

**THE FEMALE GAZE: RECLAIMING AND REDEFINING BLACK FEMININITY AND  
SEXUALITY IN SEXUAL HEALTH DISCOURSE AND EDUCATION**

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SEXUALITY IN SEXUAL HEALTH DISCOURSE AND EDUCATION

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### Abstract

Sex-education in Canada has predominantly been informed by an abstinence-based content, leaving the sexual literacy of adolescents hanging in the balance. As public health statistics indicate, sexually transmitted infection, early and unwanted pregnancy, and rates of HIV/ AIDS are staggeringly high. At the center of these statistics is the young Black female, as they are disproportionately over-represented in negative public health statistics. Many factors have been theorized to be the cause; from socioeconomic factors to educational limitations, it has been historically concluded that the individual failings and class issues of Black women are the root cause of sexual decision making that causes negative health implications. However, adopting a critical perspective may lead to a different conclusion.

This qualitative study sought to explore if the lack of comprehensive, racially attentive, and reflective sex-education as well as the influential societal discourse that shapes Black women and their sexuality in stereotypical lights, may have an impact on the sexual decision making of Black women. Through centering and highlighting the lived experiences, perspectives, and insights of a diverse pool of Black women, the stereotypes and scripts of Black femininity and sexuality, their root causes, and the impacts on young Black girl's sexual decision making were captured to collaboratively redefine and reclaim Black femininity and sexuality while capturing what would be helpful to include in sex-education, specific to Black girls and women.

This study's theoretical underpinnings are Black Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Hip-Hop Feminism, which has been coined by me as "the trifecta". A focus group with Black female-identified participants was conducted and facilitated through open-ended question and discussion based processes. Thematic analysis was adopted to explore themes, meanings and to gain a better understanding of the participant's collective perspectives regarding sex-education and Black femininity and sexuality. The main finding of this study, based in the lived experiences and insights of the participants, were that harmful societal scripts and stereotypes about Black femininity and sexuality historically and as they are presented in popular media, coupled with inconsistent and bare sex education, has the ability to affect the sexual decision making of young Black girls in a way that feeds participation in unsafe sexual practices.

This study fills gaps in literature because it contributes to the limited critical body of research that paramount the voices and insight of Black women in regards to sexual practice. This study also fills gaps by extending the conversation of Black women and sexual decision making, by suggesting tangible solutions of how the participant's insights can be injected into larger policy and practice as well as social work research. The information supplied by the participants of this study will help social workers, policy makers, and educators create racially attentive, comprehensive, and accessible sex-education.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Statement of Interest**

The “Female Gaze” is the exploration of racial, gendered, and sexual identity intersections through a female and feminist focused lens. Drawing on lived experience and personal narratives, the purpose of this project is to analyze these intersections to explore how they contribute to shaping Black femininity and sexuality, and toward sexual health decision making. I invited a group of Black female university students and university affiliated students, to explore this topic, through discussing and reflecting on these overarching questions using *their feminine gaze*: How do you understand your own sexual health, and how do your perceptions of your sexuality as a Black female impact your sexual decision making? This inquiry will be explored in the focus group through collaborative discussion and through reflecting on popular examples of hip-hop lyrics, written and produced by female hip hop artists.

I hope to use this information to co-create knowledge about how the Black female sexual script can be rewritten, redefined, consciously raised, and promoted amongst Black girls in a way that enhances sexual health and literacy. This will then frame the discussion of how these co-creations and new conceptualizations of Blackness, femininity, and sexuality, can be used to inform the concepts that need presentation in current sex-education (sex-ed) curricula and the safe and accessible ways that this knowledge can be disseminated to young Black girls. I hope the outputs, analysis, and potential publishing of the discussion from the focus group can be adapted to create tangible opportunities and suggestions to include Black femininity and sexuality in the sexual health discourse, education, policy and programming (i.e. policy proposals in sex education, community programming), and ways to disseminate sexual education to Black communities.



My interest in this research originated from the observation and analysis of the disproportionate and rising statistics of early and unwanted pregnancy, STD and STI transmission, HIV and/or AIDs infection, and unsafe sexual practice in Black female populations across the Western context (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Banister & Begoray, 2006; David & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Fields, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994). There has been a call for educational policies that “enhance” the sexual literacy and sexual health of young Black girls. Previous attempts at addressing these issues tend to focus sexual education through a lens that is abstinence based with a lack of attention to intersecting identities (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Banister & Begoray, 2006; David & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Fields, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994). This has been said to contribute to misinformed or incomplete sexual decision making while continuing to align the discussion of sex as taboo. Specific to young Black females, literature posits that the acquisition of sexual health and literacy needs to be comprehensive, culturally congruent, and needs to acknowledge the intersecting oppressions that Black females face about their race, femininity, and sexuality (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Banister & Begoray, 2006; David & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Fields, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994). An approach that considers the historic and societal perceptions of Black femininity and sexuality, its ability to infiltrate the Black female sexual self-concept and sexual practice needs to be adopted (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Banister & Begoray, 2006; David & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Fields, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994). This approach needs to be adopted to enhance the sexual health and literacy of Black girls in addition to dismantling and consciously raising awareness of the

oppressive and racist ideologies and structures that underpin notions of Black femininity and sexuality that bombard the day to day living of Black women and girls. There is evidence that these racist and sexist ideologies, scripts and stereotypes and structures that uphold them, such as education, have the ability to affect the sexually decision making of young Black girls in a way that contributes to the lack of attention in supporting healthy sexual identities and experiences (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Banister & Begoray, 2006; David & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Fields, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994).

I argue that when sexual health education is grounded in community-based, Afro-centric, Critical Race techniques, there is the potential for honest analysis and education around what it means to be a sexually active Black woman. My research aims incorporate these theories and methods in order to provide a safe space for Black women to discuss Black femininity, Black sexuality, racial and gendered issues with sex, and sex education. Importantly, through an examination of stereotypes and scripts of Black femininity and sexuality and popular hip hop culture, I hope to elevate the voices of Black girls and women in culturally appropriate ways. Finally, it is critical that race and culturally focused information about the interface between sexual health education and the historically and current day stereotypes and scripts that inform the sexual literacy and sexual decision making among Black girls is elevated through research. It is important that the voice of redefinition and reclamation, is that of the Black female. Through creating a space where Black female university students and university affiliated community members can come together to share their thoughts and experiences, I hope to create tangible suggestions that contribute to developing appropriate and effective sex education by Black women and girls for Black women and girls.

As an unapologetic Black woman and Black feminist, my interest in this research is to allow an entry point from a Critical Race, Black Feminist, and Hip-Hop Feminist theoretic positioning in order to answer these overarching questions: What informs the sexual literacy and sexual health of Black females and how is it applied to their sexual decision making? I hope to gain information through the exploration of these questions to co-create how the Black female's sexual script can be rewritten, redefined, consciously raised, and promoted amongst Black girls in a way that enhances sexual health and literacy. It is my aim that the outputs of my research can be adapted to create palpable opportunities that include Black femininity and sexuality in the sexual health discourse, education, knowledge dissemination, and policy and programming.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature review is to present details of the current sex education policy in Canada and the ideologies that underpin and the effects that this has on the experiences of femininity and sexuality of Black women. I argue that the present framework not only has implications for all Canadian students, but especially for the Black Female Canadian population. This chapter will use literature to shape an argument as to why further research is needed that can respond to these claims and that aims to support the development of a comprehensive, intersectional, and anti-racist sexual education built from the voices and lived experiences from Black women is necessary. Concluding, this chapter I will present the works of those before me, who have explored what such a policy might encompass, what needs to be changed, and how the contribution of my research can work towards filling this gap.

### **Sexual Health Education in the Canadian Context**

Over the last decade, there has been a demonstrated shift in the purpose of providing sexual health education to children and adolescents across elementary and secondary school in the Canadian Context (Action Canada SHR, 2019). In the early years of sexual health education there was an emphasis on abstinence-based perspectives and condom use, with more recent curriculum including elements of inclusion and comprehension around sexual dynamics and strategies (Action Canada SHR, 2019).

Presently, the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada's (SIECCAN) directives for sex-ed has been used as a benchmark of expectations for "high quality" sex-ed for policy makers and educators (Action Canada SHR, 2019). While SIECCAN directives cover much needed content like consent, gender fluidity, sexual orientation, contraception, and

anatomy, how Canadian students learn this in the classroom is dependant on the priorities and ideologies of provinces and school administrators, leaving sexual health education across Canada as inequitably experienced (Action Canada SHR, 2019). This points towards a need for reform in sex-ed with specific attention to the content of sex education, the ways this informs school programming, and the ways adolescents are taught (Action Canada SHR, 2019). Importantly, there is no national sex-ed strategy that is consistently used across Canada, allotting the responsibility of curriculum development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation in the hands of provincial and territorial governments as well as the schools themselves (Action Canada SHR, 2019; The Walrus Staff, 2019; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Sex-ed across Canada allows for different provinces, schools, and cities to have varying and increasingly ambiguous levels of sexual health education, resources, and literacy (Action Canada SHR, 2019; The Walrus Staff, 2019). The consequences of this is that students across provinces are given variable amounts and levels of sex-ed education and comprehension, directly affecting the amount of knowledge they are armed with in comprehending and making sexual decisions (Action Canada SHR, 2019; The Walrus Staff, 2019; Whitten & Sethna, 2014).

For example, students in the province of Prince Edward Island (PEI) and Alberta are subject to some of the most restrictive sex-education across Canada (The Walrus Staff, 2019; Young, 2015). As it presently stands, there is no formal sex-ed curriculum in the Province of Alberta and Prince Edward Island covers considerably bare sex-ed content such as the anatomy of the body, contraception, and STD/STI information (Edmonton Public Schools, 2013; Government of Prince Edward Island, 2020; The Walrus Staff, 2019; Young, 2015). While other provinces, such as British Columbia and Ontario, at best, offer additional mandatory topics such

sexual orientation, gender fluidity, and online safety (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019; The Walrus Staff, 2019).

This paves the way for multiple curricula, influenced by subjective opinions and discretions, political pressures, and personal interpretations, to shape the sexual literacy of adolescents (The Walrus Staff, 2019). This shows that sex ed in the Canadian context may be reflective of ideology and not of the health and social needs of the adolescent population, evidently needing education in concepts such as consent, gender and race, intersections with substance etc. (The Walrus Staff, 2019). Coupled with a lack of government funding to ensure resources for educators, lack of standard monitoring and evaluation, lack of accountability, and a lack of national sexual health data to determine gaps, the quality of sexual education continues to decline (Action Canada SHR, 2019).

### **History of Sexual Health Education in Ontario**

It is important to explore the political and societal climates that sex-ed in Ontario has gone through as this inevitably shapes the present-day policy and trajectory moving forward. If you investigate the history of sex education, one can notice that political priorities, societal/social contexts, and push back from religious affiliations shapes why sex-education in Ontario remains lack luster and inconsistently updated (Hutchinson, 2016). Sexual health was not introduced into school curriculum until 1966, when the counterculture of sex in the 1960's and 1970s began to rise (Hutchinson, 2016). Sexual health topics were introduced in physical and health education at this time, but, due to high rates of opposition from religious groups and parents, it was determined that it would be up to individual school board administrators to decide whether sexual instruction would be taught in the classroom (Hutchinson, 2016). This allowed sexual education guidelines and classes to be altered in the way topics such as gender norms, gay rights

movements, STI and pregnancy rates, would be introduced, if introduced at all (Hutchinson, 2016). It has been theorized that this was a response to the change in societal practices towards sex; with the rise in “illegitimate” births and single parent’s households and a results of the post war era and a rise in STI rates, governments perceived a threat to traditional families and gender roles (Hutchinson, 2016). This placed pressure on government agencies, school boards, and educators to incorporate sex education with the goal of preserving families and protecting youth as a direct response to a social and societal change to sex practice and decision making (Hutchinson, 2016). Before this, only birth control, hygiene, and family planning information were provided at variable rates to families and on a province by province basis, to young girls (Hutchinson, 2016).

It was not until the 1980’s when the HIV and AIDS rates began to show in heterosexual populations that government thought it appropriate to make sex and AIDS education mandatory in schools between the grade of 2-13 in health classes (Hutchinson, 2016). The next update to sex-ed began in 1998 as a direct response to suicide and abuse rates of Indigenous and LGBTQ students around rape culture and consent/sexual assault, beginning to touch upon topics of interpersonal violence and abuse (Hutchinson, 2016). And it was not until suicide and bullying rates rose as a result of changes in internet technology and online culture in the early 2000’s that sex-education was updated again, in 2015, to emphasize cyberbullying, social media abuse, and other forms of interpersonal violence (Hutchinson, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Which leads us to the present reform; 5 years later, under provincial conservative government, under Ford’s jurisdiction, the sex-ed curriculum is up for review and literature posits that the proposed suggestions are taking us back in time to reflect 1998 curriculum (Ferguson & Rushowy, 2019; Russell, Maraucher, Hartshorn, 2018). This directly reflects some

of the conservative and religious ideologies of abstinence and preservation of innocence, that directly opposed the evolution of sex-education in Canada in the past (Ferguson & Rushowy, 2019; Russell, Maraucher, Hartshorn, 2018). It has been said, which will be described in more detail in subsequent section of this literature review, that this reflects neoliberalist, Christian/Catholic, and white ideologies around sex and education, which has notoriously shaped Canadian education to be anti-black, anti-LGBTQ, anti-Indigenous, and colonially informed (Maynard, 2020).

The present changes are an emphasis on consent, pushing this to be presented in Grade 1 and detailed conversations around sexual orientation and gender identity (Ferguson & Rushowy, 2019; Russell, Maraucher, Hartshorn, 2018). And new topics introduced are the role of mental health, concussion, cannabis use, and vaping in sexual health and sexual coercion (Ferguson & Rushowy, 2019; Russell, Maraucher, Hartshorn, 2018). While these topics are important, there are no relevant changes that reflect changes in 2SLGBTQ+ population, racial populations or the social media era and there is no mandate on providing students with a toolbox of strategies to make positive choices (Ferguson & Rushowy, 2019; Russell, Maraucher, Hartshorn, 2018). It remains up to the professional judgement of school administrators and teachers on how to deliver the approved curriculum and a new facet to these options is allowing parents the right to opt their children out of sex-education altogether (Ferguson & Rushowy, 2019; Russell, Maraucher, Hartshorn, 2018).

Not only do the proposed changes continue to exacerbate variability in the ways sex-ed is given to students across Ontario, it also erases intersections of populations regarding race, gender, and sexual orientation. Without the nuances of these experiences and identities brought into the conversation, students are still exposed to misinformed, incomplete, and dated sex-



education that does not directly inform positive sexual decision making, how to paramount sexual health, and potential individual experiences with sexuality based off of aspects of their identity. Here, students with increasing sites of intersecting identities continue to be most disadvantaged by the current curriculum as, not only does it not meet basic consistent comprehension, but it does not make mention of their reflection in society and sexuality at all. This is where I would argue that Black girls would be one of the most disadvantaged, with the structure of the present proposals from the Ford government.

