. And it’s also good to know, as a woman, you can enjoy sexual feelings and there’s no shame in it. There’s no shame to show initiative. There’s no shame to have sex. And there’s no shame to talk about it. And don’t let anybody else define you. She made me realize that being a woman with sexual feelings means you have agency.

**Kelsey comments on her experience with one of her outside resources:**

Yes, friends. Well, they were already experienced with sex. So when they would talk about it, I am like “Okay.” And you were just nodding, you know? I couldn’t talk about it. I was just “Okay.” I learned the things with what they experienced with boyfriends, and why did they have sex, and why they considered it, and how they feel about it when they have sex. I was just listening...I was taking it in. But...What they told me, I didn’t do for myself. I just take it, thought about it, and was like “What can I do? What I won’t do? What will I do? What can I learn from this or not, you know?”

*\*Since some of these women did not have the opportunity to learn about sex in the home, the public sphere became a main influence in developing their sexual subjectivities. Taking all their experiences into consideration, I realize that sex education in school is not consistent throughout the Netherlands. There are differences in terms of age of exposure, the detail of the curriculum, duration, class structure, who is teaching, how the curriculum is taught, and what strategies are used to eradicate shame, promote communication, and empower students. With this in mind, some of my interviewees were more privileged than others in regards to how comprehensive*

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<sup>35</sup> The Public Health Service of the Netherlands. They have various locations across the country.

*their sex education was in school. To provide some examples, I noticed that the women who did not receive a comprehensive form of sex education in the home or at school (i.e.-Sandie Power, Elizabeth, Mayaah) had to learn solely on their own or through their peers/friend's experiences. In contrast, Miss Soldier had the opportunity to encounter and develop her erotic power since her teacher appears to have incorporated 'culture of pleasure' components (i.e.-looking at her vagina with a mirror and how to cum) in the class. In addition, Saliyah felt empowered since her male teacher was an older individual from her community that not only discussed the technical and emotional aspects of sex, but also challenged the norms of the sex taboo within the community.*

*Moreover, some interviewees were more privileged than others with having outside resources to learn about sex and sexuality. To provide some examples of beneficial resources, Cheryl Lynn's experience at the 'broodhuis' and especially, Saliyah encountering Miss Soldier. Because of Miss Soldier, Saliyah learned how to negotiate her internal conflict with respectability, and in turn, explore her own sexual subjectivity and erotic power.*

*Overall, I believe it is important to note that sex education in schools is only one factor and not the ultimate solution for informed, sexual decision making. Our socio-cultural environments and self-accountability are significant factors as well. It appears each Dutch school has a level of autonomy in terms of what they will teach and how they will teach it. I am at odds with schools having this much autonomy in regards to sex education and believe there needs to be a form of consistency in the curriculum to ensure that marginalized communities are informed, supported and empowered. Analyzing how a comprehensive sex education class benefitted some of my interviewees, these educational institutions need to have multiple classes over a broad period of time and integrate lessons on sexual & relationship competency, safe-sex negotiation skills, and respecting oneself and others' sexual subjectivities.*

### **Theme #3: Sexual Feelings and Relationships**

**Crystal: So, at what age did sex become important for you? So let's say when you started having curious thoughts or a desire to experiment, things like that. Also, if it applies, could you please mention an experience of an intimate relationship you have (or had) that involved sex? How was that relationship for you, specifically was it positive or negative, both personally and sexually? In what ways?**

#### **Some of Elizabeth's response to the question(s) above:**

The desire came about when I was 15, and I am in an intimate relationship now. It has its nice times and some bad times because with elderly people, you both have your ways with doing things and wanting things. You always have to be looking and see "Does it fit?" (Both Laugh) And I hate that, but you have to do it because everybody is different.

I was just telling her [Cheryl Lynn], that everything is okay but I am repeating things too much and it is irritating him. He is just a simple guy. He is very nice, but last night, we had a big fight. He was irritated that he said “I won’t stay in this relationship anymore” cause he thought that I was treating him like a little boy. And that was not my intention but he accepted it like that. On the other hand, I am very fond of him. He is a very, very nice man. He is very gentle. He is amazing, but his temperament...He is a Libra and very moody. But, he is a beautiful person. He is very difficult to handle but everybody has their own ways and he said “Why can’t you see the simple things in me? I am a simple man, you don’t have to guide me by telling me this or telling me that.” Because if he is cooking, he asks “Can you find everything?” and I say “If I can’t find everything, I will ask you.” But, he does want me to. He says “Go sit down.” And I can’t stand that. He is like “Let me help you.” And I say, “No.” (Laughs) ...He wants things his way and I want things my way. I think it’s because of the you have your life already and you have to compromise, and he is much younger than me. He is 48. (Laughs)

Sexually, trust comes from both sides in the relationship... [because] I used to use the pill, but now that I am 64, and I don’t get menstruation anymore, we don’t use anything. We both have this thing that we are together and we are not fooling around; and I can’t get pregnant anymore, so it’s like flesh and flesh. (Laughs)

*\*Elizabeth’s response highlights the autonomy and independence of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women and how this trait, at times, conflicts with the expected gender roles in the community. Furthermore, by Elizabeth emphasizing the trust in her relationship and how it relates to her sex life, she along with her male partner subvert the hypersexualized ideology placed upon the dynamics of Dutch Afro-Caribbean intimate relationships. In addition, Elizabeth discloses, without shame, that she enjoys having sex without a condom, which gives her conscious choice, a form of agency.*

**Some of Cheryl Lynn’s reflection to the main question(s):**

When I was 15, I had a boyfriend for like two years and we had sex....Overall, it was positive.... [Sexually] I expected more pain because you hear about the pain you will get when they take your virginity. You will bleed and then bleed. I had pain, but I expected more pain. And the first time, it didn’t go all the way and after a while, it did. So, it was okay... [Personally] I think it [the relationship] didn’t make me more mature, but I think it made me realize what I want and don’t want in other relationships. Like the relationship we had, it was okay, but I knew that it could be better. Like the guy that I liked, and was going out with, he was a very popular guy. Everybody liked him. And like, I didn’t like that that much because I’m your girlfriend and other girls are liking you too and so it was a trust issue. You understand? Like sometimes you don’t really trust your boyfriend with other girls, because you don’t know what he is gonna do and you are still young, so like, now when you are in a relationship and you are older, *you know how men are*, because you experience them along the way. But, this was like my first boyfriend and I didn’t really know what to expect from it. He was like, “But you don’t have to worry about it.” But, I did... In the end, he broke my trust.

*\*So how are men based on Cheryl Lynn's experience? When I interviewed her, she did not want to furthermore explain how this trust was broken, and I did not push the matter. But, it appears that over time she learned about the gender relations or the double standards in sexual behavior between men and women.*

**Some of Sandie Power's thoughts to the main question(s):**

You know, it is very strange but in my young age, I never was thinking about sex. When I was fifteen, I had done sex because of doing bad to my mother. But I never was like, I had a boyfriend but only kissing and be touched, but I never was like "Ooo! I want sex" or something like that... I do bad to my mother to make her angry because I tell her "I am tired of you and you are just putting me shame taking me to the doctor to look like I'm a bitch." So I can't tell you. I can't even enjoy the sex that I'd do because I was scared. My mother would tell me "I'd kill you if you do that." But in my angry, I'd say "I'm gonna do it to challenge my mother a little bit." So I cannot tell you. The sex was so bad. And after some years, twenty, nineteen years that I had the child, I met the father of my first born and I got some kind of curiosity and say "I'd like to see how the sex is because that time I couldn't enjoy it."

It [the relationship] was negative because I really wanted to do in the wrong way. I was conscious but I was a little bit scared because of my mother... He was my boyfriend when I go on vacation in Santo Domingo. We [Sandie Power and boyfriend] were having a relationship since I was twelve years, but he was liking a lot of girls...and at the time he had another girlfriend, but you know he's always gonna be your love...He come to me and he tell me "I love you", you know men, "and I don't want nothing with her." And now I go thinking, he go to her and say the same thing. But at that age you believe everything what they tell you, very idiot I think....So when I come to Santo Domingo and he come and greet me. He tell me "Hey, you remember what you tell me you're gonna do" and I tell him "you're gonna break my virginity" and say "Mommy made me angry man." He said "Come, we go to this house" and this happened.

My mother called him when I came to Curacao [after she found out I was pregnant]. My mother want me to make abortion and I tell her "No the baby is from the boy that I love. He's the man that I love. I don't want to take the baby away because he is very nice, handsome man."...And then my mom said, "You wanna have a child? You don't have to contact me you have to work yourself for everything." I said "Yeah, will do."

*\*According to Sandie Power's reflection, her first sexual experience indirectly was not of her own choosing. She could not fully enjoy her first sexual experience, because her focus was to get revenge on her mother's repeated violation of her sexual development. In turn, she endured many consequences such as her ex-boyfriend's wandering ways, and solely taking care of herself and her child after getting pregnant.*

**Some of Miss Soldier's thoughts of when sex became important for her:**

I know when I was six years old...I saw a movie, and I thought "Wow! When I'm big, I'm gonna do this all the time. Because I feel all these tinklings in me and like "Whoo!" And I thought, "Oh!



do I got to pee because it's wet?" Yeah, so I was a little horny bastard. (Both laugh)...And I slept with my hands between my legs and go to sleep. And when I was eleven or twelve, I remember I was sitting at a place, and I just not played with my hand, but just squeezed it. Squeezed it and squeezed it, and squeezed my vajay-jay. And I was like "Ooh!" And I thought, "What the fuck?! That was so good." So I came without doing nothing. Just squeezing my vajay-jay and just think about sex. And my body, it shocked, and it was like "Whoo!" You know?...And I wanted to feel this so much more and ...that was the time I started playing with myself a lot. I thought, "I don't wanna be a ho!" So, I do it myself (laughs). And I did. But, I know my body, you know. I think it's something good. It's not something bad because I know my body. I know how another person must treat it. And I know how they must treat it, if they want me to cum a lot, you know. I can cum whenever I want to. I can squirt. I can do my shit. I love it because I know my body before I gave it away." So, I looked. I played. I did this. I did that. So, I know how to get there, you know.

### **Some of Miss Soldier's reflection regarding a past intimate relationship:**

Well, I was with the daddy of my first child....I was fourteen. He was nineteen...I learned a lot from it [the relationship]. It wasn't positive at all. In the beginning, it was positive...I felt myself comfortable and I thought "Oh, there's somebody who can protect me. And somebody who is closer to me than just a friend." It's like I had a little family. It was me and him. But, I thought, "Okay. Now I want to have a kid. And I know I'm young, but I want to have a kid because I want to have somebody for myself. I want to have my family. I want to give, what wasn't given to me."

So, from the age of sixteen, maybe fifteen and a half, I wasn't using no condoms, no pill, nothing, because I wanted to have a baby. And at the age at seventeen, I was pregnant. I said "Finally" because I wanted to. But, I didn't told him [boyfriend] nothing. I didn't told him about the birth control that I didn't take them, so I said "Oh, I have to tell you something." because I was sick and I went to the doctor and he [the doctor] said "Oh, Congratulations!" ...So , I was almost three months and I was so happy that I told the daddy... "I'm pregnant. I would like to keep it." And he said "Yeah. That's cool." But, he was addicted to gambling, to the streets in a negative way. And sometimes he was, I couldn't find him for days or weeks. So, after a few years, I still was alone and he started to beat me up and go with other girls. I found lipstick on his shirt and his neck and yeah, so, after I had my little boy, even when I was pregnant, I was a lot alone. And I had a bleeding one day and I was alone. I had to do everything on my own and it reminds me of my parents, you know....One time, I told him "Yeah. I had a bleeding and where were you?" And he was like "Shut the fuck up. And fuck the baby." And he used very bad words, you know. I'm not even going to tell it. And I was crying, crying because, I thought about my momma and my daddy, and I thought, "How can you talk about this little thing which is living inside of me?! It's a part of you and you tell these things to this little kid, and he can't even tell you something back or protect himself." And I thought "Oh! You're like my parents." Because it hurts me a lot. The love just went out my body and I couldn't have sex with him. And even he beat me up when I had my little boy in my arms, and I had to go on the ground and just protect my baby. And I thought, "You know what? Go out! You [boyfriend] need to get out!"

So, I had to do what I had to do...And so, I just kicked him out and never wanna look back. I still don't talk wit (*with*) him. He still don't give his boy love and takes him out or nothing. No, nothing.

*\*Miss Soldier's experience with touching herself illustrates her discovering her erotic power at an early age. She was able to learn more about her body, embrace and value what it could do, and attain erotic agency in the process. With this in mind, because of her relative faster sexual development and overall maturity, I wonder if part of her reasoning to have a baby at an early age is related to the concept of proving fertility? In other words, did she desire to become a mother in order to mark her status as a woman to herself and to her community?*

*In addition, Miss Soldier was very conscious of the abuse in this intimate relationship being similar to her parents; however, I believe loving herself and her child, as well as Miss Soldier being conscious of the erotic power she sustainably possesses, allowed her to leave the unfortunate situation and learn from the experience.*

### **Some of Silayah's reflection of when sex became important for her:**

To be honest, at a very young age. But, I suppressed it. I believe that children are also aware of their sexual feelings at a very young age. I think I was about five already. I remember that I had my first crush, where I physically felt attracted to somebody, when I was like three already (laughs). But, already when I was like five, there was already a curiosity about sex, and about kissing, and about what adults do and why they are being so secretive about it. Also, tingly feelings...But, when I think back, I did have attention for boys at a young age and they want to play mother and father, and I always had to be the mom and they always wanted to be the dad. They were just a little bit close to me or they wanted to give me a kiss on the cheek and I was like "Ooh! I like that," you know.