### **Sexual Health Education and Students of Colour**

Research evidence points to the negative impact that the current sexual health education curriculum has on Canadian youth. Lack of consistent sex ed and comprehensive knowledge correlates with naivety and misinformation around getting tested, accessing contraception, and accessing information (Action Canada SHR, 2019). While this lack of consistency and gaps in sexual education impact all students, there are specific ramifications for students of colour (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Female identified adolescents are at the epicentre of the rising of rates of STD/STI's, unwanted and early pregnancy, and sexual discrimination and violence, with Black female identified adolescents disproportionately overrepresented across Canada and the United States (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis L, 2015, Action Canada SHR, 2019). It has been suggested that this over-representation of Black female adolescents is due to both a lack of comprehensive sex education and a lack of comprehensive sex education that attends to the influential factors and experiences of race and class in Western society, and how this shapes the sexual decision making, sexual self concept, and sexual images of adolescents of colour

(Banister & Begoray, 2006; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994).

Literature suggests that the present sexual health education framework in the Western context further marginalizes and ignores how the impacts of colonialism, ongoing discrimination/oppression/racism, and systemic or institutional barriers have on the community health of Black adolescents (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005). In addition, I would also assert that Canadian education in the sum of its parts, is inherently seeped in Anti-Black racism (Maynard, 2020). The Canadian education system is riddled with ideologies that are indicative of racism and racial erasure; a neutrality towards racial bias, discrimination, and harmful instances, consistent instances racial stereotypes and scripts being placed on students of colour that negatively impact their learning in the classroom, active racial profiling and streaming of Black children into low-level and low achieving educational tracks and general disinvestment in the future opportunities of Black youth, consistent classification of Black students as “at risk”, and the overwhelming assumption that black students are less “innocent”, more dangerous, and less “child like” than their white counterparts (Maynard, 2020).

What I assert is that this can infiltrate sex-education for students of colour specifically as the education system in Canada is a reflection of the anti-Black racism experiences in society at large. This anti-Black racism can present itself in a myriad of ways, including the erasure of race in educational subjects such as sex-ed and the racial stereotypes and scripts of Blackness that inform sexual discourse and education of Black children, particularly girls (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Maynard, 2020; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This all points towards a need for solidified and consistent provincial and municipal policy, that creates and hold

accountable a standard of comprehensive, culturally attentive sex education for Canadian students, especially students that are typically disregarded by the education system. This notion is what frames the scope of my thesis and this literature review.

*What About Black Girls and Women?*

Some literature suggests that there are salient stereotypes in regards to race, class and gender that reinforce the social inequities and social inequalities around sexual education, sexual risk and sexual health for girls of colour (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Banister & Begoray, 2006; Fields, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994). The notion of innocence or purity is a reoccurring topic in history; protecting “innocent” people from life threatening influences that are sexually or socially deviant. While these deviant influences can be seen as neutral, history shows that these deviant influences are typically characterized by an image of “risk” to overcome and this is typically linked to a particular race, gender or class identity (Banister & Begoray, 2006; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This then shapes how society defines innocence, typically around notions of Christianity, middle class whiteness and deviance, around notions race, low class, and female gender identity (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014).

Literature by Field (2005), David & Tucker-Brown (2013), Whitten & Sethna, and Lindsay-Dennis (2015) focus on the impact of these and other sexual stereotypes of Black women across society, media and history and discuss how this gets negatively taken up the in the treatment and policy as well as the sexual health and self concept of Black girls. Literature traces the sexual imagery of Black women back to colonial slave times where Black female bodies and sexuality were labelled as promiscuous, risky, loose, “The Jezebel” and sexually deviant (Davis

& Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). The output, in classrooms, media, text, research, and larger society frames the image of the Black female as sexually opportunistic, a drain on public resources, as having multiple sexual partners and children; the “welfare queen” (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Across the literature, the authors argue that images, being constantly reproduced over time, become coupled with class and systemic inequalities that affect Black populations in ways that promote ongoing segregation, discrimination, oppression, and systemic racism in regards to policy, programming, and education (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014).

The articles then postulate that this has direct negative implications on the sexual health, sexual self concept and sexual decision making of young Black females in way that almost creates a slippery slope to STI/STD’s, reduced condom use, early pregnancy, and unreconciled sexualized images of the self (David & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). David & Tucker-Brown (2013) find evidence in this argument through researching the effects of colonialism and negative sexual stereotypes presented in the media on acquiring sex-ed knowledge and HIV prevention in Black women, finding a strong correlation between sexual self concept and decision making and negative sexual stereotypes. The articles by Fields (2005), Whitten & Sethna (2014), Lindsay-Dennis (2015) find evidence for their argument in investigating the link between a lack of culturally attentive, anti-racist, or intersectional education and programming and its direct effects on increased risky sexual decision making amongst Black teens and girls; they found these correlations to be true.

If viewed from a neoliberalist lens, then these experiences would be a result of individual, familial and community failings and not a product of ongoing history inequality, discrimination,

and inequity (Wilkinson, 2003). If viewed this way, one can make a case for why investment in the sexual health of Black females continues to be ignored despite a population and public health outcry; it's "too risky" and ultimately, it's their fault, they're undeserving of specialized programs and funding (Maynard, 2020; Wilkinson, 2003). This, coupled with the wide-spread societal ideology of Black children being less innocent and therefore, by proxy, less child-like, further fuels the disinvestment in these sectors (Maynard, 2020). As mentioned, the literature suggests a need for culturally attentive, intersectional, anti-racist, and/or comprehensive sex education, but the articles do not address how to overturn this harmful discourse in a way that influences policy and programming. How can these discourses be rewritten and how can health of teens, specifically Black female teens be addressed? Before this can be discussed, I think it is important to ask why sex-ed in Canada is presently set up this way even though statistics suggests a need for a different approach?

### *Historic Neoliberalist Underpinnings of Sex-Education*

The literature points towards a longstanding Western and patriarchal historic belief that sexuality is a risk that needs to be controlled; hinging sex ed on "promiscuity propaganda" (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Field, 2005; Kohler, Manhart, Lafferty, 2008). Simply put, there is a concern amongst politicians and the broad public that providing sexual and reproductive health information, access to birth control and other family planning services will promote promiscuity and sexual activity from a young age (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Field, 2005; Kohler, Manhart, Lafferty, 2008). This is built on the assumption that providing this information signals to youth that society approves of sex and ignores the negative consequences of sex, ultimately shaping the curricula to typically reflect abstinence-based content (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Field, 2005;

Kohler, Manhart, Lafferty, 2008). Found to be consistent across the literature is that this is a misplaced concern; multiple studies show that the availability of knowledge, services, and resources have no effect on the onset or prevalence of adolescent sexual activity, the reduction of teen pregnancy or prevention of STD/STIs, or the adoption of safe sex practices (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Averett, Rees, Argys, 2002; Field, 2005; Kohler, Manhart, Lafferty, 2008).

However, few pieces of literature investigate what underpins these particular beliefs. An article by Whitten and Sethna (2014), investigate the need for anti-racist sex education in Canada and the implications this would have on students of colour. It was postulated the aforementioned ideologies are typically pushed forth and indoctrinated into policy and programming by white, Christian, euro-centric policy makers, educators, and school representatives, reflecting the ideologies of difference and discrimination under the guise of the preservation of childhood innocence (Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Rooted in a societal and political context that already views bodies of colour unworthy of educational, professional, and basic needs based off of racial and gendered socially constructed lines of difference and deservingness, this placed Black female students and learners in an educational and political playground that marginalizes and ignores their need for comprehensive sexual literacy (Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This creates the basis for a need for anti-racist sex-ed in Canada; both articles argue that this ideology places blame and physical, emotional or psychological ramifications of sex on communities, families, and individuals who deviate from abstinence-based principles (Field, 2005; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This ignores and negatively typecasts the intersections of individuals' identities that have the ability to shape sexual self concept, sexual decision making, degrees of sexual of knowledge, and sexual practices such as racial, cultural/ethnic, and gender identities. However, these articles do not attend to how these ideologies become persistent throughout history.

An article by Smith (2008) builds upon these arguments in a way that helps to contextualize what these ideologies reflect; a history of neoliberalist, capitalist, and racist social policy and societal ideologies that has shaped the frameworks, interventions, advocacy, programming, and discourses in Canadian education, health, and society (Smith, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003). As current government policies and programs are designed with the entire population in mind, the investment of energy gets divested in solutions towards “general societal problems”, leaving the resolution of unique populations problems or needs up to the communities experiencing them, intentionally ignoring the nuances of the Black female sexual experience (Wilkinson, 2003). As the Smith article states, a neoliberalist framework is interested individual responsibility and sufficiency, leaving unique and intersecting populations, to address issues, successes, or failings without government investment (Smith, 2008). An article by Wilkinson (2003), takes this up further and describes how neoliberalist and capitalist ideology become reflected in the language and principles of Canadian policies; creating a platform for policy to be riddled with socially constructed concepts that create and push forth the use of binary oppositions that are based on assumptions of normalcy, difference and assimilation (Smith, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003). Hinging policy on these constructs creates a way for social problems to be blamed on the “failures” of people experiencing said problem, it paves a way to perpetuate negative stereotypes, and it continues to shape the ongoing discourse around particular types of people and populations, which cyclically, determines their accessibility to government and social investment (Smith, 2008; Whitten & Sethna, 2012; Wilkinson, 2003). In sum, a lack of attendance to racial and gendered intersections and the neoliberalist framework of sex-ed reinforces and increases the potential for stereotypes such as “The Jezebel” and “Welfare

Queen” to be placed onto young Black women as it is clear the present framework was not made with their complexities, experiences, and right to sexual literacy in mind.

### **Towards Developing Anti-Racist, Black Feminist Sex-Education**

In order to address the sexual health of Black female teens, there is a need for more “comprehensive sex education” that attends to the intricacies of gender, class, and race (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). To do this, Smith (2008) suggests this going beyond changing policy to include the dismantling of neoliberalist ideologies that underpin current Canadian policies, politics, and society (Smith, 2008). Specific to this debate, this would look at reorganizing the democratic public to focus on political mobilization of and for the most disadvantaged women (Smith, 2008). Based in anti-racist theories and Black feminism, literature would suggest that society and social institutions begin to be challenged in a way that no longer views students as neutral and context free but as bodies and beings that can be influenced and shaped by society, race, class, and gender (Smith, 2008; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This pushes the conversation beyond the surface differences of race and culture to the underlying and painful discussion around things like colonialism, resistance, history, and imperialism (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Smith, 2008; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wilkinson, 2003).

Literature that investigates developing an attentive lens discusses how this would involve bringing historically grounded reflections, struggles, and experiences to light to build arguments that are tied to specific practical and political problems and developing a deliberative practical process of policy around it (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Smith, 2008; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wilkinson, 2003). This would push what we now categorize as individual issues and failings into the societal and political context and agenda; politicizing policy to become inclusive of its most



vulnerable population (Smith, 2008). This is where the debate of sex-education extends beyond the need for increased comprehension to one that includes a lens that is both intersectional and anti-racist.

Starting with comprehension, literature by Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty (2008) and Action Canada SHA (2019), agrees that comprehensive sex education is to encompass accessibility to all people, promote human rights and autonomous decision making, be scientifically accurate and use evidence based methodology, should be broad in scope and depth, be inclusive of all sexual identities and experience, promote gender equality and prevent gender based violence, incorporate a balanced approach to sexual health that highlight positive aspects of sexuality and relationships, respond to emerging issues related to sexual health, and be provided by educator who have knowledge and skills to deliver comprehensive content. These articles present findings that statistically prove that comprehensive sex-ed has a larger positive impact on teen sexual behaviour in regards to condom use and birth control, a reduction of teen pregnancy, and no bearing on the likelihood of early sexual engagement in comparison to abstinence-based programming (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Kohler, Manhart, Lafferty, 2008). However, a personal critique is that arming teens with contraceptive, anatomical, and value free information only addresses half the story.

Coupled with a comprehensive approach, Articles by Hankivsky & Cormier (2011) and Wilkinson (2003) suggest an approach that encompasses the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality explores how the intersections of various portions of a person's identity may intersect to create unique experiences in a person's life, specifically producing experiences of oppression (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; Wilkinson, 2003). This concept assumes an intersectional perspective, that recognizes the intertwined nature of gender, race, class,

(dis)ability, sexual orientation, religion, language and other influences that can combine to shape various social outcomes (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; Wilkinson, 2003). Adopting an intersectional perspective also involves understanding how these aspects of identity combine and interact with systems of oppression, capitalism, patriarchy, discrimination, and white supremacy (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; Wilkinson, 2003). Subscribing to this perspective would also place the viewer under the theoretical foundations of anti-racist theory, anti-oppressive theory and practice and critical feminism, which casts an eye on the cyclical and interconnected effects of the aforementioned things (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Specific to Black females, moving beyond intersectionality to ideologies underpinned by Black feminism, focuses the Black identity in a historic and modern-day perspective that is specific to the Black female experience. This is important as intersectionality, as I see it, has been wielded in a way that de-centers the Black female experience to make room for other racial and identity intersections. And while an intersectional analysis is important, my work through this thesis is to intentionally re-center and paramount the Black female experience and its specificity regarding femininity and sexuality. Therefore, Black Feminist theory, a theory that looks to re-center Black females in analysis and discourse, roots this project. So, how does this get pushed into policy, education, and programming?

### Alternative Frameworks

Some literature pose solutions that pertain to direct changes in programming; articles such as those by Banister & Begoray (2015), which investigated using Indigenous practices in HIV prevention for youth, David & Tucker-Brown (2013), which investigated Black culturally attentive practices in HIV prevention and sexual decision making, and an article by Wyatt and Riederle (1994) which investigates the various influences on the sexual decision making girls,

assert that culturally attentive techniques and methodology have the strongest influence in gathering important information around sexual practices of girls of colour and in the prevention of risky sexual decisions. Across this literature, methods pointed towards creating interventions and programs that will elicit critical consciousness raising, reflection and dialogue such as: mentorship programming and information transfer, focusing on concepts of sexual self esteem/concept and confidence, drawing clear links to colonialism and ongoing oppression, co-creating definitions of sexual health and literacy, encouraging dialogue, the use of music, a focus on re-education and resocialization around femininity and sexuality, and empowerment and strengths focused interventions (Banister & Begoray, 2006; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994). These approaches align itself with Black feminism and hip hop feminism, however, while impactful and proven to be effective, this literature does little to point towards how this gets pushed forth into policy in a tangible, solidified, evidence-based way.