### **Some of Silayah's reflection regarding her current intimate relationship:**

Personally, I think it is going well. We have had obstacles also because for him it was a very long journey to come here and get used to the way things are going here [Holland]. He's from a small, Caribbean island and he is also six years younger than I am...He was like nineteen when we met. And I was like "You are cute, but I'm not going to date you cause you're way too young for me." And he was like "I know age ain't got nothing to do with it. Let me show you how grown I be." (Both laugh) So, I decided to try it anyway and I was like "You know what? Just have fun with it cause it's probably not gonna last." And it lasted. Yeah, he is twenty-four now. We have been through a lot of obstacles, but also a lot of great things. You know highs and lows. But he's at that point where he is also very serious about his life, and about his future, and his career, and his education.

Well sexually, it's really great. We are exploring still. I am moving my boundaries. There's no shame whatsoever. We can discuss everything and anything. But, I am glad that he is sensitive to my ideas because he is very much about pleasing me. And usually, it's the other way around. With Caribbean people, the woman tends to please the man and does whatever he wants. And it was a struggle in the beginning of course, cause it's like yeah, he was also brought up in that manner. So it's the changes that he made here that are affecting our relationship right now. Since we have nothing to complain about and we keep on trying to keep it exciting. It doesn't have to only do with the technical stuff, but of course also bonding and communicating. And since we

have been together for a while, children is also becoming a serious topic of discussion. And it was already a serious discussion topic for him like two months after I met him. He wanted to go so fast, which is also something that happens often in Caribbean relationships. And he was already back then pushing me to have children and to do all that. But, my background is still very strongly affecting me so I always told him “No.” First, I want to finish school and then we can talk about those things. And he picked up on that and now he actually feels the same way.

*\*Silayah again highlights her internal conflict with respectability by suppressing her feelings and desires at a young age. Also, Saliyah’s relationship with her younger boyfriend underlines her not only tapping into her erotic power and agency, but also their mutual journey with negotiating and reconciling the Dutch and Caribbean cultures.*

**Some of Mayaah’s remarks to the main question(s):**

I was fifteen when sex became important for me. During that time, it was a very, very destructive and negative relationship [for me]. This guy, well they [his family] were illegal here. I don’t necessarily believe in people that are bad. I see good in people. No one is born bad. But him and his family, as I can say, when I got older, are bad people. They are intentionally, fully conscious, hurting people and maybe they enjoy it, I’m not sure...He wasn’t going to school and basically wasn’t doing anything with his life. He was a very aggressive person. He was a very abusive person and not a loyal person. And still I had the world for him. So, this is a guy who threatened my mom when she was pregnant. This is a guy I went to jail for. This is a guy who gave me an STD and the list is longer and longer. This is a guy who tried to blow my brains out. Literally, had a gun in my face. So, it was everything but positive.

And sexually, it was positive, but maybe that is because I didn’t know any better. Sex was really the only intimate moment I had with him. Sex with him became intimacy for me, and yes I didn’t know any better because he was my first. It was not necessarily lovemaking or lust, it was possession. You have those kind of people that when they have sex with a person, they feel like they have power over them. They take control over them. But, even now if I could call it positive, no. So, it was negative in all kinds of ways.

It took me three years to get rid of him, he was a stalker kind. After that, as a girl, you get into a spiral where you go back to what you know. Like when you have a guy that treats you well, cause I had that, it seems shady. It is too good to be true, and you go back to what you know. It was only actually I got older and developed myself to a certain point where I actually started seeing the core of everything and where I am moving on. I still have these things that haunt me...but, I definitely grew from it. I can tell you now I specialize in douchebags. I can smell them. I don’t care if you have a suit on. Doesn’t matter. I can smell you. So, I definitely learned from that.

*\*Since Mayaah was not equipped with the tools and information to learn about sex and sexuality in the home, she became vulnerable and sexually engrossed in this abusive relationship, where she had no sense of her self-agency. It was only when she actively tapped into her erotic power,*

*that she could improve herself, know what she deserves, and scrutinize people in her surroundings.*

**Some of Livingston's thoughts to the main question(s):**

Before I wasn't really into that [sex]. I was eighteen, and I was seeing women in like a sexual way. When I see women, I was like "Oh she pretty" and that was it. I mature really late. Eighteen was the first time I went to a club also. I saw ladies. Ladies would come up to me. It was interesting, I guess, because I was with my friends, and I wanted to chill, I wanted to hang. Then, I see women and I thought "Okay we can talk." But when I was really, how do you say, the first time was not intimate for me because I didn't feel something from it, I just wanna know the experience. I didn't feel anything, So I did it. She didn't touch me. I didn't want that...it wasn't curious because I already knew I was a lesbian. It was more for me to have it done. So, I was eighteen, but the first, the real one for me was when I was nineteen, almost twenty....It's a current relationship and a good one. The feeling was right. I wanted it myself. She's also the first one that touches me. I wanted that experience, yeah. I was pretty happy about it (both laugh).

*\* This is a good example of how Livingston actively chooses to separate sex from intimacy. In other words, how she separates her physically and emotionally connected sexual encounters, and whether she allows her partner to touch her or not in order to distinguish the two.*

**Some of Kelsey's remarks of when sex became important for her:**

Curious thoughts, um, I was like fifteen. Why? Because I was in love with a boy... I remember, and we are still friends, and I was like really in love with this boy. And I went curious, so I talked about it with my sister and told her "I'm in love with a boy, but I'm afraid maybe he wants this, he wants that." Because people were talking about sex and I wasn't ready for sex. So, then my curious thoughts about "When do you have sex? Do you must have sex? Or is it just kissing? Or touching? Why do you want it?" And I was a little tommy-boy, when I was little. Kissing and stuff like that, so when a boy touched me, I was like (back off hand motion with body leaned to the side).

(Both laugh)

So it was new for me, but it was exciting. That was the period when I got curious about sex, so I talked about it with my sister.

**Some of Kelsey's reflection regarding a past intimate relationship:**

I was sixteen when I met the father of my first child. And we had sex when I was eighteen. First of all, it was positive. We took our time to know each other. We were at school. My mother did not allow my relationship with him... I think maybe she was afraid of us, my sisters and I, getting big, like getting pregnant or something like that, so that was a difficult part. But, we were in love. We talked about it. We did stuff just to know each other and that way I wanted to show my mother that he is a good boy. My relationship with him was great. Personally, it has changed me because when I had my first child, I was twenty-one. I was twenty when I was pregnant and I

was like “Twenty years, pregnant!” I was shocked, but the reason why I got pregnant was because I had, How do you say that? I had a surgery to pull out my (touches throat)...tonsils... and then you get antibiotica<sup>36</sup> and when you get antibiotica, your contraception doesn’t work... And then I talked about it with my doctor and he’s like “Oh yeah. You got surgery, you know? Three months ago.” And I was like “Couldn’t you have inform me of that when you are having antibiotica and the pill doesn’t work?” (Crystal gasps) Yes! and that’s how I got pregnant...So it happened and I was forced to think wiser, to do wiser things, you know. So, I was like a girl from thinking like a girl from eighteen, and I had to grow so fast in a way that was good for me. But, sometimes I just think like if I could’ve waited, I could have enjoyed my youth more, you know?...So that’s the thing of how my pregnancy changed my personality. I got wiser at an early age.

*\*Kelsey’s experience really provides another perspective to subvert the hypersexualized notion of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women surrounding teenage pregnancies. Her mindset changed from a girl to a young woman, which could be related to the concept of proving fertility. Furthermore, Kelsey’s experience emphasizes that there is more to the story than what meets the eye; and how the level of patient care in medical institutions need to be taken into consideration, in relation to the disparity in sexual and/or reproductive statistics.*

#### **Theme #4: Safe Sex, Values and Sexual Decisionmaking**

*\*This theme is to make space and emphasize the erotic knowledge and values of my interviewees regarding sexual decision-making and relationship competency. Some interviewees even reason with some of the concepts I mentioned in my theory chapter. Moreover, this theme is intended to subvert the mainstream, hypersexualized ideology that conscious, unsafe sex and promiscuity of these women are the main contributors to the disparity in sexual statistics. I consciously chose not to make brief points of analysis throughout this theme, since I believe my interviewees’ responses should be received at face value.*

#### **Dialogue between Elizabeth and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** What does safe sex mean to you and what does it entail in your view?

**E:** Safe sex means protecting yourself and the person you are with.

**C:** What do you consider to be a risky situation or a risky partner in regards to sex?

**E:** A man that fools around, and a man that asks you to do things that you don’t like.

**C:** And have you ever encountered that at all?

**E:** No, not in my relationships. And if it comes to the point of discussing with things you don’t like it is like “No! Over there.”

**C:** And have you ever had to persuade your partner to have safe sex?

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<sup>36</sup> The Dutch word for “antibiotics.”

**E:** No.

**C:** And have you ever communicated with your partner about sex? And what do these discussions normally consist of?

**E:** Yes, I had partners that I could talk open and discuss anything about sex.

**C:** And have you ever had a partner that didn't want to communicate with you about sex?

**E:** No.

**C:** There is the perception that a lot of women don't take initiative or make demands in a relationship. Why is that?

**E:** Because they are scared. They become scared of the man's reaction.

**C:** And what would the man's reaction be?

**E:** The woman are like "I don't want it now, don't touch me, don't touch me." But the man, if they touch you, you have to [have sex with them]. Yes, and that is the macho within our cultures. The man decides a lot about the woman in the Caribbean. They have about to five to six women to every man.

**C:** And that's a normal thing?

**E:** Yes.

**C:** Do the women have multiple partners also?

**E:** Well, some of them.

**C:** And is that accepted as much as the men?

**E:** It is not accepted. The woman do it in secret. With the men, they don't care.

**C:** Is there any other reason why the woman would automatically have sex with the man?

**E:** They are afraid of getting sick because the man is fooling around and sometimes they don't say anything, because he is probably the only man that comes around.

**C:** Do you think money or dependency has something to do with that?

**E:** Yes! A lot of it especially in the earlier days, but now women are becoming more independent.

**C:** How would you view a good intimate relationship?

**E:** The older you become, the more you gain an understanding. You don't argue so much anymore and if you argue, it is over, like that. It comes with the years because when you are younger, you are jealous, you want to play the good girl and stick with the man. When you grow older, you think of other things and you are more interested in other things than having a relationship or being with a man or staying with a man. If a man says, "I've had enough", its like [calmly] "That's alright. Go ahead."

**Dialogue between Cheryl Lynn and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** What does safe sex mean to you and what does it entail in your view?

**CL:** Safe sex mean a lot to me because as I said before “Welcome to Amsterdam.” (*Laughs*) Here in Amsterdam there are a lot of nasty people. Nasty in the way that they sleep with each other, like they don’t sleep with each other because they love each other, they just sleep with each other because it’s sex and they don’t care about condoms and that kinds of things. Some people do and some people don’t. But, you never know who you will end up with because like me, at first, I can be very nice to you, but you don’t know what I am doing when I’m not around you. So, it’s better that you always have safe sex.

**C:** What situations do you consider to be risky when it comes to sex?

**CL:** When somebody is sick and that is why I choose for safe sex because you can’t read if somebody has HIV or SOA, so it’s always risky. Sex without a condom is like always risky...or when you are having sex, and they just take off the condom. But, you are busy already and maybe you won’t notice.

**C:** And have you ever had to persuade your partner to have safe sex?

**CL:** Yes. I always ask if you have condoms. And if no, I say “Go get them because otherwise we won’t have sex.”

**C:** Have you ever communicated with your partner about sex?

**CL:** Yes.

**C:** And what do these discussions normally consist of?

**CL:** About my health. When you have sex with somebody, you trust them with your life. I take my life very seriously because maybe we are two months together and after that it is done and let’s say you make me sick, but I don’t see you anymore and I’m sick. I discuss that a lot with my partner because I don’t want to have unsafe sex. We can go test together. But, that’s also something where I’m not sure because you can go test today and get the result next week, and within that week you can get something. You understand?

**C:** Yes. So, what does a good relationship mean to you?

**CL:** A good relationship is a healthy relationship, but I don’t think that exists anymore.

**C:** Why is that?

**CL:** Because people do what they want and you can’t trust anybody these days. You can have a boyfriend for like ten years, but you are not sure if he is true to you. I don’t think a good relationship exists anymore, but I think a good relationship is when you trust each other and

share everything with each other and when really love each other. I think they can really love each other but they always won't stay true to each other.

**C:** I want to get into that a little bit more. That is so interesting. Why do you think that people won't stay true to each other?

**CL:** Because we are living in a world right now where everyone is busy experimenting with sex, with what they like such as threesomes or other girls. You can have a wife at home, but she only has the name wife. Because when he just steps outside the door, he might go see another chick and then he has sex there and then he comes home again. I don't think that people in this world, right now, young people, but I think old people still have that respect for each other, but young people still don't respect each other enough.

**Dialogue between Sandie Power and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** What does safe sex mean to you and what does it entail in your view?

**SP:** A lot for sure. I think to do sex, always is to do safe sex is better. I know if I do sex without condom I will maybe get pregnant ...if I have to do with somebody, for sure we will use condom. Because I can't imagine, "no vale la pena"<sup>37</sup> If you take a risk for something, it's not necessary to take a big risk for a small feeling. It's something that you're gonna get for seven seconds. I always tell to my children and people who I know...For sure, you have to use condom and also the pill because otherwise can be if the condom break and if you don't see it, you can get pregnant. I know there is a lot of other things...one time I have tried something they put in your baarmoeder<sup>38</sup>.

**C:** What do you consider to be a risky situation or a risky partner when having sex?

**SP:** Oh yeah, when the others have gonorrhea, syphilis. Because so you know here in Holland, you see a lot of programs on TV for the people who they have sex, they go to the doctor...they see who sickness, many sickness people get when they have unsafe sex.

**C:** Had you ever had to persuade any of your partners to have safe sex?

**SP:** No, because I can tell you I don't have a lot of partners.

**C:** Have you ever communicated with your partners about sex? And if so how were those conversations?

**SP:** Yes, exactly with my ex-husband, because with him I have been sixteen, seventeen years together. We have a lot of communication about sex. Sometimes if you are having sex, I think the sex has to be good. So if he's not good in something, you will tell him. I tell him what I like

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<sup>37</sup> A Spanish phrase that means "It's not worth it."

<sup>38</sup> Dutch word for "uterus." Sandie is referring to an Intrauterine device (IUD).



and how you have to do it. I tell him if you don't do it good, then I'm gonna go look for another. I love sex, I love to do it but the sex has to be good. And I tell him "If I do something you don't like, to tell me, just tell me what you like, and how you like." I like intimate things. I like to try different things you know not only father and mother so. I think in a relationship, sex is very important because sometime the man go and look another woman. Maybe he is tired of the same papa mama ways, but the man wants to try something new.

**C:** What does a good intimate relationship mean to you?

**SP:** One relationship where you can be open, you can have a trust in your boyfriend or girlfriend or husband and both have to be open. He has to be open to say a good thing or a bad thing. He has to be with you to trust in you and tell you if he do something wrong...even if she's gonna be angry but I have to tell that. And fair with each other. Fair and trust and for sure a good sex. Because without sex it's gonna be something.

**Dialogue between Crisha Cannon and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** So, what does safe sex mean to you and what does it involve in your view?

**CC:** Safe sex means getting tests for SOA, use protection like condoms, Nuvaring, and use the pill.

**C:** Okay. And what do you consider to be a risky situation in terms of sex?

**CC:** When you are drunk or high or something like that... [and] a risky situation is when you don't want it because a girl can have a trauma when she don't want to do it and maybe get pregnant. When she get a boyfriend, she cannot do it with him because she has trauma from what happened.

**Dialogue between Akosua Minaj and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** So, what does safe sex mean to you and what does it involve in your view?

**AM:** The parents of the girl and the boy have to put pepper. In Africa, when most girls if they get too excited for a boy or something like that and they don't listen, they put pepper or ginger down there...They say open your thing and they gonna hold it too, and then they put the pepper and you scream. And it burns. I never feel it...It burns because it's too pepper and it's too much. It's hot for the pussy, that's why...But, it's not like every African person does that.

**C:** Just certain people? Not everyone.

**AM:** Yes... and it [safe sex] is kissing, touching, condom, pill, and ointment that kill sperm...yes, spermicide.

**C:** Okay. And what do you consider to be a risky situation in terms of sex?

**AM:** When you are excited. Because then the woman comes home, she takes off her clothes, she don't time for that [For clarification, like putting on protection or condom beforehand]

**Dialogue between Miss Soldier and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** So, what does safe sex mean to you?

**MS:** Safe-sex means to me, enjoy, do what you like but be protective, so you can't get sick or pregnant when you don't want to be pregnant. And just please watch out for HIV and you know, be careful with other people as well. Don't think, "Oh, maybe I'm not sick" and just fooling around. Just be protective.

**C:** Okay. And what do you consider to be a risky situation when it comes to sex in a relationship?

**MS:** When you don't know somebody and it's a one night stand, and you have sex unprotected. That's something that doesn't live in my book (laughs)...Sorry, it's a big uh-uh. Even when I'm that horny or maybe I'm soaking wet, "No, sorry, no." I will get home and do it my damn self, you know, the next day, I'm still healthy when I wake up, you know. And keep it for the person I know I can do it with, how I want and how I'd like to, or just use protection, yeah.

**C:** Have you ever had to persuade a previous partner to have safe-sex?

**MS:** Hmmm, yeah. When I found out that the person I was with did some stupid things. I said, "Listen, if you do it, do it very carefully because don't make me sick" you know, "Then I will fuck around if I want to get sick, but I'm just like this, so don't make me sick. Know what you do. If you choose for me, choose for me, and my body, and my love. But, not for me, my body, and some other bodies." Yeah.

**C:** Have you ever communicated with your partners about sex and what did those conversations consist of?

**MS:** Yeah, about sex, um, what I like. What I don't like. What they like. How they like it. About HIV. About cumming. How to cum. How many times. About positions.

**C:** I love how specific you are.

**MS:** Yeah! I'm a very open person. You know we got to eat, we got to drink, we got to shower, we got to fuck as well.

**C:** And that's important. It doesn't get enough recognition (Both laugh) and that's something I would like to change... I'm loving it! I have a huge smile on my face. Oh, and did you have anything else to say about what the conversations were about?

**MS:** Yeah, and about me being bisexual. But, it's not that when I'm with a man, I need to fuck a girl, or when I'm with a girl, I need to fuck a guy. It's just the person that I'm in love with. Only, I become more in love with girls than a guy. A guy is one in a million, who give me a feeling like, "Wow!" the same as a girl. So, with guys, it's tough. I'm not falling in love very quick.

**C:** Okay. And what does a good intimate relationship mean to you?

**MS:** Wow! When you can be honest, very open. Not open in a way, okay, you can have sex here, and I have sex there, and sex together. Uh-uh! But open with what you like, what you don't like, what are your wishes, do you got a fantasy? Those things and, you know, stay true, that's important. And just communicate because communication is the key. Stay true, communication, that's it, I guess. Yeah. But, just talk, communicate, stay open. You know don't be ashamed to show people what you like and how you like it because you got to enjoy it. Not only the other person, it's a two-way street. And sex is at the best when two people enjoy it at the same level, you know.

**Dialogue between Saliyah and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** Okay, and what does safe sex mean to you?

**S:** Safe sex technically means using condoms, using birth control pills. When you are in a long relationship, well in my case, after a while, you stop using condoms. But, we do get tested regularly. Safe sex is also feeling safe with the person you are having sex with. Feeling comfortable in your own skin. Feeling loved. Feeling appreciated. Feeling that things you are uncomfortable with, you can just discuss them. Being honest with each other and also tell each other there are maybe new desires or ideas that you want to try out because as soon as boredom comes in, the relationship is at risk, and well what I think is the risk of your spouse cheating on you, and also making it unsafe for you or risky for you becomes bigger. So safe is broad to me.

**C:** And what do you consider to be a risky situation in regards to sex?

**S:** Well, crossing your own boundaries. Doing things sexually, or sexual things, that you don't want to do. It's risky...even if when you are with a person for a long time, the person can do things behind your back that you are not aware of. And then you can still get in STD or maybe get in trouble because this person engaged another person in your sexual life that you were not aware of, with maybe babies being involved or crazy people that want to destroy your relationship with the person that you are with.

**C:** Your answers are just so full. And did you ever have to persuade a previous partner to have safe sex?

**S:** Yes. The one in New York<sup>39</sup> I had to persuade because this person was already talking about having children. I was like "Okay. I've known you for six months. That's not nothing." This guy was talking that because this guy has money. So, he was already bringing that up as a first issue. That was no issue for him because he had money and he could provide for the child. That's fine, but what about me? It has consequences for me too. So, yeah, I had to persuade him.

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<sup>39</sup> A long-distance relationship Saliyah had when she was twenty-three. It only lasted six months.

**C:** And you already kind of answered this question a little bit, with have you ever communicated with your partner about sex and if so, what did these conversations consist of?

**S:** We talk all the time. Yeah, almost every day. (S laughs) Well family wise, we talk about like having children and how we are going to fill that in. There is also the pillow talk of course, (S laughs) kind of like talking naughty to each other or explicitly asking “What would you like me to do?” or “What do you think about that thing I just did right now? Do you want it again or you don’t want it?” or “I would like to have a third person in the relation, what do you think?” You know. Those things. But also like “We have to get tested again.” “Oh, why? Don’t you trust me?” “Yeah, I do trust you. But it’s the agreement that we are going to get tested.” Actually, all the factors that have to do with sex, we discuss them.

**C:** Okay. And, what does a good intimate relationship mean to you?

**S:** First of all, communicating with each other about everything...I think also giving each other space, that’s very important cause it kinds of gives you the opportunity to renew yourself and put something into the relationship, and to also not take each other for granted. And of course, be able to be physical with each other. You find each other really attractive even when you just woke up. And also being supportive with the serious aspects of life, you know, and being each other’s best friend as well. Being lovers and friends.

**Dialogue between Mayaah and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** What does safe sex mean to you and what does it entail in your view?

**M:** I don’t think this question is valid to me. Safe sex, I am allergic to condoms, I am allergic to latex free condoms, I am allergic to the pill, I am allergic to soap, I am allergic to soap free soap. My skin is a bitch, so it is very hard for me to pick a mate. So if I am going to have sex, it is going to be unprotected, because I am allergic to a lot of stuff, so I have a spiral (IUD) cause I don’t plan on popping no baby, so I really have to trust the person I am with because even though I can’t have a baby, you can still give me AIDS. I have to trust you completely and we are both getting tested...If you are going to do it, please tell me, because we are not gonna have safe sex because I am allergic to everything. I am not going to be mad, this is about health. I am really paranoid with that because I am so unprotected.

**C:** What do you consider to be a risky situation or partner in regards to sex?

**M:** Risky situation is when someone is under the influence of I don’t know what...whether that is alcohol or weed or cocaine...You knew what the possibility was, there is no excuse. A person should be sober or adult enough to know what they are doing. And I think it is also risky where a person just goes with their emotion and does not think, so I’ve had previous partners and let them know this is my issue, and they are like “It’s gonna be fun,” and I’m like “I don’t care, if you can’t wait for the pussy, go find another one because I need that result, I need to see it with my own eyes.”

**C:** Have you ever had to persuade your partner with safe sex?

**M:** If I get signs that you are not safe, the door is right there and I am very harsh with that, and I am very careful about myself...and if you are already pushy before we are even in a relationship, I will cut it off right there. I have to persuade them to leave, but I know exactly what I am comfortable with and not, and I have to trust you in order for you to come into my house. And I am not the type of person to go to their place, because I'm not comfortable. I have to trust you enough for you to step over my doorstep, I am very cautious.

**C:** Have you ever communicated with your partner about sex and what do these discussions normally consist of?

**M:** Yeah, a lot actually, because I am a very open person when it comes to that. I am not ashamed...I am open before, during and after sex. Let's say if I didn't enjoy something, I will tell you on the spot, before, or after. I make jokes because if you have a good connection with your partner, whether if that is a relationship or anything else, you can be funny about it. If you can laugh during sex and still have sex, you have something good then. Seriously. So when you have those conversations and he asks 'How was it? Did you enjoy it? Did I hurt you?' I would totally answer that because I am not ashamed.

**C:** What do you consider to be a good intimate relationship?

**M:** Where you can truly be open, and everyone has their own way of being open...when you can talk about everything because it is really good between you. Let's say you can walk on the street hand in hand, if it is really good between you two, maybe he is looking at the way she is dressed, and before you start hollering, he would be like "Damn baby, Do you see that ass?" you be like "Where?" You can laugh with each other and have fun because at the end of the day, it is still you two...that is why self-esteem is really important. But if you really know each other and give each other that confidence...if you have that kind of level of communication, you are totally good. If you can talk about the most weirdest things with your partner and he can actually be your friend too, it's totally good. Now that is good intimacy to me. You can be comfortable with him as a friend and not only your partner, that opens up a lot of doors.

**Dialogue between Livingston and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** Let's see, what does safe sex mean to you?

**L:** Everything, cause I don't wanna die, I love living (Both Laugh). I don't wanna get diseases or anything. And also for, how do you say it, respect to myself. I don't wanna do it with everyone I see on the street or something. I wanna have some value in my life. When I have children, I wanna give them the same lives with talking about sex and having an open relationship, like I have when I was a child. I want them to know there is no shame to be old, and still be a virgin. There is no shame in wanting to be in love when you do it. And just for myself, I wanna have respect for my own body...there are condoms, pills, woman's condoms, I don't know, how do you call it, for the girl on girl sex...dental dams.... Yes! Also there is the shot. And you could put something in you as a woman called spiral (IUD).

**C:** Oh okay. And what do you consider to be a risky situation with sex?

**L:** When you meet someone in club, you don't know anything about them...so make sure you are safe when you do it. Don't go downtown if you don't know the person...yeah, that's a risky situation.

**C:** And let's see, have you ever communicated with your previous partners about sex? And what do these conversations consist of?

**L:** All the time...Just talking about our bodies. I don't have sex experience a lot. When I really had sex, I was 20. It was with M. Yeah, we could talk about everything. We can talk about our bodies, and our secrets with each other...we can talk about our likes or dislikes, no, there are no secrets between us.

**C:** Okay. And what does a good intimate relationship mean to you?

**L:** I think everything. But then I think not everything, because sex is important, but sex isn't everything for me. I wanna be in a good, healthy relationship. I want to be a friend, a partner, a guardian. I wanna be everything and sex is something that you get with it. If the sex was bad, I would say, "The sex is bad" yeah (both laugh). I can say that, but sex was never bad, so I don't have that problem. It's important, but not that important for me.

**Dialogue between Kelsey and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**C:** Alright. So, what does safe sex mean to you and what does it entail in your view?

**K:** I must say that I didn't totally have safe sex with him because it was my first time and it was his first time. So we didn't use protection. I just took pills.