Literature by Hankivsky & Cormier (2011) and Wilkinson (2003) attempt to close this gap through proposing specific policy perspectives. This entails assuming a position in policy making and analysis that uses both qualitative and quantitative research and evidence, makes clear socially constructed concepts to guide discussion and create flexible definitions, avoid binary oppositions, is inclusive of all stake holders, and avoids targeting groups for exclusion to justify stereotypes and discrimination; a methodology that also underpin Black feminism (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; Wilkinson, 2003). This gets taken up in ways that look to identify and address ways that specific policies address inequalities experienced by various social groups, and in this case, Black women (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; Wilkinson, 2003). While addressing who is at the center of the issue, what the social construction of the population is and what is at stake, this analysis and implementation would lead a reflexive process to reveal

processes and privilege and exclusion in policy making to lead to its reconstruction and help deliver effective and efficient programs that better service the needs of a diverse society, especially those most impacted by social inequities (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; Wilkinson, 2003).

Hankivsky and Cormier (2011) have proposed the Multistrand Project Framework (MPF), which aims to develop policy models that address multiple modes of inequality through looking to respond to “six strands of equal treatment” that include gender, (dis)ability, race, sexual orientation, age, and religion. Addressing the origins and outcomes between and across these stands through mapping, visioning, road testing, monitoring and evaluating policy, MPF look to identify a policy field/gap and explore the issues from the perspective of each strands and their commonalities (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011). Through collapsing finding and identifying commonalities, a common solution can be found that will benefit all strands (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011). While as a general framework MPF appears to be simple, it is a holistic approach to address general disparities and inequities in education policy for a broad population of students and for those who go underserved and unacknowledged due to their “unique” intersections.

Although the MPF has been praised for its citizen focus, in my opinion, the ability to identify underlying inequalities and maintain distinctions between its origins and provide integrated methods to work with these inequalities in a democratic way present some important limitations. First, there may be a risk that the MPF framework could result in diluting the Black experience as it gets bumped up against and cross correlated with the other strands of intersection. In addition, the MPF does not identify priorities within a policy window, it does not make room to choose specific intersections or recognize social location, and it does not set out a

process to ensure a diversity of representation from relevant stakeholders in this process. I would argue that the absence of this analysis within the MPF could further limit policy implementation and dilute the Black female experience (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011). Implementing this framework in a society that is not structured in a way to support it can be unrealistic, requiring a political, structural, and societal ideological and methodological change to push forth into policy and programming proposals (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011).

### **So, where do I come in?**

Much like the Lindsay-Dennis (2015) suggests, a focus on research as a means of evidence production for policy implementation as it is realistic, feasible, and politically congruent. The article proposes that culturally relevant research models that do not represent Black girls in deficit focus, one-dimensional, measurable and observable, and developmental/positivist ways can bring to light the continual oppression and traumas of the Black female experience (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). The article suggests adopting a Black feminist and womanist, dual cultural lens in research, that allows space for self definitions, facilitates dialogues, heightens voices, shares stories and healing and exchanges wisdom and using the outputs of dialogue and reflection in analysis to use as evidence for policy (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). This, much like those that speak to the true experience of race and other intersections, is heavily qualitative. This is where my thesis would situate itself in these gaps; using the stories/lived experiences/ reflections of a group of Black women on topics of sexual decision making, stereotypes and scripts, and visualizing sexual education and their respective impacts on femininity and sexuality. Using these insights to co-create new definitions and scripts will work towards rewriting and dismantling the harmful discourses mentioned earlier, in hopes, that these

new scripts can be built into sex education policy and programming or, at least, discourse at large.

So, if the potential focus is on the sexual health and literacy of Black communities, particularly Black women, and what practices drive healthy sexual behaviour, the outputs of my thesis can be used as a response in policy to a) attend to the rising negative statistics mentioned earlier in the paper 2) develop culturally attentive and intersectional methods and responses 3) have the power to rewrite discourses around race and 4) give an entry way to legitimizing anti-racist, intersectional, and culturally responsive methodologies in research and politics and 5) be used to craft solutions for the Black girls and the Black community as a whole.

Overall, while a portion of the purpose of this paper was to call for consistent and comprehensive sex ed for adolescents across Canada, the other portion was a call to visualize and attend to the most forgotten in this conversation, the student of colour, specifically the Black female student of colour, which is at the crux of my thesis. In making a case for this, this literature review discussed how the present policy structure inherently leaves populations out of its conversation and created a discussion around ways that this could be remedied from an ontological, epistemological, and methodological political approach. As the end of this literature review reaches, it would feel firm to state that the conversation no longer needs to focus on proving a need for these things, but rather co-creating ways for this to be taken up by the most influential stakeholders. Some of the suggestions presented was through research and re-contextualizing the role of community. Yet, until this comes to fruition, the sexual literacy and health of the Canadian adolescent population, specifically the adolescents of colour, continues to hang in the balance. Thus, accompanied with this call for anti-racist and intersectional sex education, comes a call to intersecting communities and researchers, to actively participate in

uncovering and rewriting the narratives and discourses that currently inform our policy and political structure to push meaningful issues onto the political agenda. That is where I hope to enter.

### **Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework**

The focus of my thesis work is exploring the experiences, realities, and definitions of Black femininity and sexuality in Western society and education from the perspectives of Black women. The purpose of my research is to contribute to a body of work that is centered on 1) redefining and reclaiming harmful and homogenizing societal and historical scripts and stereotypes of Black femininity and sexuality into sites of liberation, empowerment, collective resistance, and 2) to inform gender and race specific sex education for young Black girls. This thesis project looks to examine societal and media scripts of Blackness and Femininity in a way that can feed comprehensive sex education for Black women and girls by Black women and girls. Informing this research are three core theories that I aim to make omnipresent throughout the phases of this project. These theories are Black Feminist Theory, Hip Hop Feminist Theory, and Critical Race Theory which are all considered derivatives of Critical Social Theory.

Critical Social Theory (CST) can be applied by researchers to engage in reflective and critical reassessments of the relationships between social, economic, and political systems in conjunction with everyday practices that looks to dismantle unjust practice, arrangements and oppressive consequences that have become distorted and hidden over time in contextual and

cultural practices (Freeman, M., Vasconcelos, E., 2010). Rooted in contemporary and historical theoretical and ideological frameworks and underpinnings, CST looks for participatory, action-oriented, and often pedagogical ways to advocate for the evaluation and reconstruction of systems, structures, education, and more (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). Through groups of accompanying critical theories, CST implies that change can be achieved through the construction of society that applies a “transformational” agenda (Freemans & Vasconcelos, 2010).

This brief general summation gives a base and a justification for the use of the three theories that frame my thesis as they assume the same principles and hope to achieve the same outcomes. For my thesis, I use what I call the “Trifecta”, an amalgamation of critical theories pertaining to the intersections of race and gender. This thesis applies Black Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Hip-Hop Feminist Theory to explore the racial and gendered experiences of Black women in regard to their experiences of oppressive and harmful sexual scripts and stereotypes and how this affect sexual decision making. These theories inform my implication for data collection, analysis, and frames implications for sexual health education and discourse.

### **The Trifecta – BFT, CRT, & HHFT**

The “Trifecta” (as I have dubbed it) of theories that will be employed is due to the multifaceted and layered nature of my thesis topic. Black Feminist Theory (BFT) is used as the grounding theory to get to and honour the lived experience and self-definitions of Black women and their historic and present daily experiences. This informs my population of interest (Black women) and centers the analysis of the black female insights I look to honour and use for reclamation and redefinitions. BFT frames “the Female Gaze”; a focus on Black lived experience



and story telling in relation to how society sees Black women versus how they see themselves. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is employed to focus on the historical and contemporary patterning and experiences of systemic and institutional racism, directly informing the analysis of lived experience, alongside BFT, to create implications to sex education system in Canada and in community programming. Hip Hop Feminist Theory (HHFT) is used as a methodological tool to collect and analyze dialogical data on media and societal scripts and stereotypes of Blackness, femininity and sexuality, allowing avenues for critical consciousness raising and media literacy.

### *Black Feminist Theory*

Patricia Hill Collins and other important Black female scholars (such as bell hooks and Angela Davis), have influenced my understanding of Black feminist theory. They have been instrumental figures in critiquing the “white solipsism” (Taylor, 1998, p.234) of the early feminist movement as it was not inclusive of the intersections and unique issues that relate to Blackness and womanhood (Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). Applying a BFT lens centers the Black Woman’s viewpoint, generally rooting itself in dispelling notions of Black womanhood and femininity as the legal property of others, a direct construction of the Black female from colonial and slave times that perpetuates discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and manipulation (Hill Collins, 2016; Taylor, 1998). These discriminations, oppressions, and exploitations and manipulations present themselves in the daily lives and experiences of oppression and discrimination, and stem from the amalgamation of multiple forms of race, gender and class segregation, framing BFT’s theoretical assumptions (Hill Collins, 2016; Taylor, 1998).

BFT is theoretically rooted in five assumptions: 1) the Black woman’s experience is a special kind of oppression that is racist/sexist/classist due to dual racial and gender identity as

well as limited access to economic resources, 2) this triple jeopardy causes differing and subjective problems and needs for Black women, 3) this creates a unique struggle for both Black liberation and gender equality simultaneously, 4) that there are no contradiction in the fight to address racism and sexism as well as other intersecting ism that may influence the Black female experience, and 5) that the commitment to liberation of Blackness and womanhood is rooted in lived experience (Amoah, 1997).

These five assumptions are inherent in what Hill Collins (2016) calls the acquisition of “Oppositional Knowledge” (p.134); Oppositional knowledge is held paramount throughout Black feminist research and work to include four themes (Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Taylor, 1998; Waller, 2005): 1) creating avenues for Black women to empower themselves through creating self definitions and self valuations that enable positive images that repel the negative and controlling representations of Black womanhood, 2) making paramount the confrontation and dismantlement of the interlocking structure of white domination in race/class/gender oppression, 3) intertwining intellectual thought and political social justice oriented activism, and 4) recognizing and making salient the cultural heritage that inform skills for resistance and transformation to address daily discrimination and oppression (Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998; Waller, 2005). Using these themes, BFT can be applied to transform research and Black women to develop and center oppositional knowledge that is rooted in notions of collectivity; strategies and tactics are seen as sites of resistance, liberation, critical consciousness raising, and empowering (Amoah, 1997; Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). In its formulation, this can be used to oppose power relations and challenge the status quo (Amoah, 1997; Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998).

The point of power that BF theorist focus on is that of white domination. Paying intricate attention to the disproportionate privileges and affordances of white, heteronormative, hegemonic, often male identified, Christian/Catholic, and Western identities and ideologies and how they create differing, oppressive, racist, and sexist experiences and definitions of Blackness and Black womanhood (Amoah, 1997; Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). Much like the theory and concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, the BF thought focuses on race, class, and gender oppression, in present day experiences (Smith, 2013-14). However, BF thought focuses on the confluence of the Black female experience, making an intentional link, in analyzing and describe Blackness and Black womanhood, to colonial law and practice and experiences of slavery (Amoah, 1997; Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). This is important as it not only allows for the analysis of Blackness and womanhood in a manner that is continuously and cyclically rooted throughout history, but it also pinpoints, in time, where harmful conceptualization, practices, scripts and stereotypes proliferated and inevitably seeped throughout history to present day and that are used to justify the oppression, discrimination, exploitation, and manipulation of Black women (Amoah, 1997; Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). This allows an expansive critique of how these stereotypes and scripts of Blackness and womanhood present themselves in discourse and systems, interpersonal relationships, social order, media etc (Amoah, 1997; Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). Rooting the Black female experience of oppression simultaneously in both present day and in history is the key to critical consciousness raising and to the process of reclamation and redefinition as one can not redefine

the self or experience in society without knowing the Black woman's "place" within the societal matrix of white domination and how they "got there" (Hill Collins, 2016; Taylor, 1998).

BFT is the grounding theory that informs my approach to inquiry as I study the relationship between Black femininity and sexuality and sexual decision making. This allows for the exposure of stereotypical scripts of Blackness, femininity, and sexuality as they present in media and in Black women's experiences, in addition to providing a basis from which to analyze how historical and colonial stereotypes and scripts present themselves in the lives of women participating in my research. The application of this theory would allow me to center the voices of my sisters in an analysis that can aid a reclamation of self in sex and society, by challenging and refuting the definitions that have been thrust upon Black women through white domination and definitions of Blackness, womanhood, and sexuality from the experiences of Black women. Through the analysis of these self-definitions and reclamations, the strengths, resilience, liberation, and truth of Black women and their experiences of individual and collective sexuality can be used to inform sexual education and programming in a way that asserts the power, choice, and voice in sexual decision making.

### Critical Race Theory

CRT is a methodological theory that foregrounds experiences of race and racism to challenge discourses on race/gender/and class to challenge traditional and dominant research paradigms/texts/theories and policy that are used to explain experiences of colour (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). Theorist frame the CRT lens as a liberating and transformative solution to racial/gendered/class subordination, through a transdisciplinary lens that analyzed and focuses on the experiences of people of colour across these intersections (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso,

2002). Originally born from a plethora of racialized legal scholars and used to examine and address systemic racial discrimination in law, CRT has been extended and used to examine and recontextualize education, research at large, policy and programming, social services, economics and other sectors of welfare (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). CRT assumes that race is a socially constructed concept which has been historically used to justify actual or potential social arrangements and domination based on beliefs of the inherent superiority of one race over the other (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002).

In adopting a CRT lens, I assume the position that the racial construction of domination is used to maintain “master” or “majoritarian” narratives in society that place people of colour in positions of low achievement, low attainment, oppression, marginalization, and of less privilege and benefit (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). As these “stories” or narratives carry layers of assumptions around people of colour, they are then used to distort and silence the experiences of people of colour through normalizing the negative stereotypes and narratives in society and systems (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). This then gets drawn upon, explicitly or implicitly, in sectors such as policy law and education, to produce sites of systemic discrimination and inequality/inequity for people of colour (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002).

In relation to Black women, CRT can be applied to examine experiences of race and racism and other aspects of identity, and as they intersect, to create subjective experiences of womanhood, race, and class (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). These assumptions and standpoints craft the five elements that form the insight,

methodology, perspective, and pedagogy of CRT (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). These are: 1) the inter-centricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, 2) a need to challenge dominant ideology that hides the interests and power/privilege of dominant groups in western society, 3) a commitment to social justice through liberating and transformative responses to oppression, 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge as legitimate and appropriate to the critical analysis and understanding of racial subordination, and 5) drawing from a transdisciplinary perspective (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sefa Dei & Singh Johal, 2005; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002).