**C:** Okay. And what do you think would be a risky situation or a risky partner when it comes to sex?

**K:** Risky partner I think is a man who walks around playing like he is all that, and when you meet somebody like that...and you want to have sex with him and he think he don't have to use something. Those men are scary to me.

**C:** Have you ever had to persuade a partner of yours to have safe sex?

**K:** No.

**C:** Have you ever communicated with your partner about sex? And what were those conversations like?

**K:** Yes, we did...It was like "Do you like having sex with me?" because he had a feeling that he wasn't good enough in bed or something like that. And I was like "I don't know what you want me to do."(K laughs) "Do you want me to scream? Scream out loud your name?" (K laughs) And he was like "Yes, because I don't know if you're enjoying having sex with me." So, that was a

discussion we had, but for me, it was like “It was great. You don’t hear me complaining.”(Both laugh)

**C:** So, to continue, what does a good intimate relationship mean to you?

**K:** Communicating is the main thing you need in a relationship. Because if I can’t communicate with you, if I can’t explain my feelings to you, if I can’t talk to you when I’m down, if I can’t talk to you when I’m happy or something like that, I have to have that so my physical attraction can be with you, so I can have sex with you. Because if I can’t talk with you or laugh with you or everything isn’t good, I don’t want you to touch me. No. If I had something like that, we can be friends, but nothing further. I want it to be, it has to click... [and] let’s see, trust. Trust is also a main thing. I have to depend on you, you have to depend on me. I have your back and you have my back.

**Theme #5: Perceived Stereotypes and Negotiating Hypersexualization**

**Crystal:** In general, there is an idea that exists about Dutch Afro-Caribbean women (and men) being promiscuous. Personally, do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Are there any other stereotypes or assumptions about Dutch Afro-Caribbean women’s sexuality that you know of and that you have/had to deal with in your personal life? If so, what are they? Is there an internal conflict for you between these two perceptions? How does it make you feel?

**Elizabeth’s response to the main question(s):**

I don’t agree with that but we have been raised with that perception that men are macho and that men can do anything they like. But, with the revolution, women are now, have a sense where they can say “I won’t go no further or I won’t accept that.” Til’ 50 years the women were dominated by the men, but not anymore.

*\*Elizabeth highlights the growing agency of women and the subversion of gender roles within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community as time progresses.*

**Some of Cheryl Lynn’s remarks to the main question(s):**

I agree with this statement, but not for myself because I am really scared of getting sick and all the things, so I protect myself well. But, I think black people fuck around here and fuck around there, having sex here and having sex there, doing their thing; and maybe they care about the person that they are having sex with, but they don’t care about the risk that they are taking with that person. But, I don’t think it counts for me...but what can get me real mad, like I was saying is that I have friends that will jump in the first car that stops for them and when you walk with each other, They will say “ Hey! Look at that whore or look at those whores.” I will get mad because I know that I am not a whore. It’s not for me, but I am in the group right now...so, I disagree on that because you can like see three girls walking and you did like a threesome with one and you say the rest is also like that, that is not fair.

I don't judge people....Some of girls do things and they don't tell...Usually the guy tells or she tells somebody and it goes around. I also have friends that get in the first car that stops and tomorrow they will tell you "I had sex with him and it was amazing. I will do him again." I think I respect those people more because they know what they are doing. They are just having sex for sex because they like sex and it's your own choice. If you want to have sex with the whole world, it's your own choice. If you are strong enough to tell about it, I think its okay. But if you are doing something and you won't stand for it, then I don't think you know what you are doing because somewhere you are ashamed of what you are doing.

*\*Cheryl Lynn illustrates how Dutch Afro-Caribbean women are sexually homogenized by society and their multiple, sexual subjectivities are not acknowledged. I am also curious if Cheryl Lynn has racially internalized the hypersexualized notion of her community, and has over exaggerated the way some people in her community display their sexuality as something deviant? However, she later appears to distinguish the type of girls she respects depending on if they felt shame after their sexual encounter.*

**Dialogue between Crisha Cannon and Crystal regarding the theme:**

No. Because they always look at what Black people do because everything we do is wrong, and when they do something, the same thing, it's good. Because they [the white people] think it's their country... And everything they do is good, but when Black people do those things, it's not good. You have to do it their way and like, when they have sex, almost nobody got to know that. And when, we, Black people have sex, like everyone knows that in one time. I think we get more attention than white people.

**C:** And why do you think it's like that? That with white people thinking that what black people do with sex is wrong?

**CC:** Because they don't like black people...I think it's because of the skin color. I think that's true because we have nice skin color and they not. They are like white like paper...and what I think is like the white people don't have romance in their life and the black people have. The black people give more attention than white people. So, they have better sex than the white people. That's why all the white women want black men because they give better sex. For example, it's like, I have a white friend and I have slept with a white man and a black man, and I will tell my friend which one was better, and it will be the black man, and they will try too. So, that's why they do that.

**C:** Why is the black man considered to give better sex?

**CC:** Because black men are made to work hard.

**C:** Work hard in what way?

**CC:** In every way. Yes, in the house, out the house and sexually too.

**C:** Is the white man good for any sexual thing?



**CC:** White men could be, but then they must have a little bit black blood.

**C:** And what other assumptions you feel are being made about black women like with their bodies and what they do?

**CC:** That they are ugly. They say this because they are jealous because they can't be like us.

**C:** And has anyone made assumptions about you and your sexuality that made you upset?

**CC:** No.

*\*Crisha's comments highlight how sexual ability is discerned by body demarcations (i.e. -skin color), and how black people's sexuality is constantly under scrutiny and surveillance by mainstream society, because we are socially constructed as "bad", even though she argues white people are doing the same sexual acts. Nevertheless, I wonder if her view on black men being better at sex is influenced by her Afro-pride or mainstream notions?*

**Dialogue between Akosua Minaj and Crystal regarding the theme:**

**AM:** No, I don't agree. They don't like us because we are sexy. Because they don't have no ass, no boobs, nothing... You can get and give better sex if you have a nice body, but if you don't have a body, you can't get and give better sex. White people don't have body and the black people, they have.

**C:** So, it's because of the body?

**AM:** Yes! But look, it's easy to see because if I go to a party, and a white girl also, she go off the beat and I go with the beat. That's also the same in the bed. The white man go off the beat and the black man go in the beat.

**C:** Alright. And what does the white man have?

**AM:** Nothing. Their feet smells like cheese.

**C:** And what other assumptions you feel are being made about black women like with their bodies and what they do?

**AM:** That only black women stands in the Red Light.

**C:** And where do you hear these things?

**AM:** The news and people outside.

*\* Akosua's comments are very similar to Crisha's reasoning in terms of how sexual ability is discerned by body demarcations (i.e. -ass, boobs, dancing with the beat) and how black people's*

*sexuality is constantly under scrutiny and surveillance, not only by mainstream society, but the media as well. Nevertheless, I wonder if her view on black people being better at sex is influenced by her Afro-pride or mainstream notions?*

**Some of Miss Soldier's remarks to the main question(s):**

Yeah, I agree, not only our colored folks because everybody sleeping around, even the white folks can sleep around. The Moroccan, the Turkish, every kind of folk, but the black folks, I think we the horniest people, you know. I don't like black. We're colored folks... I think it's in the blood, that's what I think... I think our blood is that hot, that's why we like more sex. And the white folks like sex as well, but in a sick way. That's my opinion...They [white folks] are like freaky. Too kinky. They you know, in Suriname, there's not many stories about touching family. Wit (*With*) the white folks, there many stories about daddy abusing daughter, daughter have child of daddy, those kind of crazy things, or white folks go to the hookers a lot, you know. The big police and politician guys, they sometimes like to wear diapers, or you got to kick and hit them, or spit in their face. It's sick!(Crystal laughs) You know. Just pull my hair and spank my ass! But, just pissing in my mouth or shit on my face, uh-uh, don't think so. (Crystal laughs) That's the white folks kind of sex (Laughs)

...Yeah, and look at our shapes! (Both laugh) and we're like "Okay, sista!" or " Okay, brotha!" And the white folks are flat, most of the time, or too fat. But, they don't got, what we got, "Sorry!" You know, but that's why the women, back in the times with slavery, and the white women, they gave us kind of clothes to wear, so the their husbands couldn't enjoy our figure. Yeah.

**Some of Miss Soldier's remarks regarding stereotypes of black women from the Bijlmer:**

Yes, stereotypes we have in our colored community in Amsterdam Southeast, you know, there a few black ladies, colored women, however we want to call it, but with colored folks, you know, who doesn't show any dignity or ask for respect, and they just give it away for cigarettes or like a phone card, or crazy things, you know, just for money. Just for things. And when you talk about Amsterdam Southeast, Bijlmer, yeah, you get those stories about our women here. But, because of the few who does that very often doesn't mean that we're all colored women who live in Bijlmer are like that! Because I got my dignity and I need to have respect before I would open, so please, you know. But, some stupid folks, they said "Oh, if they're like that, every colored people or girl is like that." That's bullshit!" I'm not a Bijlmer whore. I'm just a lady who lives in the Bijlmer because I like to live with my own kind of people."... So, this is why I live here and not because I'm one of those ladies. They made a movie about the stereotype that they point their finger to. And now, every time, some people from outside Bijlmer, who come here and hear you talk, or just have a conversation with somebody like myself in the store, it's "Oh! Bijlmer behavior." What the fuck do you mean?! You see? So, I hate the movie. I didn't see it myself... [The movie is] Only decent people or "Alleen Maar Nette Mensen"<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> A controversial, Dutch novel, and later film, by Robert Vuijsje. The film was released in 2012 and received much criticism with regards to reinforcing the sexual stereotypes of black women, particularly black women from Amsterdam Bijlmer.

They, you know, the crazy black or colored folks who did, you know, help the guy making this movie, are you crazy?! We went through slavery, still do. And look what you gonna put us into, Why?! Why?! So, you gonna tell the people who pointing their fingers at us, "Okay, you're right." Because look, so I'm mad at the Dutch guy who made the movie...And the white folks, you know what they do? They just sit behind, relax, and laugh at us, again. C'mon! So, I don't support those kind of bullshit. I'm against it. And if I have a conversation with them, OOOOoohh! It's gonna be tough, because I got a lot to say. And I love my people. I love my color. And as you can see, I'm not dark colored, I'm just light brown colored. But, I wish I was more dark because I love my skin, I love my people. Because I'm mixed with Indian, that's why I'm light. I love it! That's why I put a tattoo, it says...the chains are loose. And it's respect for my ancestors, so that's why I put it.

### **Miss Soldier's thoughts regarding the negative perception of the Bijlmer:**

They give us that negative thing because Bijlmer is, most of the people in Bijlmer are colored people from Dominican Republic, from the Antillean, from Suriname, from Africa, some of the US, but they didn't want to have us near them, so they put us in one place. So, they can be with each other and we don't have to notice that there are so many colored folks. So, just let them live over there. But, they give Bijlmer a name, Why? because we're colored folks live in Bijlmer. Because when you go in other places, there is sex as well. They steal as well. They do things as well. But, Bijlmer, doesn't really look like a ghetto if you compare it to the ghetto in the US or in London, but this is the ghetto. The Dutch ghetto. Only when you can take and can have a look from the inside of the places, you know, it's different than when you go to the inside of a place where white people live.

*\*Miss Soldier makes several arguments in reference to race relations, stereotypes, and the subjective aspect of the term hypersexual. In her first remark, Miss Soldier affirms that everyone sleeps around and also agrees that black people are relatively the most sexually active population. However, when making her argument, she simultaneously redefines the term hypersexual by discerning and emphasizing the 'wayward' sexual acts of the white community. In addition, she provides a historical perspective, in regards to the white community's strategies to conceal their explicit fear or desire of black, female bodies. Correspondingly, she also shares an experience of how Dutch Afro-Caribbean women are sexually homogenized and made into a modern-day spectacle for mainstream, white society. Last but not least, Miss Soldier alludes to the presence of institutional racism since a great majority of people of color live in one area of Amsterdam. This last statement justifies my journey of having to find people of color in Amsterdam, when I first arrived to the Netherlands.*

### **Some of Saliyah's thoughts to the main question(s):**

It makes me feel annoyed. I feel annoyed because I guess if you look at it from a Western perspective, like a Dutch perspective, you can actually say yeah, maybe you can label it as promiscuous. But, I think it's just a different way of experiencing sexuality. I think that most

Caribbean people show their sexuality more. And it has to do with of course, the climate in the country of origin. I mean, it's hot. So of course you wear skimpy outfits and of course, your body becomes more important to take care of because that is what people see. I think it's also especially in Caribbean culture, it's more open, like talking slackness is something that people just do, you know? Maybe for instance in Dutch culture, it's not necessarily something you would really talk about. But, I don't think that Dutch people are less promiscuous. But, black people don't hide it.

When I look at sexuality, yeah, it's still that black women are easy. They think very lightly about having children. They're loud. They're noisy. They're less intelligent. A big mouth. They're lazy. Let's see, not very responsible people. They have short term thinking, so they really don't think on the future. Things like saving up and those things. You know stereotypes always have a core of truth to it. It's just that it is overly exaggerated and generalized. That's what makes it an unfair thing.

**Some of Saliyah's thoughts about her internal conflict with stereotypes:**

It actually really started when I went to high school because here in Holland, you have to do a test when you're about eleven or twelve. And that determines already if you have chances to go to college or to University. And me being a Black, Asian girl or Asian, Black girl, however you want to see it, from Bijlmer, already gave me a stigma. And when I got my advice, I had the highest advice. I actually went to a school where they teach Latin and Greek. You are really being prepped for University....So, my friends, my peers, didn't really appreciate the fact that I was gonna go to a higher education level. And they were telling me that I was acting white. I was feeling better than they were. I felt too good to live in Bijlmer and I was going to end up being a stuck-up whatever, you know?