The application of CRT allows me to apply a racial and gendered lens to critiquing and challenging dominant discourses in sexual education and programming. As statistics would suggest and quantitative research on the sexual health of young Black females would suggest, the Black female population is continuously faced with high rates of STI/STD's, unwanted or early pregnancy, HIV and/or AIDS, reduced condom use, and sexual violence (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). Based off of these statistics, it has been suggested that young Black girls engage in sex at younger and higher rates and that socioeconomic factors, such as lack of economic stability and lack of appropriate education contributes to and mediates the rates at which these statistics occur (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). Therefore, policy and education recommendations tend to circumvent around abstinence-based approaches to sexual education be taken to mediate these statistics. Yet, literature suggests that the present framework further marginalizes and ignores how the impact of colonialism, ongoing discrimination/oppression/racism, and systemic or institutional barriers have on the community health of black adolescents (Action Canada SHR, 2019; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005). In adopting a CRT lens that attunes itself to both the sexual experiences of Black women

and the racial and gendered experiences of sexual education, research suggests that it is a lack of comprehensive sexual education knowledge specific to Black girls that reflects sexual health knowledge, the nuance of their sexual experiences, and a knowledge and dismantling of the stereotypes and scripts placed upon them in regards to Blackness, femininity, and sexuality (Banister & Begoray, 2006; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wyatt & Riederle, 1994).

Operationalized in my thesis, utilizing a CRT lens in unison with BFT will continue to allow me to center the voices of Black women in my analysis and pull out the sites of media and societal domination in their sexual experiences, while also allowing me to center their voices in what sexual education should look like for Black women and girls. This orients me in a position that assumes that the social construction of Black femininity and sexuality is inherently detrimental to the sexual health and wellness of Black women. Much like the assumption of BFT, my theoretic position in CRT would assert that it is the historic harmful conceptions of Blackness and femininity that seep into policy, programming, and society at large that have a direct influence of the sexual experiences of young Black women that make them susceptible to the statistics above (Field, 2005; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This continuously places Black women in a matrix of domination and subservience in their sexual lives that creates a breeding ground for manipulation, exploitation, coercion, and marginalization (Field, 2005; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). As stated in my BFT section, this would include the hypersexual, loose, sexually mature, Jezebel narrative that has been placed upon Black women throughout time that is cyclically reflected and replicated in media, society, and social interaction that shapes the Black female self concept and experience as well as the perception of Black women (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Without

dismantlement and consciousness, this can influence the sexual decision making of young Black girls in a way that replicates a self fulfilling prophecy (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This also places young Black girls in the margins of sexual education, deeming them unworthy of attainable and achievable comprehensive sex education that can positively shape and empower them in sexual situations (Field, 2005; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). In applying a CRT lens, this would allow me to pay specific attention to the Black female experiences of sex education in Canada in a way that highlights what it was lacking, how this shaped specific racial and gendered experiences, see where the role of dominant discourses and ideologies begin to shape, silence, and manipulate Black women in sexual situations, and center the Black female voice in strategizing what sex education in Canada should be to paramount and maintain the sexual health of young Black women.

### *Hip Hop Feminist Theory*

HHFT was coined by Joan Morgan and other contemporary Black Feminists which looks to theorize and analyze the centrality of Black and Brown women in popular media, culture, and music (Lindsey, 2015). Hip Hop Feminism (HHF) is a generationally specific and historically contingent combination of intersectionality, Black feminism, and Critical Race Theory, that looks to create space to have dialogue about the tensions, contradictions, and possibilities of race, gender, class, and sexuality in reflexive, honest, and personal ways (Henry, 2010; Lindsey, 2015). HHFT looks to achieve this through focusing on representation of women and girls in culturally reflective popular culture, and to develop pedagogical strategies that are strengths based, culturally relevant, and media literate to challenge harmful and dominant discourses of Black and Brown female bodies that can influence self concept, self esteem, cultural knowledge,



education, and decision making (Henry, 2010; Lindsey, 2015). HHFT demands and acknowledges the visibility and spaces for self articulation within the Black female community, like BFT and CRT, and draws upon history of racism, heteropatriarchy, and intra-racial gender ideology to identify sites of oppression and discrimination to strategize sites of liberation, resistance and education (Henry, 2010; Lindsey, 2015).

In revisiting these historical records from a standpoint that is rooted in Black female experiences in popular culture and society can aid in pushing back against the political, cultural, and social spaces that continue to oppress, discriminate, and marginalize them (Henry, 2010; Lindsey, 2015). This is contingent on analyzing popular hip-hop media, videos, and lyrics to look for spaces where dominant ideologies and stereotypes of Black femininity and sexuality are present (Henry, 2010; Lindsey, 2015). HHF theorists believe Hip Hop is a distinct cultural tool that has the ability to work on the minds of those consuming it, and this functions across socio-economic, political, and racial boundaries influencing the ways in which people make sense of the positive and negative messages they receive (Lindsey, 2015). Linking these stereotypes and scripts back to the earliest Black female experiences of exploitation in colonial and slave times, provides a justification for how stereotypes of Black femininity and sexuality have been absorbed by dominant society and potentially by Black women (Lindsey, 2015). Using HHFT as an entry point allows for the creative potential for Black women and girls to reconstruct and redefine the social stereotype of script of Black female social identities from that of “Jezebel”, loose, gyrating, and sexually driven, to being central figures of femininity, fluidity, organic, and sexually independent (Lindsey, 2015). Once a consciousness around media’s replication of harmful history is made aware, HHFT can then be operationalized to link the images and words to instances in history where the Black female body has been celebrated, associated with Afro-

celebration, and spiritual and cultural practice; inherently transforming and redefining the Jezebel narrative (Henry, 2010; Lindsey, 2015).

As the focus of my thesis work is exploring the experiences, realities, and definitions of Black femininity and sexuality in Western society and education, it is important to situate oneself in a theoretic position that heightens and centers the voices of Black women. The “Trifecta” informing this research are three core theories: Black Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Hip-Hop Feminism. The exploration of my theoretical frame serves as a glimpse into the lens I am adopting to achieve the purpose of my research which is, redefining and reclaiming harmful and homogenizing societal and historical scripts and stereotypes of Black femininity and sexuality into sites of liberation, empowerment, collective resistance, and to inform gender and race specific sex education for young Black girls. As it is of the utmost importance to me to produce tangible solutions for the Black female community rooted in reciprocity, I feel strongly that these “Trifecta” of theories, in combination, ensures the outputs of my research are FOR Black women, BY Black women.

## **Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods**

### **Ethics**

An ethics approval certificate was secured through the McMaster Research Ethics Board in May 2020 through the completion and submission of Letter of Information, Recruitment Email scripts, Stimulus to illicit response, Consent Logs and Verbal Consent Scripts, Recruitment poster, and Research Proposal. Please see the ethics approval attached in Appendix A.

### ***Recruitment***

The exclusionary criteria were based on gender, race, age, and affiliation. Participants are to be above the age of 18, identify as Black, identify as female, and affiliated with McMaster University. There are no exclusionary criteria based on status and level of education within the university. Black female identified students were recruited by sharing the recruitment poster (Appendix B) on social media platforms via my personal social media (Facebook and Instagram) and the social media pages of Black focused groups on McMaster campus to include United in Colour, Black Students Association, BlackSpace, African-Caribbean Faculty Association of McMaster (ACFAM), and the McMaster Social Work Group. The recruitment poster was shared on the personal pages and groups of those who my poster resonated with. Additionally, the

posted was circulated on the weekly email listed for undergraduate and graduate students in the School of Social Work for McMaster University.

Participants contacted me expressing interest in participating in the study via email. As per my email script (Appendix C), all prospective participants received a Letter of Information detailing the study and ethics (Appendix D), a copy of the lyrical content and links to hip-hop videos (Appendix E) and if required, follow up emails (Appendix F). Once continual interest was expressed, I asked for a telephone contact for the purpose of conducting oral consent (Appendix G) to participate in the study; this was recorded on the oral consent log (Appendix H), facilitated through the oral consent script. Once completed for those who expressed firm interest, email of a list of dates and times for potential online focus group was circulated and the date that received the most consensus was chosen. Due to the occurrence of COVID-19, the focus group, initially designed to be facilitated in person, was conducted via the online application ZOOM and audio recorded with an external tape recorder for aiding transcription.

In line with Lindsay-Dennis (2015), it was important for me to engage in a data collection process that could be used to influence policy and that was both feasible and politically congruent with my theoretical approach to research. Importantly, Lindsay-Dennis (2015) highlights the need for research on Black women that sheds light on the continual oppression and traumas of the Black female experience and the need to adopt a Black feminist and womanist, dual cultural lens that allows space for self definitions, facilitates dialogues, heightens voices, shares stories and healing and exchanges wisdom. This methodology aligns itself nicely with culturally congruent and relevant models described earlier in this paper; popularly taken up in Black, Indigenous, (dis)ability, queer, and gender-focused research (Lindsay-Dennis L, 2015). Using the stories/lived experiences/ reflections of a group of Black women on topics of sexual

decision making, stereotypes and scripts, and visualizing sexual education and their respective impacts on femininity and sexuality fulfill this. Then, using these insights to co-create new definitions and scripts will work towards rewriting and dismantling the harmful discourses mentioned earlier, in hopes, that these new scripts can be built into sex education policy and programming or, at least, discourse at large can occur. I believe using the ‘trifecta’ will achieve this goal.

Data collection using a BFT framework is unique as it assumes a few positions: 1) dismantling the hierarchy of researcher and participant, 2) simultaneously building new knowledge/narratives about the social world throughout the data, 3) keeping the conversation political, 4) raising critical consciousness and consistently centering the Black female voice (Amoah, J., 1997; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Patterson, A., et al, 2016; Simien, E., Clawson, R., 2004; Taylor, U., 1998). Here the main focus of what “data” needs to be collected is collective complementary and contradicting experiences across intersections of identities that contribute to components of being Black and being female (Amoah, J., 1997; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Patterson, A., et al, 2016; Simien, E., Clawson, R., 2004; Taylor, U., 1998).

Data collection using a CRT framework is through story telling as resistance, or, the production of a counter story (Parker, L., Lynn, M., 2002; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Soloranzo, D., Yosso , T., 2002). Counter stories are methods of story telling of peoples whose experiences are often not told to expose, analyze, and challenge the majoritarian stories of racial privilege (Parker, L., Lynn, M., 2002; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Soloranzo, D., Yosso, T., 2002). Built into the notion of counter story creation is also the strengthening of social, political, cultural survival and resistance, affirmation of the community, as well as the building of critical consciousness around modern day and historical experiences and patterns of racial

subordination and domination (Parker, L., Lynn, M., 2002; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Soloranzo, D., Yosso, T., 2002). Here, the bits of data that becomes the meat of analysis is collective dialogue, narratives, and producing a counter story that reflect the everyday knowledge and racial experiences of Blackness and womanhood and personal experience/placement in the “majoritarian story” (Parker, L., Lynn, M., 2002; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Soloranzo, D., Yosso, T., 2002).

These theories blend nicely for my thesis as they are in agreeance around the “who’s” and the “how’s” of my data collection. No other identity markers are placed on this to honour the necessity of heterogeneous and diverse input and dialogue across ethnicity, religion, sexuality, education level, gender identity, class, and age. This is to intentionally collect complementary and contradictory conversations and dialogue that can potentially produce generalizable and closely reflective data of the diversity of the Black female population. The how’s are through narrative, dialogue, arts based quantitative methods of inquiry that allows a space for collective conversation that is intentional, collaborative, and allows me to be a data source.

The theories are also in agreeance in terms of the types of questions being asked, which should be in nature, verbally situated in producing politicized conversation to address intersections of identities and highlight experiences of racism, sexism, classism, and discrimination. Theoretically, BFT asks to focus questions and dialogue on Blackness and womanhood, the questions of HHFT focus on Blackness, womanhood, sexuality and scripts/stereotypes in media and society, and CRT would focus on Blackness, womanhood, and experiences of systemic discrimination. In operation, I simultaneously hit all these lenses in a way that is fluid to allow the conversation to be led and determined by Black female participants

in a way that also makes room for self-definition, counter stories, and collective consciousness/mobilization.

### **Data Collection**

Integrating this into my thesis, my project performed a narrative focused group and a hip-hop feminist method of study that primarily relied on interviewing and reflecting with an online focus group on ZOOM. Originally planned to be conducted in person, to facilitate the role of strengthening notions of community/sisterhood amongst my participants, the intent of the focus group was transferred to an online format due to the impact of COVID-19. The discussion and reflection were facilitated through interview questions and hip-hop lyrics from popular black female artists such as Janelle Monae and Nicki Minaj (See Appendix E). These lyrics and video content, which was sent to participants before the ZOOM focus group, was presented to stimulate responses and facilitate discussion around media stereotypes of Black femininity and sexuality.

### *Focus Group*

In line with my theoretical grounding, I chose the focus group method because the process enables a bringing forth of the lived experiences and truths of Black women in a way that raises critical consciousness, that is liberating/empowering, and can be used as tools for actionable social justice. (Amoah, J., 1997; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Patterson, A., et al, 2016; Simien, E., Clawson, R., 2004; Taylor, U., 1998). I used the focus group process as a site from which to engage with culturally/traditionally reflective tools for the purpose of elevating the Black female experience (Amoah, J., 1997; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Patterson, A., et al, 2016; Simien, E., Clawson, R., 2004; Taylor, U., 1998) and where participants could reclaim their

voice, speak their truth, and create a sphere of theorized existence that can be used for structural and societal change (Amoah, J., 1997; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Patterson, A., et al, 2016; Taylor, U., 1998).

Reflecting Black feminist theorists, the interview questions seen in the Letter of Information and Informed consent were designed to purposefully draw out strengths within the Black female participants (Appendix D) (Amoah, J., 1997; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Patterson, A., et al, 2016; Taylor, U., 1998). The questions were aimed at highlighting sites of resistance in order to activate the formulation of new definitions and scripts about Black femininity and sexuality and to brainstorm how to implement sites of strength and reclamation from the perspectives of Black women that could be used to inform sex education policy and programming. Drawing on research conducted by Hancock, Mooney and Neal (2012), the questions were sequentially ordered to build upon each other to intentionally use the meat and communal consensus of self-definitions amongst the group in regards to Blackness, femininity and sexuality, to discuss the role of hip-hop, media and society and formulate ideas for sexual health education for Black girls in Canada. As mentioned, my questions were developed in line with the 'trifecta' to include questions about: societal, historic, and media perceptions of Blackness, femininity, and sexuality, then brainstorming around self-definition of Blackness, femininity, and sexuality, what my participants feel inform these two concepts and how they impact the formation of Black female identity, how this has potentially impacted sexual decision making and knowledge around sex and whether or not any of the insights mentioned were taken up in sexual education in a way that was reflective and inclusive, and what needs to be integrated into sex education for Black girls.