So, they kind of pushed me out of the community. And when I went to the school, it was exclusively white. And all the black children that were there kind of gave up their identity as being black or being colored. They just wanted to conform to the white idea. And to me, they were like "Oh! You're from Bijlmer and you're Black too. Oh yeah, you're probably some loose check and you're probably just some lucky shot that you came to this school because you can't be as smart. And if you are, then you're an exception" you know, like an exception to the rule. So, I was actually in a situation where people were doubting my academic capabilities. The way I looked was linked to certain types of behavior. They would throw parties where everybody would be drinking and one of them would ask me to come do bobbling...It's like some kind of twerking thing. They would expect me to do that and like I would bring the sexual element. That's what they would expect from me. I totally felt violated. Also, deeper that "Yeah, there's no such thing as a black, smart girl" you know?

And that was hard for me. And at the same time, people that I was hanging out with here, [in the Bijlmer] already were, at a very young age, sexually active. And they started to act in a certain way and would dress in a certain way, which was also more sexual. And the fact that I didn't do that, I was kind of ridiculed. They also said it was from me acting white. Apparently, they themselves also think that sexual behavior is related to the color of your skin. So, they are playing the race card the whole time...It's very double, yeah. And that was a huge issue for me

because it was hard for me to relate, you know?...People saw the color of my skin and they wanted me to act black...So, that is something actually I am still struggling with...I couldn't fall back on my Indonesian culture or my Surinamese culture cause I didn't have anybody to teach me. I didn't want to be too much associated with Dutch culture, so I started focusing more on American culture. American black culture, so yeah. That became my sort of identity.

*\*Saliyah felt sources of exclusion in both the black and white communities because she was stereotypically "not black enough" to be accepted. Her relatively high level of intellect and lower display of her sexuality are not expected of a black person. She highlights how stereotypes affect race relations; and how internalized racism and policing sustain a racist society, where it is harder for a black individual to transcend the stereotype.*

**Some of Mayaah's comments to the main question(s):**

No, I don't agree with that because everyone on the planet be hoppin. We are just on the camera or maybe because we do it openly, maybe that is the difference. Maybe because the camera is clearly focused on us...maybe because we [black people] are very interesting and we have this history of like "The Blacks did it." So I am not really surprised...Everyone is doing it. Just because you see a certain thing on TV, does not mean that that is the entire story or that is the actual story. It's what people want you to know or want you to see.

Because it is a good story and people need to point a finger. People need to point a finger because... Racism still exists, it is just modern racism and slavery. I truly believe that, and it is not for everyone cause you truly have good and bad in all cultures. We are very different because we come from the bush, we don't come from the bricks or come from the stone or city. We have a different skin color, we have a different language, we have different interests, of course we are interesting. I think this goes not only for black cultures, but any culture basically, it just depends on location. For instance, in my country Suriname, white people are fascinating.

The movie, "Alleen Maar Nette Mensen", definitely take it with a grain of salt and how the races blend and interact together. Good movie to watch, and define what it is going on in Holland...the point they tried to make is that there are stereotypes in all cultures...because there is a stereotype doesn't mean you know the person. Just because you are black, doesn't mean you don't have an education. And just because you are white, doesn't mean you are smart. Look beyond the layers, that is the message. We are scared of what we don't know, whether that is a human with a different color or a knock on the door when you are the last person on the planet. What you don't know, you push away...everyone deserves a chance. You shouldn't define a person by their nation. Black people fucking around and making babies and yes, you do have a group that does that, but you have them in white society too. You have those groups and it is not color based. Just because you have a period where black babies are born every five minutes, so you just keep your lens focused on that when there are a hundred of different things going on in the world that are way worse.

You choose to keep your lens focused on that. Really?! Why keep the lens focused on the teen moms when you can film the parents or the environment or the actual source. Why film the scandal? Entertainment, it is nice, we need to point a finger. If we really cared about each other,

we would use all this publicity and say “Where is the source?” but it is so entertaining though, so people assume, it is human nature.

*\*Similar to Crisha and Akosua, Mayaah alludes to the fact of how black people’s sexuality is constantly under scrutiny and surveillance by mainstream society and the media, due to our “hypersexualized” difference---this difference, which is of course, socially constructed and exploitingly frames us as “derivative” or “other.” Mayaah indicates that the racism of today is nevertheless normalized in the Netherlands; and in the form of stereotypes, assumptions, ignorance or the implicit marginalization of issues surrounding people of color. Instead of constructing the issue as a spectacle for entertainment, our society and institutions need to utilize their agency and resources actively to not only become aware of the ‘real’ source of the problem, but also to reexamine their methods and policies, in order to disrupt the normalization and implicit traces of racism.*

**Some of Livingston’s remarks to the main question(s):**

When I hear something like that, I get mad sometimes because what the media shows you what they want you to see, because I know a lot of Caucasian people that fucks around, fucks around, when I say fuck it’s really fuck in the streets, parks, everything, and their Caucasian. But, they don’t wanna show that because yeah you wanna have a group that they can take on, and what a better group is the group that come from another country, so yeah. You need to live in it, to see it. Everybody knows, don’t believe what you see on the TV because that’s not the real life...sometimes I write to it and say, you’re talking bullshit, you really wanna know how it works, come here...If that what you want to show us, do it, but you won’t influence me.

I need to say, now that everybody have internet on their phone, what I can't deny is that black people, when they have ass, they need to show it and dance on the music. And that’s what the media will take and say “That’s what all black women does.” But, I will say that it is not a shame that a women can shake her ass, I would say do it! Not everybody likes it, but don't do it too much because you making your own name about it. If it’s something you like to do, do it! But don't let people think that you're the girl with a big ass that can dance. Be a girl with a big ass with a career, with a job that can support you and your family. Make a better name of yourself. Don’t do things for attention. You want attention make sure you’re an outstanding person, so when they wanna put you down they have no room to do it, then they need to say “Oh, she has a big ass but she also has a good job.” When they see another group, how you say, the other group, I don't know how you call them, Moroccans, they wanna pick on them also. When they see a light skinned person, only they assume it’s that person. Yeah, but when they find out if it’s a Dutch person, it’s not on the TV anymore. Yeah, Holland is a great country but it has it’s illness in it.

*\*Livinston’s remarks are very similar to Crisha, Akosua, and Mayaah, where they highlight that the media perpetuates these stereotypes surrounding people of color and makes them a spectacle for entertainment. For Dutch-born white people, this is not the case, and the media chooses to withhold the story instead of overreporting it in order to maintain this dichotomy that black people are associated to what’s bad, while white people are associated to what’s good.*

**Some of Kelsey's response regarding her process to negotiate her identity as a young mother within her family and community:**

I was twenty. And my mother was like very furious. (K laughs)

The family was like "You are twenty years old!" Everybody is putting you down, talking to you like, and everyone is knocking you down. You have the feeling like "Oh my God! I'm pregnant." And nobody is like "Oh, how do you feel?" That was the beginning and I just felt like I made a terrible mistake...But then, I was looking at myself because I'm positive, eh. I was looking to myself and I was looking at my boyfriend and we were talking about it. I know the way I got pregnant. It wasn't like I laid down and was like "Let's have a child" because I had a future. I know what I wanted to do. But now, I was pregnant so what I'm gonna do? I was looking at my mother and I was like two months pregnant. I looked at my mother and was like "If I'm gonna watch you and letting you talk to me like that because I'm pregnant, I must find a way to pull myself out of the negativity," you know...So, I left her. I went to my big sister and for a month, I stayed there and talked to myself and talked to my boyfriend and like "How we gonna do this? Can we do this?" And we talked about it and then we made a choice that we are gonna keep child, because it was my child. It was my responsibility and I wanted it. Maybe it was meant to be in this way, you know? So, when I was three months pregnant, I went home and I looked at my mother and say "I'm keep my child, I'm going to school, I'm going to work, and I'm going to do what I wanna do." And the family was like "Oh, okay." And I was like "I'm living my life."

Yeah, because you have many black children, eighteen years, and I do have a little sister, she was eighteen when she was pregnant. And I cried, I cried, I cried. I was like "Why? At such a young age? I know how it is to be young and pregnant. Why?" But, she lost her baby...And I talked to her and I was like "Maybe this is your chance," when she lost the baby. "Maybe this is something you needed to learn, you needed to know." You know pregnancy is a joy. And you have to enjoy your pregnancy because it is a gift, you know? It is a gift. But, children can't have children. So, that's what I tried to teach her because she has also friends that age with pregnancies. Three friends of her were pregnant at sixteen or seventeen, and they walked out of the house, you know. And they stay with their boyfriend or they stay with friends because they are not getting the support at home...And children like that, how can they raise their own children if they are not supported by their own family. So, yeah. And when my mother yelled at my sister, I was there; and I yelled at my mother and told my mother "It's your fault that she is pregnant at the age of eighteen because you don't communicate. If you did communicate with her, and with us, things would be different."

She (mother) didn't change. She stopped and she looked at me. She knows I'm right. But, she wouldn't admit it. She won't admit it. She was like "I didn't send her." And I'm like "You didn't send her with words, but you did send her in a way because you don't communicate."

*\*Kelsey's story highlights how there is more to the story than what meets the eye. Her family is an example of how the politics of silence can break a family.*

**Theme #6: Perspective of the Disparity in Sexual Statistics and Cultural Sensitivity**

*\*The focus of this theme is to emphasize my interviewees' erotic knowledges and experiences surrounding their perspective as to why there is a disparity in sexual statistics. With this in mind, I want readers to observe the level of consistency in outlook between my Dutch Afro-Caribbean mothers and daughters and sexual health professionals of mainstream organizations in the next chapter. Observe what factors were emphasized the most? What was missing? And what needs to be changed? In turn, these questions should give insight into the degree of cultural sensitivity of mainstream, sexual health programs are in the Netherlands.*

*Moreover, this theme is also intended to subvert the mainstream, hypersexualized ideology that conscious, unsafe sex and promiscuity of these women are the main contributors to the disparity in sexual statistics. Instead, there are other underlying factors, which need to be taken into consideration. I consciously chose not to make brief points of analysis in this theme, since I believe my interviewees' responses should be received at face value.*

**Crystal: According to sexual health researchers, Surinamese girls comprise five times more teen pregnancies than native, Dutch girls. Moreover, in regards to STIs, of all new cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis in 2003, 12%, 21% and 12% respectively were women from Netherlands Antilles and Suriname, while they represent only 3% of the general Dutch population. When hearing these statistics, how does it make you feel? What do you think contributes to this difference?**

**Some of Elizabeth's reaction to the sexual statistics:**

It makes me feel very sad. It has a lot to do with the culture and how Dutch girls are raised and how women from the Netherlands Antilles and Black girls are raised. The Dutch are raised that if a girl has a boyfriend at 13 years, the mother goes out and buys the pill, and gives you the pill, and give the condom to the boy and the girl. They speak very open about sexuality because Holland is very open. But, in the Caribbean, it is a taboo and women have to obey the man; and the macho culture is still dominant. In the upward spiral, Caribbean women do not take this anymore. But, you have a difference between generations. The younger generation jumps in the car not knowing who the man is. But that is the gap that I've been telling you about between the generations, and now it is going back where the partners stay together.

**Dialogue between Elizabeth and Crystal surrounding the degree of cultural sensitivity within Dutch, mainstream sexual health programs:**

**C:** And do you think that there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of SOAs and teenage pregnancy in your community? And do you think anything needs to change?

**E:** Here in Holland there is a lot. There are all kinds of information so if you get pregnant as a teenage girl, you choose for it. And I don't think anything needs to change because there is a lot of information. In Holland, there is a lot of opportunities.



**C:** If you think the information and services are out there, why do you think the statistics are not lower for these women?

**E:** I think it is the neglecting of the people themselves. I think it is their choices. They choose to get a baby with this man because they want to stay with the man. They think that if I have the baby, he will stay.

**Some of Cheryl Lynn's reaction to the sexual statistics:**

I'm not shocked. (Laugh) People these days don't respect their partner that they are sleeping with. I don't think it's the woman. I think it is more of the man that they don't care about making you sick, they only care about having sex with you. You get a pill at the doctor and then you are cured. Whatever. But they don't think like "Hey! You can give me HIV." They don't see it like that. They see it like we will get a pill and it's over...If you are having sex around without a condom, the results won't lie.

Also, white people are raised different. White people here are raised like you go to school, then you get married, after that, you have children. When you are 18, you find your own house so you can start to live on your own. They prepare their children more on things than black people. Yeah, everybody has dreams but Dutch people make a plan for their life, and black people have a dream and they don't plan it. You have to have the discipline to reach your goal and I think white people have that more than black people. Because of that, they are looking at life in another way. So, when a white girl gets a white boyfriend, and sometimes she gets a black boyfriend (Both Laugh). But when a white girl gets a white boyfriend, most of the time, they end up married and with children, like the first boyfriend they have. But black people, most of the times have to pass five or six guys before they are really happy, and white people most of the times are already ready in their first relationship, so they don't need all that sex and they don't need [to encounter] all those people that are sick, that want to have sex with them...white people talk to their children about sex in a more open way than black people do.

Like me and my mom, we just tight. I can tell her everything and ask her a question. But other black girls are like "How in the fuck am I going to tell my mom that I had sex or how am I going to ask my mom for advice?" You are scared of your mother and white people don't really have that taboo. I think they are more open about it.

**Cheryl Lynn's opinions that if there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of SOAs and teenage pregnancy in her community:**

Yeah, there is enough information and services. We are in Holland. Everybody talks about sex. Everybody knows about sex. Everybody knows about condoms. Everybody knows about the sickness. Everybody knows about everything, but I think it's your own choice with what you do with it...No, I wouldn't make any changes, I think there is enough information. But sometimes I get mad because there are things when you went to school or went to the doctor, they told you a lot of things that you are supposed to know right now, and then after a while, you are scared. For example, "I had sex with a boy without a condom, now I'm scared." Okay, but you knew about

this, why are you scared now? Why didn't you think about it before? It doesn't make sense really because you make your own decisions and when you make the wrong one, it's your own call.

**Some of Sandie Power's reaction to the sexual statistics:**

The black people don't like to talk about sex with children, the ones from my generation...and I know for sure the white one, they talk a lot with children, for them its normal...and I think they [black people] don't want to integrate into some communities. Like I live in Holland, but I stay in my mind like a Dominican? No. What I do, I take what's good from Holland, I give to my children. What I find it too much, like having sex at a young age, I don't give to them. I don't tell them they don't have to, but it's better not to...Even their father tell them "You want a condom?" and we joke...I find the way that we do it funny and the child get a bit of curiosity. We are so open with them... I think that the miscommunication between child and parents and the taboo, it's something that cannot be. I think that is a very big reason why.

**Sandie Power's opinions that if there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of SOAs and teenage pregnancy in her community:**

Yeah, I think there is enough. But, I think they have to get more information to work out the contacts from the mother, between child and parent. They have to try to get more in the Dutch community so they can leave the taboo on the side, and they can be talking more sex with the children...But, I remember they have [it] here already. But, the parents they don't like to come. They have workshops about sexuality, they have workshops about educating child. But I think sometime they [the parents] think the child is gonna be too much into sex. But lack of learning they will do it. They will do it without knowing they can get a sick and that they can get a baby when they do sex.

**Some of Miss Soldier's reaction to the sexual statistics:**

It makes me sad and because of the taboo, I think we love more sex, we colored folk. And but why most of our women become pregnant at early age or a contact with HIV? I don't know. I don't got the right answer, you know. It's a big question, I think we need to use our brains and not just, we been through a lot with slavery...So, like we're not important like the white folks. That's how many of our colored folks treat ourselves and each other. You know like even fights. We colored folks, we kill each other for what?! We shoot each other for what?! Instead of cooperate, stay strong, grow together, and one day we can fight against other ones, but no, we kill each other. It all has to do with slavery. I'm for sure about that subject because I did my study and have the scars. And you know, that's what the white folks taught us, you know, what you learn in school...Most white folks raise their children together more than our colored folks. And they, the children gonna go to school. They have their papers. They have their car on time. They have their home, their place on time. You know, everything is on time. But, we got to struggle like I don't know, because they keep us at that level, just like that. The system, the big people, because slavery still lives, but it's modern...they like to keep us down. And of course, when we go to school, we can get those papers, what the white folks get. It's just a big game. It still lives...That's why I said, "Fuck the system!"

Like the white folks are more worth than us, you know, they're more, but I refuse to believe that because I know what I worth, and I'm worth a lot. Yeah. I love myself a lot. Back in the days, I was little, I said, " Oh! I love myself." And I love myself because my parents didn't love me the way they supposed to love me, so I love myself more than basic person, I think...And I love my color. I love my people because of what we've been through, ancestors, and what we still go through every day, every minute, twenty-four seven. So, I love us. I love you as my sister. Even I only know you for two hours, but I love my people. And it's sad that in a heterosexual relationship, I cry for my black brothers, why they behave themselves like that. You know why? We play the game of the white folks. I can cry about that because I'm aware of it all and I refuse to play their game. I just live and just respect me for who I am. God made different persons, you know, so just love each other and be respectful to each other, but not like they show us to be.

Don't play the white man's game, please...So many negative things and the colored folks, it's a shame because it's not our fault, but we really have to wake up. Soldier yourself up. Know who you are.

**Miss Soldier's opinions that if there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of SOAs and teenage pregnancy in her community:**

Enough in the Bijlmer? No. They said there are projects, you know, to help young ladies. But, you know, there's not enough money to help them the way we supposed to help them. And if there's money, it's gonna go in the pocket of the person who started the project. They steal money. There's not enough here...We have to do for ourselves, we have to communicate better, learn better, how to protect yourself and still have sex, but know with who, and when, and how.

...So they don't work with they're heart. You do something, you do it with your heart and make sure the goal you wanna reach, you will reach. But, it's all about money...if I could make a change I would bring generations like a grandma, a momma, and a daughter, maybe a granddaughter with it, and tell them, each of them the experience of life and sex, you know. And I would let people, colored people with HIV live and tell their story to healthy people about how they live. They see it with their own eyes. They can smell it with their own nose, you know, when you taste it on your own mouth, and you know the taste, you know exactly how to handle, you see, that's what I believe in. Make it big, you know, like a real project, put your heart in it and go out into the community. And do what you gotta do, even if it costs a lot of money.

... [The lesson to teach is] Only give your body when you're comfortable with it, when you got the need to it, but not because you think " Oh! He likes me, and I just give it away because he want to."

And to guys, you know, when they heard the story of the grandma, the mamma and children, so they see that a woman is a woman, and you need to respect that, and treat her like a diamond, because when there's a scratch on her diamond, you know, it's worth less...So, I would separate guys and girls, but after teaching, bring it together. And talk with what I said with generations and with sick people or healthy people, how they live, show them their lifestyles, show them what you can or can't do. Taste it with their own mouth and it will be okay. But, just go into it. It's not a one week ting (*thing*) or one day thing or just talk for half an hour, No! Just be in it

until you think, "Ah! I did something because I can reach them. I've reached them. They listening. They ask me questions." When people start asking questions about the knowledge you've been passed them, then they're open and they listen to you. And then you can see they want to make a change because that's why they going to ask questions.

**Some of Saliyah's reaction to the sexual statistics:**

I feel sad when I hear it because we've been here for many generations, and to see that this is still such a big problem... I am very concerned about the future of generations...I think it still has to do with shame culture with Caribbean or Black communities. Although, I think that right now it's gradually changing. But, I think that it's still hard for black teenagers to talk about sex. They don't really make use of the sources that are there. They would quickly take information from their peers, which doesn't always have to be correct, than to Google it or go to the library. Like do your own research. Yeah, that means that there is still a lot of knowledge missing. They taught them to use condoms in the wrong way, if they even use them. If they don't use it, it's maybe because they're afraid to dive in, maybe they feel ashamed that everybody would see them buying it. Also, like I already said, girls tend to please their man and if the man says "Aaw Baby, it feels better without it" Blah. Blah. Blah. Then, they're quicker to say "Okay" and you will just let it slide...and religion too [is a contributor]...You still get the message that, as a woman, you have to be prude and you cannot be visible in a sexual way.

**Saliyah's opinions that if there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of SOAs and teenage pregnancy in her community:**

I think that now there is enough information and a lot of campaigns. There are actually community centers, especially for people from the Bijlmer that have questions about sex. So, the means are there, but I don't think that they are reaching their target group in an efficient way. I think the Black community needs a different approach...They have to start with the younger people because the younger you start, the more normal it becomes to talk about these issues, to talk about sex, to talk about feelings, and to break the taboo. So, I think that it will be good to make sure people can also recognize themselves in the educators. So, not just older white people that tell you what to do, but people of all different ages with different backgrounds. Maybe not always so formal, but always well-informed...And once ago, I saw a van at a really big shopping center here in Bijlmer...and it said something like "Girls Spot" and there were young girls, like our age, were in there looking nice, looking hip, and approachable to young people. This van was a spot for all girls who want to chat, who want to talk, who want to share secrets, you know? So, it was very inviting. The van was colorful and I actually saw girls walking in and out. They were sitting and chatting with the girls. I think they were doing their nails, so it was like they were really focused on their particular target group. Young girls who are insecure and who might not address issues about sex directly, but they do have questions about it, you need to make them feel comfortable by also offering them something else like doing their nails or having tea and just chit chat with them. So I thought that was really good.

And for men, they had this group, I think it had to do with absent fathers. They had young, black role models, like celebrities around this area or even national celebrities, would talk about their role as parents. So, it's like rappers that also have children, who are young and are maybe like in

their twenties, but are successful and are good fathers. They were on a campaign and they had these evenings where all the guys can get together and they just invite people from the community to talk to them. And they address issues like fatherhood, teenage pregnancies, intimacy, communication with your partner. So they tried to do it in different ways. I think that is effective because guys don't wanna talk with women in the room, they wanna talk with guys, you know? Guys like them saying it.

I think there are a lot of cultural festivals organized here in Bijlmer...And I see that it is also a good way to attract people because they are already in an environment that they like and they are already made enthusiastic by music, by the scenery, by the vibe that they're feeling, and if you can introduce them to something that is important for them to know, especially sex education, they're more open to it. So, I think it should just be more integrated to the everyday activities than to only frame it as just sex education or issues that deal with sex and are a problem. If you keep on approaching it as a problem, you will create a problem. But, if you approach it in a positive way and a part of daily life, especially when you show the connections that it has with every other aspect of life, then it becomes interesting to people. They will be more open to discuss it. Yeah.

**Some of Maayah's reaction to the sexual statistics:**

I think Surinamese people, we have landed in a spiral of repeating the same behavior; and not every Surinamese family in this country is to the point that they can educate themselves. A lot of parents teach their children what they have been taught even though they know it's not correct...White people on the other hand give their kids a lot of freedom, and in the black culture, we restrict our kids a lot because we are overprotective. And that is good because you care, but because you give your kids a certain freedom doesn't mean you don't care. It just means that you are taking away the interesting fact of something that they cannot do...parents keep saying "You can't do it," children are more likely to do it when you are not around which is more dangerous. Because black girls are being held so strictly, we, black people, have passion and feistiness in us. We don't like to bow down whether it is to a parent, to a man, to a teacher, that's also in our genes...So obviously we are going to break out and obviously you don't know what you are doing. So your parents might sit down with you when you have a job interview and role-play, but how come you can't do that with relationships or sex. How come we don't have that? It is actually more sad for the girl not knowing what situation she is getting into because sex is serious. She is punished for the information that was not given to her by her parents. I think that is a result of old fashioned black families; and Holland is a free country and we can do whatever the fuck we want. I think the mixture of old-fashioned black families and too much freedom at once is the cause of that. For white people, freedom is not interesting, because they already have it.

**Mayaah's opinions that if there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of SOAs and teenage pregnancy in her community:**

I think there is enough info in the community. The source is at home. I think the community definitely does enough. The opportunity is there, it depends on if you are going to attend and use the information...To make a change, I don't think that they [sexual health programs] should focus

on the sex necessarily, but the steps before that. That is what's really lacking... For example, the difference between a good man and a bad man...pick your partners wisely. That information is totally not there. If you want to give good info to the black community, we need to be tricked, as in we need to go to some public event that is all about dancing and stuff, and they just squeeze another program in there...but in a funny kind of way, because we love comedy and it needs to be a good balance between funny and serious, so the message is actually getting there. Or a play because that way it will slowly start reaching. A lot of people in the black community didn't have a father. They don't know what a daddy is, especially for the girls, you can't really blame these children because the girls don't know how a man is supposed to treat them because they exactly didn't have a father figure. And you can't blame these boys as well because they didn't have a father and that is supposed to teach them how to be a man. So that is what is missing, that conversation...I feel bad for someone when they don't know. You can't punish someone for something they don't know...so I think the problem is specifically not sex, because sex is thrown in a girl's face everywhere today...the conversation in how you should be treated, that is what is missing. A chain that needs to be broken is when a girl feels uncomfortable around a good guy because it is foreign to what they know.

### **Some of Livingston's reaction to the sexual statistics:**

Holland is a small country, so I think they are growing more people from a different country than Holland, so there are more people that are not Dutch here in Holland than actual Dutch people, like we are very integrated here, so the percentage is higher than the actual Dutch person that lives here, you know.

Because I already told you that I know a lot of Dutch people, men and women, they have done the same things that black people does and worse, so the statistics doesn't bother me a lot. As I told you, the Dutch wanna show you, what they wanna show you. If they interviewed 100 Dutch people and a 100 Suriname people, then I would believe that. But not them interview 600 Surinamese people and 400 Dutch people, that's not even...See! Because you already then have two cultures versus one, it's not equal. You know what I mean? So, if you do Surinaams and Dutch, now that is something I would believe in. There are more teenage moms in Suriname culture, that's because, we in our culture, you don't just do an abortion, maybe because of influence of religion compared to most Dutch people in Holland who don't believe. Also, because, Dutch people are more focused on the working part, they forget to be human sometimes. The priorities are different...the child will feel ashamed. That is what I think needs to be stopped because as the child is in the position to ask the mother, and talk with the mother or father, then it would stop. A child doesn't want to be a shame for his mom or dad...They would keep it a secret. I think that's the problem. You need to have people around you that you can trust, and talk about everything cause if you cannot talk about it, you will stay with the problem and you cannot fix it. That's what I think...You need someone to feel safe with even though you are doing something that's not right...[Also] They [the media] want to pick on the other culture. That's also what I think with the sexuality in Holland is that they only show you the bad things. They don't show you the good things, like when a teenage girl get pregnant in the Surinamese community and she can't support the child, it's always ... but the rest of the family make sure the child has everything for its needs. That is not what they show. They only show "Oh, another teenage woman or girl pregnant!" Because maybe that child has been tricked by a boy and didn't know better.