#### HHFT Data Collection Approach



HHF methodological tools to data collection are focused on centering the voices of Black and Brown women and girls in a process of debunking popular presumptions and myths around femininity and sexuality (Henry, W., 2010; Lindsey, T., 2015). Using popular culture such as hip hop as a tool for collective analysis and consciousness raising, the examination lyrics/music/videos/history/imagery allows for a liberating and honest conversation around the underlying messages in “melodious misogyny and racism” (Henry, W., 2010; Lindsey, T., 2015). This conversation, rooted in collective critical thinking and dialogue, can create pathways for critical racial, gendered, and media consciousness raising to reconcile harmful messages to create entry points for theorizing tensions and complexities of lived experiences in the constructed identities of Black girls (Henry, W., 2010; Lindsey, T., 2015). Leaning into narrative and qualitative methodologies like interviews and focus groups, HHF looks to collect data on experiences of marginalization of Black women and girls within popular culture and other settings while connecting to concepts of identity, history, and activism (Henry, W., 2010; Lindsey, T., 2015).

Question 3, as shown in Appendix D, allowed my participants to reflect and discuss, in relation to the hip-hop music presented, the definitions of Blackness, femininity and sexuality thrust upon Black women versus the definitions they created. Deepening the conversation in analyzing the lyrical content allowed women to thoroughly discuss question 4 and 5, the impact of societal scripts and messages as well as the role of media and hip hop on the perceived impact on the sexual health of young black girls. This conversation continued to roll over into question 6, 7, and 8, using the critical concepts and themes from music videos, society, experience, and history, to inform what this group of Black women wanted to see in sexual education for Black girls.

HHFT was used to unpack the lyrical and video content of two popular Black female artists, Janelle Monae, and her song “Pynk” and Nicki Minaj’s song “Anaconda” and “Rich Sex”. Nicki Minaj is a central “sex symbol” in modern hip hop culture and Black female rapper. Janelle Monae is a self declared “feminist” and androgynous presenting female artist in modern-day hip-hop culture. Purposefully juxtaposing the presentation of Black femininity and sexuality of these two popular Black female hip-hop artists was used to discuss the ways Black female hip hop artist replicate or dispel Black female stereotypical imagery and labels and the prospective effects on young Black girls consuming their content in relation to sexual decision making and sexual health.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Stage 1: Thematic Analysis*

Once the focus group was completed and audio recording was transcribed, I began the thematic analysis process. Thematic analysis is a method, widely used in qualitative based research, that identifies, analyses and reports patterns within data in a step by step manner. Using my overarching theoretic position, the ‘trifecta’, as a framework for identifying and understanding patterns within my data, I was able to allow for a rich, detail, and complex description and analysis of my transcriptions. As the trifecta alludes, a critical approach to interpreting textual and lyrical/musical elements consider a range of legal, economic, social, political, institutional and practical factors, an analysis of language, in the way it is created, understood, and used, is necessary to gain reflective and true insights into lived experience in a way that amplifies the voices of Black women in Canada. As language, lived experience, and popular media are never innocent, there are multiple sites of analysis for definitions and descriptions of collective experiences, that can include process, practice, and knowledge

generated by participants in narrative focused research such as this. This means that commonly used words/themes/definitions/imagery, as they align with the narrated experiences of Black women, has analytical significance, showcasing women's sexual, feminine, racial, and cultural histories as well as present-day experiences. As this pertains to scripts of femininity and sexuality, sexual decision making, hip hop, and sex education, as the women participated in the focus group, there were some consistent and repetitive themes/phrases/ and words that added collective nuance to their narration.

### Stage 2: Developing the Codebook

I developed a code book (Appendix I) that reflected the themes emerging from the focus group transcript. The themes closely follow the Question List from the Letter of Information, which was thematically organized to facilitate the focus group to draw out the intricacies of these women's lived experiences. This will be reflected across the 8 chapters that comprise this Codebook. Each subtheme detailed the common thread of notions Black femininity and sexuality, what impacts sexual decision making, and what can be envisioned for sex education in Ontario. I first reviewed the focus group study participant transcript and identified sections of text (quotes) that represent the nuances of Black female experiences of sexuality, femininity, and sexual decision making as well as the common themes/imagery/stereotypes in society and media of Black femininity and sexuality. Then, I reviewed how these themes/imagery/stereotypes as well as self-definitions based off of nuanced experiences, shape the understanding and reflection of popular hip-hop artists such as Janelle Monae and Nicki Minaj. After pulling out common reflections on this content, I then analyzed how the women collectively spoke about how this impacts the sexual decision making of themselves, potential impacts on young girls, and how these things frame what should be encompassed in sex education for young Black girls in

Ontario. In crafting my findings, I used the chapters to further condense my analysis into 5 major themes that had subsequent sub-themes that mirrored the codebook.

*Stage 3: Integrated Trifecta with a Focus on HHFT in the Analysis*

A key aim of my analysis is to go beyond critique toward building new knowledge, stories and narratives about the social world to stimulate new practice and to reconstruct methodology in an innovative and collective approach to promote diversity within academia and society, create sites of empowerment/encouragement, and build alliances/coalitions/ political groups to move towards transnational social justice traditions (Henry, W., 2010; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Lindsey, T., 2015; Parker, L., Lynn, M., 2002; Patterson, A., et al., 2016; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Solorzano, D., Yosso, T., 2002; Taylor, U., 1998). The secondary stage of my analysis of the focus group data included a diagnostic analysis of unjust social practices/media/histories/experiences that confront Black women, and the limitations of existing interventions (Henry, W., 2010; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Lindsey, T., 2015; Parker, L., Lynn, M., 2002; Patterson, A., et al., 2016; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Solorzano, D., Yosso, T., 2002; Taylor, U., 1998).

In order to do this, data analysis within these theories asks the researcher to use new media and incorporate multiple forms of scholarship from diverse backgrounds to inform analysis in conjunction with the narratives/dialogues/stories of participants to create enriched, relevant, and strong thematic analysis (Henry, W., 2010; Hill Collins, P., 2016; Lindsey, T., 2015; Parker, L., Lynn, M., 2002; Patterson, A., et al., 2016; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Solorzano, D., Yosso, T., 2002; Taylor, U., 1998). Keeping central to the analysis is the intricacies and the generation of the counter-story/narrative/definition/deconstruction and reconstruction to inform justice and mobilization (Henry, W., 2010; Hill Collins, P., 2016;

Lindsey, T., 2015; Parker, L., Lynn, M., 2002; Patterson, A., et al., 2016; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Solorzano, D., Yosso, T., 2002; Taylor, U., 1998). Attending to this in my focus group was through the intentional asking of my participants to disclose where they felt harmful definitions/discourses/stereotypes and scripts come from in media and society, how they personally identify them in media content and society at large, as well as the media content presented. This allowed for a continual process of collective consciousness raising around the colonial roots of stereotypes and scripts of Black femininity and sexuality and ways it can be politically redefined by Black women.

The overarching goal of this, according to HHF, was to “uncover to somatic historiography of the Black musical experience” to reclaim and recontextualize Black female bodies in media and society (Henry, W., 2010; Lindsey, T., 2015). Through unpacking the lyrical content and video imagery of “Pynk” by Janelle Monae, “Rich Sex” by Nicki Minaj and “Anaconda” by Nicki Minaj with the sisters in my focus group, the collective Black female voice had a space to discuss the ways other Black women represent Black femininity and sexuality in popular media, the sites of strength in each content in relation to the Black female sexual self concept, and the potential ramification in regards to impact it may have on susceptible and vulnerable young Black girls making sense of themselves as sexual Black women. Through unpacking the content, media literacy can be developed and ways hip hop can be unpacked in the classroom or in education can be strategized and theorized, amongst the sister in the focus group, to create tangible ways that hip hop can be used as a tool and site of liberation, education, and resistance in sexual education and in the lives of young Black women. A portion of our discussion was dedicated to unpacking popular media, hip hop, and the musical styling of Janelle Monae and Nicki Minaj. Through the purposeful juxtaposition of these two artists and a broader

conversation of the influence hip hop culture and music, I was able to integrate into my codebook, the collective ways women spoke about stereotypes, strength and power, sexual decision making in relation to young Black girls, and ways hip hop could be used to inform sex education.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

As a Black woman myself, I came with set of experiences that shaped my interest in this topic, the ways I wished to explore it, and ultimately, the questions I asked. In acknowledging this, it was important to me to be reflexive about the positionality I hold as a researcher and within the theoretic stance I am assuming in investigating this phenomenon and the formulating the intended outcomes. However, it was also important for me to be reflexive about the ideologies and experiences I have as a Black woman, outside the world of academia and the position I hold as a researcher. I am aware of this and not to resolve tension but recognize that it is integral in my role as a Black feminist researcher, to occupy both positions simultaneously while paying attention to the ways I may reproduce: colonial and white centered research, power imbalance, and contribute to the disempowerment of Black women. The subsequent subsection discusses the nuance of this experience and the ways I aimed to remedy the inherent tensions of occupying multiple positions in my research.

#### *Positionality and Cultural Intuition*

Congruent with critical feminist epistemologies and the partiality of positionality, reflexive praxis in research has been shown to be an important precursor and continual element

in linking analysis and interpretation in a manner that honours the experiences and truths of one's participants (Mulling, 2000; Williams, 2005). For this to be successful, as mentioned throughout, Black women need to be brought to the center of data analysis; making Black women's lives the central vantage point of their experience and of the research itself (Mullings, 2000). The goal of situating my positionality ethically in my research is to strike a balance between participation and collaboration to produce work that is truly reflective of the experiential knowledge that Black women have and to produce tools and knowledge for the Black female community then (Williams, 2005). It has been argued that relational knowledge around societal and community issues lives in the analysis of data in a way that exchanges action and voice against a "background of common experience, tradition, history and culture" (Williams, 2005). Understanding relational knowledge is through interpretation and interaction with those experiencing an issue of interest, asking the community and the researcher to enter the social world of the Black woman to understand experiences and perspectives of others through the self and through the eyes of the "other" (Williams, 2005). Luckily for me, a portion of me developing this relational knowledge lives within the cultural intuition that has been afforded to me by being a Black woman myself.

However, academic research is a center of power, privilege and status through differences to the community in terms of class, profession/formal/academic/and institutional connection, and as a "producer" and contributor to wider societal knowledge and discourse (Muhammed, et al, 2015). Therefore, in reflecting consistently on my positionality as well as the injection of my cultural intuition, reflective praxis also included addressing needs for control, bias in analysis and interpretation of community issues, use of the self in research, and insider/outsider status as a researcher/representative of the academic community in regards to power and privilege (Byrne,

et al., 2005; Cashman, et al., 2008; Etmanski, et al., 2014; Etowa, et al., 2007; Jackson, 2008; Williams, 2005). This connects to addressing BFT principles, striving to remedy the inherent challenges in creating research equity amongst academic and community partners (Muhammed, et al, 2015).

Power sharing fuelled by reflexivity, involves the interrogation of my identity as a Black woman, as a researcher and how this dual position may contribute to systems of oppression and social inequity and how that may be hidden in the research process epistemologically, ethically, and methodologically (Muhammed, et al, 2015). This involved unpacking the space between academic and community relationships and myself within the relationship; literature calls this “working the hyphen” (Muhammed, et al, 2015). This included being transparent and open with the Black women in my focus group on what my relationship is and is not early in the consensual stages and negotiation of research participation, embracing the contradictions of the working relationship to collaboratively confront power hierarchies of who is telling the story in my research and who is creating knowledge in my research, embracing the personal narratives and counter-story telling of the community, and recognizing the power I have to regulate research and actively shift that power to enable the community to lead the analysis process (Muhammed, et al, 2015).

### *Sisterhood and Afrocentricity*

The concept of sisterhood and its roots to Afrocentricity is heavily embedded in the practice of BFT (Belaineh, 2016). As the article by Hancock, Mooney, and Neal (2012) stated, the role of community building as a force, source, and resource can produce highly influential ideas that can be mobilized in politics in beneficial ways. Using the role of community as a “site, object, and modality” for policy making can be a driving force behind policy and political



thinking, explanation, and intervention (Hancock, Mooney, Neal., 2012). In operation for my thesis, community and the development of “sisterhood” are used interchangeably. Sisterhood, the idea of “Black sisters” or “my girls” is a term and relational definition of small community building within the Black female population that has dated back to before colonial times. The notion of sisterhood is Afrocentric; Black women seeing each other’s as sisters break through the lines of difference situated in our subjective identities to make room for safety, community, strength and resilience, liberation, healing, and mobilization (Belaineh, 2016). Therefore, engraining the Afrocentric notion of building sisterhoods/community in my focus group, focusing on the strengths, resilience, and safety of the Black women in my research and attends to the goals, as Lindsay Dennis argument outlines, of dismantling one-dimensional narratives of Black women to focus on things that empower, make successful, and promote the health and wealth of people who identify with said community.

This is a theme that consistently comes up in the discussion of my focus group, the word “sisters” being used by multiple participants, as a means to relate, build upon each others experiences, brainstorm, and to foster comfort and safety within the paradigms of their research oriented relationships with each other (Belaineh, 2016). Therefore, when combined with reflexivity around my positionality and cultural intuition, keeping the notion of sisterhood central to my research process allows me to not only position myself as both researcher and participant in safe and healing ways, but also allows me to de-colonize the research itself, provide opportunities for community building, and enhance sites of resistance and strength within the Black female community that is within my reach. The is even reflected in the pseudonyms given; they are the traditional Ghanaian names of influential people in my personal life that I am proud to call my sista’s.

## **Chapter Five: Findings**

### **Participants**

There were 6 participants in the online focus group, including myself, occupying space as both a facilitator/researcher and participant. There was no “control” for ethnic background as a heterogeneous pool of participants were desired in order to honour the intricacies and complexities of opinions of Black women who come from multiple backgrounds of “Blackness”. All women identified as cis-gender with variability in regard to spiritual and religious practices, levels of income, education, sexual orientation and occupation. The participants and myself were given pseudonyms to protect the privacy and confidentiality of their stories and opinions.

It is important to recognize that a diverse pool of participants ultimately shapes the voice of my findings, that of a Black female voice with variable lived experience and worldviews. Salient participant characteristics match the demographics of typical university students, alumna, and community members affiliated with the university.

### **Themes**

Emerging from the focus group were 5 broad themes to include the presentations of Black women’s sexuality and femininity in the media and society, the roots of the presentations, the impact this has had on the sexuality and sexual experiences of young Black women, and the

recommendation for how sexual health education can respond to these experiences in culturally significant ways.