**Livington's opinions that if there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of SOAs and teenage pregnancy in her community:**

No. The government they do have programs where they are trying to make it more accessible, but it's just the way they are going about it is not the best with it being culturally sensitive. And the media is just making it worse...like the government tries to make sure that everybody gets the same education, but they send it to the school as a package, but the school can say, I want it or I don't want it. That's what I mean is they trying, but there are people behind the scenes that say "No."

If I was to make a change, it is to make contact with the parents, my generation, their parents. They need to find contact with their parents, like my mom, my auntie, etc. Of course they are stuck with these things they have learned from their parents, because a child will accept things from their parents, that is what I think. They don't need to focus only on the child, but also their parents. It is now, I've learned, lucky for me, I've learned it the right way, but I have friends who might not have learned it the right way. And even if they know it or they don't know it, they will teach their child a little bit of what they have been taught from their parents. What I'm saying is that they need to contact the child and the parent. They need to bring the parent in the project about sexuality...And they need to find a way to combine those cultures with the Holland culture and their own culture, otherwise it's not gonna work.

**Dialogue between Kelsey and Crystal in regards to her reaction about the sexual statistics:**

Wow! I got chills right now. Maybe the statistics are so high for us because we go to the doctor, and it's so high cause they know they have sex with different mens, and I don't know why, but the men are always cheating. So, that's why the girls are testing themselves and that's why maybe their statistics are higher than white females. Wow! I don't know how to answer this because it's a huge difference...and I don't know why, but they always pointing at us. It's always about that race, that race, that race.

**C:** Really, you feel like it's that way here?

**K:** Yes! I do have that feeling. Also, when it comes to pregnancies. Yes, at an early age, we get pregnant. But, I know many, many white people that get pregnant, but they do an abortion. And, we, the black community, we don't have abortions. So, yes the pregnancies, but what about the abortions?

**C:** And specifically with culture, do you think culture at all has something to do with this difference? So, a difference in cultures between the white culture and the black culture?

**K:** I do think so, because in the white culture, I think the communication is better than in the black culture. I have to admit because it's like a taboo in the black culture. But what I hope, that my generation with kids, can teach their kids that it's good to talk about sex. And not only about sex, but it's good to communicate about everything, because our parents didn't.

**Dialogue between Kelsey and Crystal that if there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of SOAs and teenage pregnancy in her community:**

**C:** Do you think that there is enough information and services surrounding the prevention of teen pregnancy and STIs in your community?

**K:** Maybe there is, but I don't know because if I have to speak about myself, if I want to know something, I don't look at our black community, I look further than that.

**C:** And what do you mean by further?

**K:** Also look in the white community. (Both laugh)

**C:** And do you feel like the information that's given to the black community is culturally sensitive or beneficial to the black community here?

**K:** I can't answer that because I don't know and I never went to an event like that in the community. If I want to know something, I just go to the doctor, internet, things like that. And maybe there are things in our community who try to explain the children how to protect yourself. I know there are events like that, but I hope they advise each other so the statistics can be lower. But, I don't know if they get the white information, and if it helps in a way.

**C:** And when you think about the programs, with them being beneficial, and you said you didn't know whether or not, is there anything you would change regarding sex education and services?

**K:** Books in school. They need books that explain. Let it begin at a young age...I don't know how, but they need to explain it in steps, you know? From lower school to middle school, but in a way the children can understand, know about it, and don't be afraid to ask questions, because that's where it begin...if you talk to them at a young age and they learn about it also at school, because school is open, everybody talk about the same thing, then it will be...more comfortable... And not comfortable to do it at a young age, but comfortable in a way so when you want to know something that you can ask and be comfortable asking about it.



## CULTURAL SENSITIVITY, IS IT PRESENT? SEXUAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS SPEAK OUT

Having a discourse on cultural sensitivity within mainstream, Dutch sexual health programs contradicts the Netherlands' idealized reputation of being very tolerant and liberal. In other words, this chapter will confront probable implicit racism within these mainstream institutions. With this in mind, Madelief Bertens highlighted that there is a lack in effective STI/HIV prevention interventions targeting Afro-Surinamese and Dutch Antillean populations in Holland. The programs are not:

“...very effective in motivating women of Afro-Surinamese and Dutch Antillean descent to protect themselves against sexual risks and decreasing sexual risk taking....[Also] a report on best practices confirmed that many STI/HIV prevention interventions targeting ethnic minorities in the Netherlands are not systematically planned or sufficiently structured. They conclude that intervention practices need improvement and recommend comprehensive needs assessments, clear formulation of project goals, including a theoretical basis, involvement of the priority group and complete evaluations” (2008:13).

Given this context on the issue of creating an effective program, the level of cultural sensitivity is an important factor for a program intervention to achieve a specific goal amongst the target group. Furthermore, as the reader, you may wonder, what do I mean by the term ‘cultural sensitivity’? Bertens referenced Resnicow and colleagues affirming that cultural-sensitive interventions are interventions that involve “...ethnic/cultural characteristics, experience, norms, values, behavioral patterns and beliefs of a priority population as well as relevant historical, environmental, and social forces...in the design, delivery, and evaluation” (2008: 23). In essence, where do Dutch Afro-Caribbean women stand, in terms of their

importance when planning these interventions? And are these programs creating interventions that are culturally sensitive to them?

In order for me to gain insight on my research question even further, I interviewed two sexual health professionals. My secondary participants included:

*Milleke de Neef*

Milleke is a senior consultant and researcher at Rutgers WPF, the country's national reproductive and sexual health organization. She has been engaged with this establishment for approximately twenty years. Milleke mainly conducts qualitative research on the areas of contraception, unintended pregnancies and ethnic minorities in sexual health. Being with a national organization, she mainly consults with other professionals and intermediaries, such as city representatives from the Municipal Health Services (GGD) who work with more specific and local populations. The interview was conducted in Milleke's office on November 27, 2012 at Rutgers WPF headquarters in Utrecht.

*Juan Walter*

Juan is a Public Health Educator at the Municipal Health Services (GGD) in Amsterdam. He has been engaged with this establishment for almost twenty years. Juan was born in Curacao and he presently lives in Amsterdam. His focus group that he supports and collaborates with is basically all immigrant groups in Amsterdam, which includes but is not limited to Antilleans, Surinamese and Moroccans. Correspondingly, his focus group particularly includes youth, adults, community centers, religious-based organizations and community based organizations. The interview was conducted in Juan's office on November 20, 2012 at the Municipal Health Services in Amsterdam.

Given this contextual description, I have analyzed my interview experiences with the Milleke and Juan separately. As stated before, I have obtained their professional opinion about the reasons behind the disparity with teen pregnancies and STIs. Furthermore, I asked questions regarding the degree of cultural sensitivity in sex education and reproductive health services to Dutch Afro-Caribbean women; and also inquired about what current approaches are being made to tailor to the needs of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women to lower their high sexual statistics with STIs and teen pregnancies.

### **Interview #1:Milleke**

Due to Milleke's hectic schedule, I felt very appreciative to have an interview and be squeezed into her agenda. As requested by Milleke, I sent her my interview questions one week prior to our meeting for her comfort. Despite a minor language barrier, I must acknowledge that Milleke is a wealth of knowledge and facts. Considering her job position and responsibilities, I should have expected this from a professional sexual health researcher. Throughout our interview, she showed me an innumerable amount of intervention materials such as brochures, websites, and even board games.

At the beginning of our interview, I asked Milleke to explain her everyday tasks and work process as a researcher, and she responded stating:

Before you create anything, you have to make a good analysis of your group and the participation of your group is very important ...We develop interventions, but we need research before we do anything; and you also need people from the target group to focus on their wishes and limits...Sometimes I do focus groups for that and I talk with the target group... and I sometimes organize network meetings and we did a project about gender...There was research done where gender wasn't taken into account in some sexual health programs. Gender relations is very

important to take into account with interventions, especially for ethnic minority groups (Milleke 2012).

After hearing Milleke's response, she highlighted two main points that contribute toward a culturally sensitive program. The first point is to conduct research to understand the social context, the needs, and limits of your target group. The second point was allowing the target group to get involved in the research. With this in mind, I wish I had asked a follow up question to gain clarification on the target group's level of involvement----whether if they were only consulted at the beginning of the research process, so the professionals could hear their concerns; or if the target group was involved throughout the entire intervention process, which is a more culturally sensitive approach. Furthermore, she acknowledged the importance of gender relations within the frame of ethnic minority groups, which I agree is an influential, underlying factor that is often overlooked.

Afterward, to analyze the consistency level of Milleke's perspective as a sexual health professional relative to my mother and daughter interviewees, I presented her with the same sexual statistics I addressed in theme six with the primary interviewees. I asked what she thought were the contributing factors to this disparity in STIs and teen pregnancies between Dutch Afro-Caribbean women and Dutch-born white, women. From my understanding, she emphasized the following determinants: Relatively, Dutch Afro-Caribbean teenage girls have a lack of direction or a lack of long-term goals in life. There is the lack of openness to communicate about sexuality in the home. In addition, some girls perceive a child to be their goal or aim in life. Traditional gender roles also play a factor; and the lack of adequate sexual education, which was more aimed at the technical explanation of sexuality and had less focus on communication skills. In light of these factors being very similar to what my primary interviewees mentioned,

Milleke also thought of Madelief Bertens “responsibility versus respectability” concept, and its connection with hindering safe-sex negotiation skills due to emotional dependency.

With the intention to lower the sexual statistics, Milleke mentioned a board game called ‘Gender Boxes’ that Rutgers WPF had teenage mothers play with in order to promote dialogue on gender roles within the community. She further elaborated:

We talk about what they thought were the most important issues in their community. What are the most important issues amongst men and women? The responses we receive... it is very important for a man to be brave, have money, take initiative; and a woman has to be more focused on the household, etc....we try to tackle those stereotypes and ask why don't you come outside of your box, and you try to make clear what are those reasons that you stay within the box with the way you behave as a man or woman and how can this connect to sexual risks and can we tackle the sexual risks? Do you, yourself, think you can tackle the sexual risks, what would be the benefit for you as a man or woman, and the whole community? (Milleke 2012)

Throughout our interview, Milleke really stressed the importance of deconstructing and reconfiguring gender roles, which is very essential to the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community, since the double standard in sexual behavior is prevalent. Equally important, Milleke also mentioned another prominent, culturally sensitive project called ‘Uma Tori’. Uma Tori is an intervention program where mainly a small group of Surinamese and Antillean women would gather together to have interactive conversations, sometimes in their native language of Sranan Tongo and Papaminto respectively, and share stories. The program focuses on “risk perception and sensitization, negotiation and communication skills building, with an emphasis on sexual assertiveness, power inequalities and gender related influences” (Bertens 2008:77). Uma Tori has taken advantage of the focus group’s communal nature, and has utilized the strong female

kinship networks within the Dutch Afro-Caribbean community in order to educate and to empower women. This intervention program has proved to be very successful and effective, especially with increasing the use of risk reduction strategies and safe-sex negotiation skills (Bertens 2008).

Nevertheless, towards the end of our interview, Milleke mentioned certain aspects of Rutgers WPF that I felt needed improvement in cultural sensitivity. To provide an example, she indicated that a government policy was implemented where Dutch sexual health materials can only be translated into English and French. Milleke further explains this policy affirming:

This information is only disbursed in Holland...You are here in Holland, so you have to try to learn Dutch. It makes people speak Dutch. The government said we are not going to translate it into all these languages. But now things are changing a little, where they sometimes will allow the translation of information in the [target] ethnic minorities language, but it is not very easy to do that and also have the funds for it (Milleke 2012).

I recognize that the Netherlands is a country comprised of many nationalities, and it possibly seems more feasible financially to mainstream all educational materials. Be that as it may, if a sexual health program wants to promote change within a specific target group, sustainable investments must be made; and mainstreaming is not the answer.

Likewise, with my goal of determining if sexual health programs in the Netherlands are beneficial or culturally sensitive to Dutch Afro-Caribbean women, I genuinely felt misunderstood by Milleke because she kept focusing on the 'mainstreaming' of materials. On the contrary, I wanted to know if materials were ever tailored to or accommodated for Dutch Afro-Caribbean women? She mentioned that programs are not varied by ethnic minority groups but by settings (i.e.-youth and service providers). Milleke clarifies further stating:

We have the settings and within those settings we try to mainstream it and of course we look at risk groups within those settings. Then we try to mainstream those topics within education, where young people can be tested, and we tackle also those topics like once in five years, we do big research. We use those findings in our settings or education materials. And sometimes maybe we don't do enough, but we try to (Milleke 2012).

By Milleke utilizing the words 'big research', I realized that since Rutgers WPF is a national sexual health organization, they are more likely to mainstream all of their work. For this reason, they are possibly more focused on the pervasion of information than cultural-sensitivity; and using their funds as optimally as possible, in order to disperse materials to as many people as possible. Moreover, if I was to display a top-down model, Rutgers WPF appears to be closer to the top of this hierarchy where they focus on research, train professionals and raise awareness on a national level; while intermediaries, such as Juan Walter, are more involved in the community organizing projects.

### **Interview #2: Juan Walter**

Juan Walter is an Antillean man with a calm yet strong demeanor; and whom is very well known in his field for his never ending dedication towards educating ethnic minority populations in Amsterdam. Because Juan has a high level of care and commitment for the work he does, he is very critical about the structure and strategies of sexual health programs towards ethnic minority groups.

At the beginning of our interview, Juan described his daily interactions of collaborating and training community based organizations (CBOs) led by ethnic minority individuals. These organizations usually approach the GGD to attain guidance and financial support with starting a sexual or reproductive health related intervention project in their community. To begin a project,

representatives of these CBOs need to write a proposal annually and submit it for approval. As a public health educator, Juan guides the appropriate individuals of the community based organizations throughout the application process, to ensure that they submit a clear, systematic proposal, which addresses: the specific sexual health issue, the method of intervention and what the CBO wants to accomplish. With his support, the submitted applications of the community based organizations have a significant chance of being approved and receiving funding as well. However, Juan also stated that:

I give them advice on how they can do the best. But the choices, they make them, I just help them to make the choices. I guide them throughout the way and give feedback. I [also] visit their activities in their communities so I can see their development or invited as a professional who gives a workshop. My work is quite diverse (Walter 2012).

. This process highlights that community based organizations have more agency and involvement on conducting projects surrounding sexual health issues that are more pertinent to their specific community. This process, in my opinion, is very culturally sensitive. In regards to sustainability, Juan has worked with and guided organizations for almost five years until they were finally able to make their interventions maintainable and self-sufficient within their target community. Equally important, Juan arranges community meetings at the GGD in Amsterdam, where representatives of organizations not only present the stage and status of their intervention project, but also learn from one another with combatting certain sexual health issues in their target communities. In addition, attendees exchange information and gain clarity on what to achieve, the success rate of certain methods, and how to apply these methods in their own



intervention projects. These meetings primarily serve the purpose for CBOs to network and receive feedback on intervention projects.

Correspondingly, I had the opportunity to witness and participate in one of these meetings listening to the various projects that were being implemented, and offering constructive feedback when needed. These meetings mainly were attended by organizations whose target groups were the Surinamese and Antillean community; and I found it very interesting that many of them used the method of comedic theatre plays, to spread the message surrounding the importance of safe sex and risk reduction strategies.

Throughout the interview, Juan emphasized the importance of adjusting to the ways of his target community, instead of the target community adjusting to the ways of the institution. Juan exemplifies this aspect when scheduling or planning events affirming:

If I know that my community is always late, and if it is in my power and I am planning, I will plan it in a way that it doesn't affect my work but that it can connect with them. For example, I know to never start an event at 9am because nobody would be there. If I tell them to be here at 12, I expect them to be here at 1. So I plan my day knowing what I know and I'm not going to sit here and bitch about it if they are 10 or 15 minutes late because I know that. None of my colleagues work on the weekends or in the evening like I do. They like it from 9 to 5 because it is so easy.

Some of them are learning that we really need to change how we look at the communities and if we really want the community to be there like we are there for them, we need to change. If you know that most of them are people who came here for a better life, most of the time, they are working two jobs, so it means the time they do have is in the evening or later in the weekend. So if I want you to come to a meeting, I will pamper you so that you feel comfortable, and they say "Oh that person understands that I have worked hard"... there is some food. There

is something to drink, and we stay and relax and talk with each other. Instead of coming in and saying there is the coffee, there is the tea, and then we are going to start (Walter 2012).

By Juan adjusting to the timing patterns in his target community and making them feel appreciated, reveals cultural sensitivity can be implemented in the minutest actions. If you want to make change and get the communities more involved, employees in these institutions need to adapt themselves to their target community.

Juan further reveals how institutions can be more culturally sensitive in their intervention methods declaring:

And if we want to apply these messages into the community, I think it is important to ask how they see their sexual health? Are we going to discuss about what we, as the Municipal Health Services, think is sexual health and how people need to behave? ...And that is one of the things that makes my colleagues or researchers crazy because you cannot think that I am going to look for this outcome without talking to the community about what are you thinking and if it is realistic to expect that outcome, because then it is better not to start with the research because your assumptions are not what the reality is. You are thinking from a white-European perspective and they are from a Black Caribbean perspective, so try to understand that first. To be approachable, we need to be more present at the community organizations. The second one is we need to stop second guessing the methods if they are culturally sensitive, because in my opinion, they are not. We need to involve the community, by not only consulting them but involving them during the outcome, during the whole process because that is culturally sensitive. Otherwise, don't do it (Walter 2012).

Juan addresses the issue of seeing sexual health issues in the perspective of the target group to obtain the best results on what needs to be achieved. He also addressed the issue of low representation of black employees and the strong presence of homogenization in the structure,

which is an aspect that needs to be eliminated for a more culturally sensitive environment.

Homogenization was not only present with one employee representing all ethnic minority groups but also in terms of institutions mainstreaming their methods. Juan states:

The reality is sometimes organizations want to be culturally sensitive but politicians don't allow cultural sensitivity. They want one diverse project that will cover everybody. [But that] is not working. You need to put in more effort for change...Because it is easy to make a pile of something, because then you don't need to deal with it, because it is not identifiable. Allochtonen don't recognize themselves as allochtonen, so who are we talking about? This idea of progressiveness has been blinded with legalization and we are not specifically identifying, and automatically things are being done the easy way (Walter 2012).

Equally important, Juan was very knowledgeable in terms of the disparity in reproductive statistics and he mentioned many of the underlying cultural factors in sexual behavior that were addressed by my mother and daughter interviewees. To lower these statistics, He mentioned the importance of communication in parent-child and intimate relationships, the power and influence of mothers on children to create change towards a healthy, sexual behavior, and sex education also focusing on understanding our sexuality as human beings, alongside prevention. Juan further critiques on sex education stating:

Sex education should not only be about preventing something, but how can I become as healthy as possible sexually. So do I know my body? Do I know its functions? Do I know who I will allow to touch me or not or how I want to be addressed as a woman or man? ...And those type of things are not being discussed and therefore the young women and young men don't know their boundaries or what is expected from them on that level. A lot of these programs are focusing using a condom and saying no, but not how to go with the changes of my body? What is right for me and how do I see myself as a sexual human being. These

things are not taught at home or at the school. How do you expect those young girls and boys to say no especially when they are in a single-parent home and do not have a father or role model? If people don't know the basics [of their own sexuality] it makes it difficult to talk about risk and how to deal with all the changes with your feelings and desires. But I think it is more important for the black community because they need to know their needs and desires, how to deal with it and how to communicate it (Walter 2012).

In order to see change, Juan underlined the importance of more black people getting involved in the field of sexual and reproductive health. He says that it is time for others to stand up and stop hiding. Juan also noted that even though certain sexual health programs aren't as culturally sensitive yet, due to the amount of challenges with limited access to funds and limited amount of agency, they are trying to improve their intervention methods and working their way to a more culturally sensitive environment.

## CONCLUSION

The hypersexualizing discourse forced upon Dutch Afro-Caribbean women is a homogenizing portrayal that is analytically and culturally reductive. The perpetuation of this concept conceals the implicit racism in mainstream Dutch society, while also absolving sexual health programs to examine themselves for embedded, racist and sexist notions in their institutions. In order to provide a counter narrative and eradicate the hypervisibility of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's bodies, sexuality and character, I needed to gain more insight into the underlying factors of the disparity in sexual statistics. With this in mind, I have come to conclude that positive, sustainable changes need to be made both within the target community and the public institutions in the following areas, which involve: breaking down the presence of the sex taboo and gender roles, increasing the importance of safe- sex negotiation, relationship competency, and sexual empowerment; and lastly acknowledging the ramifications of colonialism, sexism, and racism within the Dutch sexual health landscape.

The gateway to these changes is by both entities embodying a politics of articulation and a culture of pleasure. This environment will make space for Dutch Afro-Caribbean women to reclaim their multiple sexual subjectivities and transcend the hypersexualizing discourse surrounding their relationship to sexual and reproductive health. Their erotic power will provide the sensorial survivorship to combat the internalized -isms from the perpetuation of this mainstream discourse; and sustainably allow these women to possess the consciousness, skills, and resources to protect their sexual agency and have fulfilling lives.

On the other end, sexual health programs could lower the statistics by taking advantage of the communal nature of the Dutch Afro-Caribbean culture. To provide an example, these

institutions could make women cognizant of their power through matrifocality, or educate and raise awareness using the influential, female kinship networks. Furthermore, institutions could also improve their methods in cultural sensitivity by having people within these target groups involved throughout the entire intervention process. In addition, they could arrange for more funding to be appropriated towards culturally-sensitive projects that are integrated into Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's daily activities, like Uma Tori; and most importantly, institutions need to eradicate their Eurocentric homogenization strategies, along with the implicit racist and sexist ideologies within their sexual health program's framework.

Similarly stated before, in this case, feasible strategies to reform social values, public policies and economic realities need to be created, along with the involvement of a politics of articulation and a culture of pleasure. In essence, in order to achieve a more equitable society, these concepts can be utilized to identify, disrupt and destroy appearances of the white hegemonic power structure, while persistently contributing towards freedom, accessibility and compassion surrounding the diverse expression of Dutch Afro-Caribbean women's sexual subjectivities.

I hope readers will take note of the voices and arguments expressed in this paper; and especially focus on the underlying factors mentioned in order to provide more appropriate sexual health programs and support systems for Dutch Afro-Caribbean women in the Netherlands.

## APPENDIX

### Interview Guide for Dutch Afro-Caribbean Women

1. Greeting
2. Interviewee Introduction (Name/Age/ Place of Birth and Current Residence/ Level of Education/ Social Class/Profession)
3. Who lives in your household?
4. Was sex and sexuality ever discussed in the home?
  - a. How old were you?
  - b. Who mainly discussed sex and sexuality with you? (Did your mother discuss this topic with you?)
  - c. What were some of the lessons or morals about sex and sexuality told to you while you were growing up? (To Mothers: What messages did you pass down to your own daughter about sex and sexuality? Are any of those messages different from what you learned?)
5. How did these conversations make you feel? Did you disagree with any of the messages about sex and sexuality that were told to you?
6. Do you think these lessons had an influence on your sexual behavior?
7. When was the first time you had a sex education in school?
8. Was the sex education class part of another class (i.e- P.E. or a science class) or a class on its' own?
9. From what you can remember, what was the content in this sex education class?

10. Was the class informative?
11. How did the lessons you learned at school about sex and sexuality compare and contrast to the teachings you learned in the home?
12. Do you/Did you have any other outside sources to learn about sex and sexuality besides school and in the home?
13. At what age did sex become significant for you (i.e.-curious thoughts and desire to experiment)?
14. How old were you when you had your first intimate relationship that involved sex?
  - a. How was that first intimate relationship for you, specifically was it positive or negative both personally and sexually? In what ways?
15. Are you in an intimate relationship now? How would you define your current/last intimate relationship?
16. What does safe sex mean to you and what does it entail in your view?
17. What do you consider to be a risky situation or a risky partner in regards to sex?
18. Have you ever had to persuade your partner to have safe sex? How?
19. Have you ever communicated with your partner about sex? What do/did these discussions consist of?
20. What does a “good” intimate relationship mean to you?
21. In general, there is an idea that exists about Afro-Caribbean women (and men) being promiscuous. Personally, when you think about yourself, do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Are there any other stereotypes or assumptions about Afro-Caribbean women’s sexuality that you know of and that you have to deal with in your



personal life? If so, what are they? Is there an internal conflict for you between these two perceptions?

22. How is a black woman typically viewed within the family and the community if she has an STI or becomes pregnant as a teenager?
23. Do you feel that you know enough about how to protect yourself against STIs and unwanted pregnancy?
24. According to sexual health researchers, Surinamese girls comprise five times more teen pregnancies than native, Dutch girls. Moreover, in regards to STIs, of all new cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis in 2003, 12%, 21% and 12% respectively were women from Netherlands Antilles and Surinam, while they represent only 3% of the general Dutch population. When hearing these statistics, how does it make you feel? What do you think causes this difference? What do you think the role of culture plays into this difference?
25. Do you think that there is enough information surrounding prevention of teen pregnancy and STIs in your community?
  - a. If not, what is lacking? What would you demand?
26. Is there any closing message you would like to share?
27. Interview Debrief

## APPENDIX

### Interview Guide for Sexual Health Professionals

1. Greeting
2. Interviewee Introduction (Name/Age/ Place of Birth and Current Residence/ Profession)
3. Who and what age is the target group you work with?
4. What are your everyday tasks and responsibilities on the job?
5. How or what inspired you to work in this field?
6. According to sexual health researchers, Dutch girls comprise 3.2 teen pregnancies per 1,000 teenage girls; in comparison to Surinamese girls, who comprise 16.8 pregnancies per 1,000 teenage girls. Moreover, in regards to STIs, of all new cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis in 2003, 12%, 21% and 12% respectively were women from Netherlands Antilles and Surinam, while they represent only 3% of the general Dutch population. When hearing these numbers, what could be the contributing factors to the huge disparity in these statistics both in the public and private sphere?
7. What sex education topics do you feel are the most important to teach to the community? What about the Afro-Caribbean community and specifically Afro-Caribbean women?
8. In relation to your organization, do you have difficulties of trying to get your messages across about preventative sexual education to Afro-Caribbean women? If so, why? What do you think are other significant difficulties that sexual health programs encounter, in general?
9. How do you think others, outside of the focus group, view or define Afro-Caribbean women sexually? Are there any stereotypes?

10. Personally, do you think Afro-Caribbean women are likely to encounter sexual force within their own relationship? Why?
11. In relation to your organization, do you feel the reproductive strategies and structure are culturally-sensitive or beneficial to the Afro-Caribbean community and culture? If not, what are the gaps? What would you change?
12. In general, do you feel the reproductive strategies and structure of sexual health programs in the Netherlands are culturally-sensitive or beneficial to the Afro-Caribbean community and culture? If not, what are the gaps? What would you change?
13. From your knowledge, in your organization, Are or were there any approaches or programs created to raise sexual awareness, lower the reproductive statistics, and increase the contraceptive use within the female Afro-Caribbean community? Pertaining to the same question, what are other significant approaches or programs that sexual health organizations are doing/have done that you are aware of?
14. Is there any closing message you would like to share?
15. Interview Debrief

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