### **Stereotypes and Counter Stories about Black Femininity- Unfeminine and Inherently Nourishing**

#### *Stereotypes and Scripts of Black Femininity- Unfeminine*

Lacking femininity was central to the discussion when describing stereotypical scripts and definitions of Black femininity. Women in the group used anecdotal examples from their lives when they have often been described as aggressive or surprisingly confident. While the latter two words can be taken as positives, the ways in which they were described likened Black femininity to something that is lacking softness, a softness that is typically ascribed to white female counterparts. In reference to a discussion around confidence and strength, the women described this as something that is said to them in ways that often a surprise, as though they should not possess traits, and is often coupled with the aggressive nature in which that are described:

*“I was going to say aggressive. At the same time, I find people also said we are very open about it, we are very, I guess, bold in a sense. It’s used often, at where I work, that’s kind of what I get because I work mainly with men. I find that’s something they say a lot especially about me.” (Naana)*

This narrative suggests, that when Black women speaking their mind, it can be viewed as being inherently violent, which is consistent with the stereotype of the “Angry Black Woman”. Those that are voicing these stereotypes, as emulated by this quote from Naana, were typically

described to be white men or white women, which is a strong reminder of the ideological and racial roots of these stereotypes and scripts. In describing these stereotypes, I noticed that in the stories being told, that there was an emphasis on masculinized language anytime one of the participants described a moment when they spoke their truth. In teasing this out of the conversation, I recognized that combining these descriptors create an image of a Black woman as being negatively “masculine”. I chose to summate and analyze some of the words chosen in the group during our discussion to see if some of the connections I made were reflected in the group, as seen in the quote below.

*“So far, the words we have listed: strong aggressive bold, ready not delicate kind of point towards, anytime a black woman speaks out then its labelled with this language that has negative connotations at times. And it’s also thematically organized; none of it feels dainty or soft. Which is a lot of the words mentioned here is almost the antithesis of what society would consider “femininity”. A lot of these words strong, bold, aggressive, is normally associated with male traits. So, I find that particularly interesting.” (Grace)*

My observations indicated that there was a consensus regarding the “masculinized” language and words being chosen to reflect what our counterparts feel about Black femininity. Collectively, we thought that this might suggest that perhaps this ideology shapes the perception of Black women as those, much like men, who should take things “on the chin”. Viewing Black women as people who lack femininity can justify the harsher treatment they bump up against day to day, interpersonally and societally.

#### *Redefining and Reclaiming Black Femininity- Inherently Nourishing*

Following the above the discussion, the group was given the opportunity to reclaim and contest the stereotypical definitions of Black femininity and sexuality. This was achieved through co-

creating personal definitions, grounded in personal experiences of being a Black female and how they view other Black females. An important theme that emerged within this discussion was the notion that being “inherently nourishing” was a signifier of Black femininity. The theme of Inherently Nourishing came from a large discussion on the traditional aspects of Black femininity and Black culture that included words like homemakers, “wifeys”, care givers, loyalty and warmth became the backbone of this theme. For example, ChoChoe shared:

*“Loyal and traditional was a good one. Not in the sense that, like I wouldn’t even consider us old school. But more so, in terms of warmth and family orientedness—that kind of traditional. In a way that is different in North America.” (ChoChoe)*

This was echoed by Naana who stated:

*“We are very nurturing. We are very warm, accepting and this is a random conversation I had with one of my white co-workers. And they say a lot of things that they appreciate about some Black women is that they are very traditional...we are home keepers. Whereas most white women don’t necessarily do that cooking and all the little things. We are just kind of born that way.” (Naana)*

Hence, the women’s reflections on these nurturing roles directly contests the stereotypes and scripts that view Black women as aggressive or masculine, redefining the femininity of Black women to something that is rooted in traditional homemaking. Importantly, the participants identified this to the nature of the African and Caribbean culture in which they were raised, providing examples of being raised by mothers or in environments where the expression of womanly duty and love is through things like cooking, cleaning, home making, or making other feel comfortable and invited. The focus group participants expressed that having a sense of providing for loved one’s, whether that be physically or emotionally, is ingrained as a part of

their identity. This is something the women in focus group take pride in, which they believed to be connected to their culture and distinct from the experiences of the white people they engage with in their daily lives. Providing in ways that is never wavering, non-contextual, and open door allows Black women to express their feminine energy in tangible ways that is transformative and healing for others.

### **Stereotypes and Counter Stories about Black Female Sexuality- Inherent Promiscuity, Hypersexual, and Complicated Reclamations**

#### *Stereotypes and Scripts of Black Sexuality-Inherent Promiscuity and Hypersexuality*

The participants shared that they experienced the descriptions of the stereotypical scripts and definitions of Black Sexuality as mirroring negative connotations. These included scripts related to promiscuous behaviour, being labeled a “hoe”, an expectation of readiness to have sex, or being inherently “freaky”. This discussion included media and lived experience that described these themes as an expectation of Black women that is also thrust upon us by White counterparts.

*“I don’t know why promiscuous comes to mind but it is the first word I think about...especially the way white people would describe Black women, that’s what comes to mind for me.” (Esi)*

It is important to pay attention to the language here as this participant shows us that these scripts are almost like “stamps” or automatic descriptors in Esi’s mind. This was present in a lot of the conversation; negative words of Blackness coming up but not being sure as to “why”. When unpacked a bit further it was discovered that because these descriptions are so commonplace and frequent in our personal interactions and in the media we consume, they become rigidly defined in our mind as the “first words” to describe ourselves. A rich discussion around expectation also ensued that highlights how these words come with weight; they are not merely words but social

scripts that Black women are to live by that have the ability to positively or negatively shape our social interactions and the way people perceive us:

*“I find a lot of the time we are either two extremes. So, either you’re all the way, basically the hoe or all the way just stuck up because you say no. It’s like you automatically think you’re better than everyone else and that is how you are seen...even if you’re a friendly person, and I am one of those people, even if you say hi to someone or smile at someone it automatically means you want something or want to have sexual relations...there’s no middle ground” (Naana)*

This further demonstrates the complexities of Black women within the societal matrix; an inability to just be without judgement or labelling. Of importance is the language used when Black women reject these stereotypes, further labelled negatively when taking agency over of sexual decision making and expression.

#### *Complicated Reclamation and Redefining- Shame, Freedom, and Power*

The women in the focus group were given the opportunity to reclaim and contest the stereotypical definitions of Black sexuality through co-creating personal definitions, grounded in personal experiences of being a sexually active Black female. This discussion was multilayered and included aspects of personal experiences with sex as well as feelings around early sexual encounters as it bumped up against religious beliefs and upbringing. This added elements of shame and guilt to the layers of sexuality that were being described. The group discussed how previous and current struggles of coming to terms with a definition of sexuality that makes sense to themselves and their personal lives:

*“I remember I was 7 years old...they were reading the bible and it’s the testaments like thou shall not even think about sex and I was like, what are you talking about? What is*

*going on? I am just sitting there not getting what's going on and at that point I was like, "I don't know about you God with having these feelings, why give them to me if you do not want me to have them" (Adjoa)*

All group members agreed that there is a complicated relationship between religion and growing into one's sexual self due to the abstinence and shame-based ways that sex was spoken about in their early and formative years. Because all group members were raised in Christian and/or Catholic households, sex and sexuality were topics never spoken about and highly shamed or verbally punished, affecting the ways this group of women define their past and present sexuality. As religiosity is a large aspect of Afro-Caribbean culture that mirrors the patriarchal and colonial views of sex and women and sex, I also chose to take the position as participant to share my own experiences of this complicated relationship with sex.

*"I was also brought up in a religious, catholic based household, so for me growing up, before I refined or defined my sexuality as an adult now, it was rooted in a lot of shame. Whenever I thought about Black female sexuality and myself, I thought about shame and secrecy. I thought about keeping it on the low. And when I did have these feelings, because your hormones are coming and etc, it would make me feel bad and it would play on my confidence" (Grace)*

Some members of the group stated they are still coming to terms with their sexuality and ways to own or express it in healthy ways due to years of shame and secrecy coupled with having no one to talk to. Hence, while Black female sexuality can be described as freeing and powerful when given the agency and choice to express it, it can also be indicative of pain, as many have not been given the opportunity to even explore what it means. This can lead to challenges expressing



sexuality in a way that is freeing and powerful, which, was the more positive aspects of creating the counter story of sexuality, that arose from this discussion.

*“I do like the word free. I think we are very much so in tune with our body because it’s been so criticized and hyper focused for a very long time. But we have like this knowing of ourselves in sexually healthy ways. So, for me, Black female sexuality kind of looks like an exhibition of being spiritually, sexually, physically free with a person of your choice”*  
(Grace)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Naana:

*“I also think I like to use the word powerful...over the years I have noticed, within myself, that my sense of worth and sense of sexuality has definitely evolved...the power is within you. So I think, basically, being free in your sexuality means having power over your sexuality and owning your sexuality...just living your truth.”* (Naana)

In contributing to the group, I also shared this collective notion of powerful or freeing sexuality being underpinned by agency and consent. Having the power to express sexuality how you want, with who you want without judgement or fear was central to the healthy definition and expression of Black female sexuality. This dispels the notion of inherent promiscuity and hypersexuality as the majority of the group spoke of sexuality as being something that is highly respected and coveted within the self; only shared with someone with whom you feel safe and secure with or with someone of your specific choice. Dispelling this notion of external ownership over the body, exploitation, and a need to please particularly men, were the highlights of this conversation.

### **Roots of Stereotypes and Scripts- Colonialism and Media**

The group was in agreement as to where the stereotypes and scripts originated when asked to explore its roots. Multiple links were drawn to elements of racial subjugation and discrimination, cultural and historical oppression, as well as the subjugation and exploitation of the Black female body. drawing purposeful links to colonial and slave times and media portrayal of Black women.

### Colonialism

The historical roots of oppression, discrimination, and subjugation of the Black female body and agency, linking back to slave era and colonial times was a consistent dialogue when discussing stereotypical roots of Black sexuality and femininity. Drawing from examples such as Sara Baartman, colorism, exoticism and fetishizing Blackness became the vantage point through which this group of women saw stereotypical representations of themselves. Notions of ownership, sexual coercion and exploitation were closely intertwined with white ideologies of Black bodies being inhumane, unworthy, and animalistic was described to be the catalyst to the development of these stereotypes. This was most aptly articulated by ChoChoe who stated:

*“Even the fact we were considered property to be owned and traded...even our position or the shape of a woman’s body and position in society in relation to her body is different”*  
(ChoChoe)

This was echoed by Adjoa who shared:

*“Because we can say it nicely and say like exoticism because I think our Black features have been put on display and shown as crazy...no one thinks you have any humanity left in you just because you have Black features.”* (Adjoa)

It is important to contextualize these quotes as being directly linked to slavery as this highlights the fact that social order and social interaction was not birthed out of nowhere, but rather created and perpetuated from dominant groups to clearly draw a line of difference and treatment.

Media

The women agreed that the impact of colonialism on Black women is at the heart of how and why Black women's sexuality is portrayed in negative ways that has seeped into both historical and current day popular culture. As a main focus of this research was the role that the media, particularly Hip-Hop, has had in perpetuating and promoting the harmful stereotypes and scripts of Black sexuality as being inherently promiscuous and hypersexual, it was important to me to explore whether the focus group saw this reflected in the popular culture and hip hop they consumed. Here, a discussion of representations in larger media and hip hop, as well as a discussion framed around two popular hip hop artists, allowed the women to delve deep into how media representations of Black women reinforce this notion of masculinity, hypersexuality, and promiscuity. Drawing very intentional links to a lack of agency and ownership of one's body in sexual situations and how this is represented in media, the fetishizing of Black women, and the media "enslavement" of Black women framed this discussion.

*"The first words that come to mind for me are either like raunchy or trashy. And I do actually think of like music videos. That is what I think of when I think of Black sexuality. I remember my first memory of it I was too young, I was like 9 or 10, and there was a music video on the TV." (ChoChoe)*

While the same words that represented the stereotypes of Black women were used to describe the media portrayal and perpetuation, this was taken up further in ways that indicated these stereotypes as something that Black women in the hip-hop industry can not break free from. An intricate discussion of whether this was a choice or internalized stereotype ensued without group consensus. However, this spoke to not only the stereotypes also being a-likened to modern day

lack of agency over Black female body and expression as well as the inability for the Black woman to be seen as a complex person; as someone outside of the stereotypes.

*“I think what’s interesting is that Janelle Monae’s song ‘Pynk’ and when I watched the video...I think she softens the word pink so much. And then when I think of someone like me who has been following Nicki’s brand...its very pink, barbie, really hypersexual hyperfeminine imagery. But Janelle Monae, I guess people who have very heteronormative views, would say that she is a ‘masculine brand’ because she likes to wear suits and is not straight and likes to wear dark colours and she does not have to wear long inches of wigs, she just wears her hair however she wants. And she literally takes the imagery that Nicki is always pushing, this pink pink pink pink pink imagery that connects with barbie and that connects to hypersexuality and hyperfemininity and heteronormativity, and she takes it and she blows it out of proportion. She’s like pink is beautiful and it is the inside colour of my vagina.” (Adjoa)*

Using hip-hop analysis and media literacy as the overarching lens through which this conversation was framed helped women pinpoint imagery in music videos that associated hyperfeminine presentation like the colour Pynk, the shape and exposure of a Black woman’s body, or even things like length of hair, to promiscuity and hypersexuality. To me, this indicated that the participants were describing a need for counter images and Black female representation, like Janelle Monae, to provide a sharp relief for Black women who do not necessarily identify with Nicki Minaj’s imagery. I alluded to this in my contribution to the group, deepening the conversation around what the aspects of Janelle Monet’s imagery could provide the most relief from the stereotypical scripts:

*“She softens Black female sexuality in a world that constantly presents us as being so hard, as being so aggressive as being so raunchy...her physical presentation as it links to her lyrical content, rejects the stereotypes and scripts of Black femininity and Black sexuality thrust upon us. That you need to have this big ass and you need to be showing it all the time or you need to be dressing like this with gold all over. And it challenges that with suits and more ‘masculine traits’ but still finds a way to make it soft, to make it sexy, and to make it feminine. That to me is extremely powerful” (Grace)*

In analyzing the ways these two different artists express themselves through music and video allowed the conversation to flow into positive and negative examples of Black femininity and sexuality in hip-hop music. A large portion of this conversation paid attention to how Janelle Monae breaks the stereotypical imagery of Blackness to something that rejects not only what society as a whole think what femininity should look like but also the expectations of body-focused exploitative sexual expression that is often placed upon Black females and Black female artists. Wide-spread consensus on the transformative and powerful ways that Janelle Monae transforms Black femininity and sexuality was expressed and the potential for this to positively impact girls. This then entered into a conversation of whether or not artists have choice in the ways they market themselves or whether artists take full ownership over the ways their imagery affects their consumers. This was reflected in Nanaa’s observations of women in Hip Hop:

*“Like Queen Latifah is a boss, she didn’t have to be naked to do so. And again, at the same time, I’m not judging Nicki Minaj’s choice...but at the end of the day when you keep doing that all the time is also changes the image of how black women are viewed. You are a representation for the culture.” (Naana)*

However, it was agreed upon that regardless of choice, it is Black artists, particularly Black female hip hop artists are a large representation of Black culture and therefore carry a significantly influential role in perpetuating stereotypes and set examples to youth.

### **Effects on Sexual Decision Making- Lacking Safety and Contextual Information**

All the women who participated in the focus group agreed that regardless of the intentions of the Hip Hop artist, stereotypical discourses and images of Black Femininity and Sexuality in the media have the ability to affect youth, particularly young Black girls. The women were given the opportunity to express how the absorption of these scripts and stereotypes can affect the sexual decision making and sexual schemas of young Black girls. This focused on the interface between the content they are receiving, the context in which they receive and the importance of safety when receiving these messages.

#### Context and Content

This conversation centered around youths' inability to fully make sense of the content that they are absorbing or things they are hearing and experiencing which can affect the way they behave and present without accounting for safety in sexual situations/presentation and the contextual information that goes along with sexual encounters.

*“It makes girls more curious and not about the things that would keep them safe. Because if you go on Instagram, you don't have to go very far to see an ass but you definitely have to dig to find sexual health clinic or how to have safe sex or where to get a condom. Like those things are not readily available in the media whereas how to get your butt bigger and Nicki Minaj's latest song would be a lot easier to find. So, I think there is a level of*

*curiosity that it invokes but not in the things that are going to make sex safe and even fun or pleasurable.” (Esi)*

The group was in agreeance that content, beyond just exposure to hip-hop music, contributes to the detrimental effects of stereotypes and scripts. Popular culture such as Instagram, twitter, and other forms of social media was used as common examples of the easiness in finding sexualized images of popular stars or sexually charged content.

### Lacking Safety

The notion of the combination of unsafe curiosity, exposure to sexual images, shame and secrecy around obtaining sexual information is what the group identified to be the most toxic combination that can effect young Black girl’s sexual decision making and sexual behaviour.

*When I was in my teen years and sexual years were starting to come, Nick Minaj was in her prime. These music types of music videos are coming out...what she was doing was just so hypersexualized. So, I’m thinking, everybody finds this sexy, everybody finds this attractive, I maybe need to look this way to feel attractive and to get male attention, which was the point. I was a 15/16 year old girl, I just wanted boys to like me...and then you start behaving in certain ways that may or may not be so sexually safe to get this type of attention...you think Nicki Minaj gets attention that way so that’s the way I need to do it. That puts you in sexually unsafe scenarios that...say oh, I need to have sex with this guy...it starts influencing your questions, the sexuality, and how you’re formulating your earliest perceptions of sexual health yet not one time is condom use mentioned.” (Grace)*

My anecdotal example of my lived experience was used to discuss how the images, stereotypes, and scripts that the focus group participants described. I noted how these images and stereotypes

trickle down into the sexual schema's of young Black girls and how this affected my sexual decision making from a young age. In contextualizing the effects of these scripts, the group members and I began to engage in discussion around how learning about sexuality or reflecting sexuality in these ways can lead to Black girls entering unsafe sexual situation. Our discussion identified the conditions that create unsafe sexual situations, which are based off of the stereotypes and sexual expression discussed. These included: looking for male attention, feeding the male gaze, early and uninformed sexual experiences, and hypersexualized presentation/dressing. This was emulated when Naana stated:

*“So now if a girl is dressed like, she’s feeling really nice and sexy, she wants to dress up to the club, now because she’s dressed that way everyman that sees her feels it’s their prerogative to touch her ass or to make a comment that is rude and disrespectful because Nicki Minaj does it in her music videos. She allows men to touch her in ways...you know what that I mean...Women are becoming sexualized at a younger age than normal....so now all these kids are rapping and singing these words and they may not understand it but eventually subconsciously or unconsciously you will be taking in these things you are watching. So, these kids, by the time they get to the age of 13, all of a sudden their walking a certain way or losing their virginity at a younger age than they used to. For me, a lot of these things are creating adults a lot sooner than they are meant to be adults.” (Naana)*

Naana made a strong connection between mirroring the stereotypical images of Black femininity and sexuality and unsafe sexual situations. Underlying this point is the powerful combination of three things that make unsafe sexual situations: the perception of Black femininity and sexuality, a lack of contextual information about sex, and applying stereotypically informed expressions of Black femininity and sexuality to the self. In applying these stereotypes to the self while lacking



the contextual information about sex can create perceptions of Black femininity and sexuality from mainly male counterparts that make Black girls more susceptible to things like sexual coercion, assault, exploitation, and manipulation. And it can also affect sexual decision making as popular media stereotypes, like the one's discussed in relation to Nicki Minaj, suggest that Black girls should be engaging in sex frequently and without boundary. This was discussed as unconsciously encouraging Black girls to engage in sexualized behaviour that can put them in sexually mature situations that they may not actually be prepared for, such as losing one's virginity at a young age.

### **Redesigning Sex Education for Black Girls- Comprehensive Conversation, Nuance, and Accessibility**

Tying the conversation altogether took into account the totality of our discussion such as the stereotypes, counter stories, histories, and present day examples, to inform an action-oriented reflection on what needs to change in sexual education to remedy the absorption of the scripts and stereotypes identified from media and society, provide information on its roots, and to transform the discourse internally and externally with definitions that signify power, freedom and nuance for young Black girls in regards to femininity and sexuality. At first, the group identified some barriers that affect young Black girls from accessing sex-education that is comprehensive and nuanced. These barriers include, religion, accessibility and lack of representation and investment.

*“This aspect of religiosity right, then you are thinking because you are raised in a particular household that is often religious is your black that ‘gosh, I shouldn’t be looking at these things’, there’s such shame...the first thing you are going to absorb is this ass you are seeing on*

*Instagram and not dig deeper to unpack some of that and look for sexual health information because some of this is linked back to secrecy.” (Grace)*

I went on further to say...

*“Sex education specific to black girls needs to be informed by black voices” (Grace)*

In response, ChoChoe wondered about the possibility of this framework when she stated:

*someone mentioned that there should be sex-ed specific to Black girls and I thought who the hell would teach it? Cause there’s so many white teacher’s and wanting to have that as an option, my immediate thoughts was ‘how’ because it does not seem like it would be likely” (ChoChoe)*

This conversation had elements that circled back to the complications identified in producing self-definitions of Black sexuality; religiosity. Overcoming the widespread abstinence-based mentality within the household, schools, and government and how this is underpinned by religiosity, was the first identified challenge to accessing comprehensive sex-education for all children. Specific to Black girls, issues of relatability and accessibility were brought up and circumvented around a lack of diverse people to teach it and a lack of investment within the school-board and district. Directly relating back to political notions of knowledge; the group of women alluded to sex-education specific to Black girls needing to be rooted in anti-racism. Meaning, curriculum that is reflective of the identity in content, the way it is taught, and whom it is taught by would be the largest challenge.

### Accessibility

Remedying some of these challenges looked at increasing accessibility and dispelling the secrecy around have sexually educational conversations.

*“And I think a lot of the discussion about how people voted in Ontario based on sexual education plan is why our premier lost because she was lobbying for our sex-ed to be taught earlier. And a lot of people were saying that shouldn’t be the case but I am like, ‘your baby works a tablet’ ...Like if your toddler can work a tablet, do you not think that they are going to be exposed...But I believe if you’re old enough to get an STI then you need to know what that means.” (Adjoa)*

This quote reflects the consensus the group came to in regards the overarching principle that should shape sex education; that everyone, regardless of age, has a right to accessing sexual education to protect themselves, enhance their safety, and to enhance their capacity and decision making.

### Comprehensive Content

After an invigorating discussion on how sex-education could be delivered in accessible ways to young Black girls, the group then spoke of what should be included in sex education. Altogether, there was a list of comprehensive topics that was included that was identified as beneficial to all students.

*“Like a disability and sex, same sex or same gender interaction, even fetishes...I don’t know how early kids will start thinking about that. Like literally anything you can think of because there’s kids that feel odd. So bring it all up. Everything, different types of bodies, all types of bodies, interracial couples, literally anything just bring it up so then the one kid that has more questions will read...” (ChoChoe)*

In agreeance, Esi went also mentioned...

*“I think information about birth control options and also how drugs and alcohol affect your body and can maybe influence your sexual decision making. And that would come from experience especially, I find being an adult is interesting because you’ll go out and guys will be like ‘oh can I buy you a rink’ and that’s usually a little opening” (Esi)*

This touched upon topics anywhere from sexuality, gender identity, substances and sex, consent, birth control options, homosexual sex and safety and so much more. This was underpinned with elements of accessibility and diversity, meaning that making the conversation as comprehensive as possible not only touches diverse expressions and identities of sexuality but also places it in a format that is easily accessed by all without feeling the shame and secrecy of wanted to explore particular topics on one’s own.

### Nuance

In regard to sex education specific to Black girls, the group was in agreeance that the nuance of Black identity and experience needs to be taken into account. This does not only include the stereotypes and scripts thrust upon Black girls from a young age but the nuanced experiences that Black girls have that makes sexual situations more unsafe than other female counterparts.

*“There should be an entire unit on just Black girls. Like Black girls and sex education, HELLO, like this is what people see you as; if you are going to develop early then this may or may not happen, if somebody comes up to you and they are saying things like this and they are speaking very subliminally then this is what they mean. It is a safety risk; it is a security risk...I think for Black women you need to talk about the nuance of it. It’s not as simple as this is what happens when the penis goes into the vagina and you know STIs and*

*stuff. I think there is a very real sexual warfare happening to Black women and I think there needs to be that nuances discussion of, can we talk about interaction, can we talk about how you can be coerced into sex, can we talk about how your uncle that you think is your uncle is viewing you in a sexually inappropriate way and everybody in your family is acting like that's not a problem. Like, you need to talk about the nuance that nobody else is talking to them about. If they can spot the nuance at an early age, then they can make the choices" (Adjoa)*

Naana echoed similar sentiments and further expressed additional points of exploration...

*"We need to talk about the mental aspect because that is important more than anything else...maybe when we are younger, we should work on the mind and their self-esteem or whatever can help because this is something they can do as they grow and progress."*  
(Naana)

The nuances of growing up with bodies typically more bodacious and ample than other, the scripts that come along with having a particular body that has come along with that, the ways this infiltrates and shapes sexual decision making and most importantly sexualized treatment of young Black girls is the nuance that is described. This, coupled with the effects on the mental health of young Black girls and how this affects body image and sexual behaviour, was another layer of nuance needing more education and conversation.

*"I think for me one of the things is that I went to a white dominant school. Most of the schools I was the only Black person so it was a little hard to have a body or whatever. I always looked older than anyone in my grade...so I think one thing I would tell myself is it's okay. Accept yourself. Who you are is enough and that other people's beauty is not the absence of your own" (Naana)*

Similarly, I shared...

*“You’re beautiful as you are, find the confidence in what you look like and know that because you don’t look like what you see on TV or on Instagram that it does not mean you are not beautiful and it shouldn’t be the reasons that you become so willing to put yourself in situations that you are not okay with to feel beautiful” (Grace)*

The tightly woven intricacies of mental health, self image, and sexual decision making brought this transformative conversation to a close. It was overwhelming agreed upon that infiltrating what is behind the sexual decision making of Black girls not only need to include the historical and present-day aspects of scripts and stereotypes but also needs to include body image and mental health. The ways Black girls are bombarded with sexualized images and reflections of themselves but also bombarded with wholesome images of white women is a nuance that has the ability to negatively impact the body image and confidence of young Black girls in ways that can make sexual decision making a pathway to feeling beautiful or rising social rank. The beauty of Black Girl Magic is a nuance, throughout any education, that must remain omnipresent.

Centering and highlighting the Black female voice was paramount to my analytic process as this shapes the voice and reflective output that create tangible solutions for Black girls and women. This is important to recognize as it creates the basis of politicizing this study; through creating intentional pathways to reject narratives placed upon us as Black women, replace them with definitions curated and crafted from our collective and differing lived experiences and truths, and reclaim aspects of our identity that has been exploited and oppressed. Through the application of the Black Female Gaze, we were able to engage in a collaborative discussion BY Black women FOR Black women about stereotypical presentations in media and society, their

colonial roots, the impacts this has on young Black women, and how we can shape sexual health education to benefit the most marginalized.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

Applying a thematic analysis to my transcriptions, underpinned by the principles of BFT, CRT, and HHFT produced several themes and subthemes as the codebook was created. As language, lived experience, and expression around popular media was discussed, collective patterns in data in respect to sexual, feminine, racial, and cultural histories and present-day experiences were teased out. Patterns described scripts of femininity and sexuality, influences on sexual decision making, analysis of hip-hop music, and sex education framed the overarching themes which was organized according to my question list. In addition, elements of my positionality and cultural intuition as a sexually active Black women was also brought to the center of analysis, using my common experiences, tradition, history and culture to aid the analytic process and to shape my contributions as a participant in the group.

Emerging from my analysis of the focus group discussion were five thematic categories—*stereotypes about Black femininity and sexuality, roots of stereotypes and scripts, effects on sexual decision making, counter stories about Black femininity and sexuality, and redesigning sex education for Black girls*. These themes illuminate reflective and culturally informed critical developments for discussion that focus on how the perceptions of sexual health in relation to Black sexuality and femininity shape sexual health and decision making. Moreover, my analysis suggests the importance of extending the conversation to what needs to be addressed within society at large and sexual health education more specifically, to enhance the sexual literacy and

education of young Black women. In creating and analyzing these categories, I found the data suggested a collective and consensual alignment of opinions around the various themes that allow me claims about the stereotypes of Black femininity and sexuality, the actualities of Black femininity and sexuality, the role of media and society, the detrimental impacts on young Black girls, and implications for education.

### ***1. Impact of Stereotypical/ Racial Scripts of Femininity and Sexuality Black Women and Girls***

My research echoes much of the previous scholarly research in this area. As discussed in the focus group, participants confirm that the salient stereotypes about race and gender socially construct Black women and girls as risky, sexually deviant and opportunistic (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). The focus group participants also named stereotypes of Black femininity that circumvent around Black women being unfeminine, aggressive, or overly confident, linking these experiences to interpersonal interactions, media, and personal experiences. The participants were in agreeance that these stereotypes and scripts typically come from white or male counterparts.

The stereotypes described, draw parallels to the eurocentric, neoliberalist, and discriminatory ideologies that literature by Maynard (2020), Smith (2008), and Wilkinson (2003) identify. Framing their findings around the historic conceptualization of Black girls as “risky”, these stereotypes and scripts then become the racial and gendered degrees of separation that are used to justify the sexual and gendered maltreatment that Black women face, particularly the disinvestment in the sexual health and education of Black girls (Maynard, 2020; Smith, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003). This has the ability to shape programing and funding that reproduces the narrative that Black girls are undeserving of educational investment due to their “risk” and



personal failings as it pertains to sexual decision making (Maynard, 2020; Smith, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003). This is important to draw out as this creates a strong rationale as to where these stereotypes and scripts come from as well as their perceived effects of sexual decision making.

## ***2. The Roots of Stereotypes and Scripts***

Through exploring the racial and gendered stereotypes of Black girls, the focus group was able to explicitly identify the historic foundations of these harmful ideologies. First, the participants linked these stereotypes and scripts back to colonial days and the slave era, using the earliest depictions of the Black female form and descriptions of Black sexuality as root examples. The participants drew upon examples like Sara Baartman, the ownership and trade of Black women, as well as the sexual exploitation of Black women and how this has shaped societal perceptions of Black femininity and sexuality. An emphasis of this conversation was placed on the shape of the Black female body, often being ample breasted and curvaceous, as being theorized by early European colonizers as inherently libidinous and sexually insatiable due to its shape and size. This directly echo's the literature of Lindsay-Dennis (2015), Davis & Tucker-Brown (2013) and Field (2005) that traces the sexual imagery of Black women to colonial slave times where the production of Black women being likened to "the Jezebel" began. This shows that in the earliest interactions of "Blackness" and "whiteness", the degrees of separation mentioned were crafted and allocated sharply and with intention (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014).

It is important to recognize that both the focus group and previous literature state that these stereotypes are crafted from the standards of innocence that larger society and history have defined. This standards of innocence, and by proxy deservingness, often circumvents around

notions of whiteness, maleness, Christianity and middle class status (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Therefore, the archetype and antithesis of innocence, adopting this view, would be the Black woman due to her intersections of gender, race, and class (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay- Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). As identified by both the group and literature, these stereotypes and scripts have continued to present day through it's continuous perpetuation in popular media (Henry, 2010; Lindsey, 2015).

Using popular culture, particularly hip-hop, to explore the perpetuation of Black racial and gendered stereotypes allowed the focus group participants, including myself, to identify images, lyrics, and artists that either feed or reject the stereotypes mentioned. The participants described using the popular hip-hop artist Nicki Minaj as an example, the hypersexual lyrics, hyper feminine imagery, scantily dressed bodies, and emphasis on breasts and "booty" as harmful reflections of the stereotypes and scripts described above. As literature by Henry (2010) and Lindsey (2015) put forth, linking images and stereotypes in popular culture, like hip-hop, back to the earliest female experiences of exploitation in slave and colonial times, can provide a justification for how these stereotypes of Black femininity and sexuality have been absorbed and reproduced by dominant society and potentially, by the Black females.

### ***3. The Effects on Sexual Decision Making***

With the role of media remaining central to this conversation, it can also be said that popular media like hip-hop has the potential to become a distinct cultural tool that affects the minds of those consuming it (Lindsey, 2015; Henry, 2010). With a lack of consciousness around media's replication of harmful history and stereotypes, Black girl's can absorb the stereotypes and scripts of Black femininity and sexuality in a way that becomes deeply internalized (Lindsey, 2015;

Henry, 2010). As David & Tucker-Brown (2013), Field (2005), Lindsay-Dennis (2015), and Whitten & Sethna (2014) have argued, these internalized rigid definitions and stereotypes shape the social interactions and ways that people perceive Black girls and women in ways that have direct negative implications on Black girls. In addition, these rigid definitions and stereotypes can also shape the ways that Black women and girls socially interact as well (David & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This suggests that these scripts and stereotypes can impact the sexual health, sexual self concept, and sexual decision making of young Black females in a fashion that deteriorate the sexual health of Black girls by making them more susceptible to things like STD's/STI's, early and unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDs, and sexual abuse (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Field, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Whitten & Sethna, 2014).

These were the exact sentiment of the participants of the focus group; without media literacy and/or comprehensive sex education, young Black girl's consuming popular media can internalize these stereotypes in a way that makes them curious about sex but necessarily about the things that keep them sexually safe. The group also identified that consuming stereotypically harmful media also has the ability to make young Black girl's want to engage in sex more due to perceived popularity it may gain them, as they want to emulate their favourite artists. The concept of safety was central to this conversation as the insights mentioned were also described as antecedents that feed the cycle of the disproportionate overrepresentation of Black women in detrimental sexual health statistics. Described by one of the participants as a "sexual warfare against Black women and girls", creating safe sexual situations for Black girl's is paramount to protecting their sexual health as well as dismantling the harmful notions about them. Aligning with Black feminism, an integral part of the Black women's ammunition in creating safety for

the self is having the ability to redefining herself while arming herself with knowledge (Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). This became the building blocks for creating the counter story and redesigning sex education.

#### ***4. The Counter Stories of Black Femininity and Sexuality to Inform Sexual Health Education Content and Delivery***

The findings suggest the importance of creating counter stories and new definitions of Black women's sexuality to inform sex education curricula in a manner that is reflective of the experiences of Black women and girls. As repeatedly stated by Black Feminist scholars, allowing Black women and girls the space to redefine the self and inform curriculum, policy and practice is the most influential building block to systemic change as well as the pathway to liberation and empowerment for Black women and girls (Hill Collins, 2016; Patterson, et al, 2016; Simien & Clawson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). Also asserted by Hankivsky & Cormier (2011) and Wilkinson (2003), the foundations to overturning systems informed by racism and white supremacy must include the dismantlement stereotypical, racist, discriminatory and oppressive practices and ideologies.

The focus group participants directly confronted stereotypical scripts about being a sexually active Black woman through reclaiming their identity and creating their own definitions of Black femininity and sexuality. Additionally, through re-examining hip-hop culture and highlighting positive examples of popular hip hop artists that emulate these reclamations and new definitions, the focus group was able to find tangible and concrete examples within the self and within hip hop culture, that affirmed their new definitions. In challenging the stereotypical concepts of Black femininity as masculine and aggressive, the focus group and I chose to redefine Black femininity as something that is inherently nurturing; drawing intentional links to traditional

aspects of Afro-Caribbean culture. The focus group and I described Black women as homemakers and caregivers that carry strong principles of loyalty and warmth. Across the group, this was identified as a trait that is ingrained in Black women that makes them distinct from white counterparts. This directly challenges the notion of Black women as masculine as it allowed Black women to express the ways in which they exert feminine energy in impactful and transformative ways.

In challenging stereotypical scripts of Black sexuality that describe Black women as inherently promiscuous and hypersexual, we were able to redefine Black sexuality as something that is both powerful and freeing, yet, at times, shameful. The women in the group expressed complicated relationships between religious upbringings and sexual identity, which has the ability to form feelings of shame, secrecy and guilt when learning about sex and exploring one's sexuality. Linking this back to how religiosity can mirror patriarchal and colonial views of women and sex, the participants and I shared stories of coming to terms with their sexuality and how we learned, as Black women, to express it in healthy ways. Predicating this on having the freedom and agency to express your sexuality, we challenged the concept of Black women being libidinous by redefining our sexuality as something that is respected and sacred within ourselves. We described and defined the expression of Black femininity and sexuality as a choice, that Black women have the power to make. What helped flush this conversation out more, was comparing these concepts to the ways popular hip-hop artist like Janelle Monae express their femininity and sexuality. Across the group, we found that her artistry intentionally gender bends and dispels hypersexuality and hyperfemininity, which was central to the images and lyrics that resonated with us and reflected the ways we felt about Black sexuality the most. What we recognized is

that the pathway to liberation, empowerment, and freedom lays within the ability to express and define the self; and this was the largest takeaway to inform sex-education.

### ***5. Redesigning Sex Education for Black Girls***

Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty (2008), Action Canada SHA (2019), and Hankivsky & Cormier (2011), argue that intersectional perspectives and culturally attentive prevention and protection techniques should inform comprehensive sex education curricula to aid issues of inclusivity and sex literacy. Deepening this, David & Tucker-Brown (2013) and Wyatt and Riederle (1994) found that culturally attentive techniques that allow its learners to raise critical consciousness, reflect and engage in dialogue, to focus on sexual self esteem and self concept, and that creates new definitions of sexual health and literacy is the most affective influence to inform the sexual practice and decision making of adolescents. This was echoed by the focus group participants as we collectively claimed that in addition to nuance and intersectionality, sex education should also be accessible and attentive to a format that is thorough in comprehension. The women felt that sex education should include a range of topics including: sexuality, gender identity, substances and sex, consent, birth control options, mental health, self esteem and self image, homosexual and heterosexual sex and safety and much more. The also asserted the importance of including diverse sexual expression and identity and believed that this should be contextualized within formal content and by adding elements of popular culture to inform education while enhancing both media and music literacy.

Accessible sexual health education also addresses barriers to access; this includes dispelling the widespread religious shame and secrecy around sex that is underpinned by abstinence based preferences in education, increasing and investing in the representation of Black educators in the classroom, and increasing general political movement towards changing sex education in

general. The challenge however, is that this work continues to fall into the optimistic matrix of achieving widespread, progressive, and collective political, ideological, and policy change; much like the previous research has ultimately concluded, this has not produced meaningful change (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Smith, 2008; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wilkinson, 2003). Those suggestions, much like the one's also presented in my focus group, would require an overturn of rigid and regimented structures that uphold our present society and education (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Smith, 2008; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wilkinson, 2003). Recognizing this, we as a group extended the conversation to how these changes may feasibly and realistically be achieved, which are pearls of insight that can be injected into the realm where social work, policy, and education meet.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The world of social work occupies a powerful position that touches upon many sectors of human service and experience, allowing the realm of social work the unique ability to blend social justice and interconnect the sectors of society we deem to be separate from other aspects of life, such as school, health care, politics, child welfare etc. Social workers who are concerned with social justice, can act as a bridge of equity between the sectors of society that all human beings interact with. Specific to education, social work can make bridges of equity within and outside of the school board by intentionally working to fill the gaps identified by marginalized populations in their learning experiences, therefore directly and positively impacting populations and communities of people by arming them with knowledge that they have been intentionally and systemically denied.

In relation to Black girls and sex education, my research suggests that social work can fill these gaps by influencing curriculum that has traditionally been grounded in a medical model of

care and abstinence based learning to one that is reflective of public health concerns, such as unwanted pregnancy, sexual disease and infection transmission etc. within schools and shift towards a culturally informed model of care that is comprehensive. This model would be concerned with sexual health as it intersects with the nuance of people's identities as well as thorough content that arms youth with sexual knowledge around condom use, infection rates, sexuality, media, choice, consent and more. This could happen through having social workers take on school based administrative positions or occupying roles in public health and social police. This can take the fashion of anti-racist educators taking up school positions as well or social workers running sex-positive external programming through community centres.

First, social workers can inform school programming by occupying spaces and titles like school administrator and advisor, policy analyst, or curriculum auditing sex education and other school programming to ensure it is informed with an intersectional, anti-racist, Black feminist lens (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Hill Collins, 2016; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). However, as identified by the focus group participants, are the barriers to achieving systematic change even while occupying those spaces (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). Second, there continue to be bleak and unrealistic opportunities to shape sex education within school boards to that are comprehensive, inclusive, and anti-racist (Ahern & Kiehl, 2006; Smith, 2008; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). In response to this, the focus group came up with tangible solutions. These include platforms that speak to the times and information pathways of the youth today that are media informed, interactive and community based solutions such as external groups coming into schools to do talks or app/web based counseling and advising on sexual health particular to Black girls. Here, chat groups with professionals around sex, online counseling that weaves in



the impacts of popular culture and media literacy, after school drop-in sex education programming, or online information webinars are the various suggestions put forth by the group

Predicating this on how accessible media and other platforms are to children was described as reason enough to start to change the discourse around sex-education as abstinence based to comprehensive. Overarching this was the notion of keeping youth safe and informed which does not encourage early sexual activity. Second to this was overcoming the challenge of accessibility by removing sex-ed specific to Black girls from school-based curriculum altogether due to the perceived lack of investment and complication with confidentiality. Creating a safe space, outside of the school, either through external organizations or online platforms where girls can come together in community-based ways was central to this conversation. Using media platforms, as this is highly popularized among youth of this generation, was seen as the best route to achieve this as it allows people confidentiality and agency in the ways they would like to engage in the conversation and it also allows for a larger network of community building to occur.

So, how this can exist within the realm of social work and become the work of social workers is seemingly possible. This can look at developing programs specific to Black girls and diverse populations around sex education, offering this within external agencies, developing online platforms and counseling, or offering drop-in services for girls. Much like how social workers within agencies do this for topics such as substance use and addictions or trauma or violence against women work, this same community based, group centered, inclusive formats can be used for sex education specific to Black girls. This could be a social work sex counselor of diverse identity that goes to schools to do after school programming, runs monthly groups/webinars around various topics, or engages in over the phone/in-person/virtual sex

education counseling. This does not require a multitude of research and statistics as this has already been provided and the numbers and impacts are crystal clear (Action Canada SHA, 2019).

What is necessary to fulfill this commitment is investment, acknowledgement and steadfast dedication to achieving social justice within sexual health education for Black women and girls. As suggested by Hankivsky & Cormier (2011), this means working within a Multi-strand Project Framework that aims to develop policy models through addressing the origins and outcomes across various intersections and using this to map, vision, road test, monitor and evaluate sexual health policy and programming. Using an intersectional, Black informed format to crafting this type of program and a policy can be done, if at least a portion of society is structured to support it ideologically and methodologically. That portion of society could be us, as social workers.

### **Implications for Social Work Research**

Drawing on Hip-Hop is a culturally attentive approach to analysis (Banister & Bergoray, 2015; David & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Lindsay-Dennis; 2015). Banister & Bergoray (2015), David & Tucker-Brown (2013), and Lindsay-Dennis (2015) argue that using Hip-Hop, a form of popular Black culture, can further analyze how stereotypes and scripts are presented in media and larger discourses about Black women and how they impact the sexual decision making of young Black girls. This is important to social work research with Black women because it deploys a methodology that is reflective of Black culture and encapsulates the visual and media components that potentially influence the mind of Black women. Previous research, such as Lindsay-Dennis (2015), suggests that these harmful stereotypes are presented in Hip-Hop images and lyrics, leaving Black girls to absorb and internalize these stereotypes through likening

themselves to archetypes of Black femininity and sexuality found in music videos and popular artists. In analyzing the popular Hip-hop artists Nicki Minaj, my research approach and process enabled focus group participants to voice our feelings and experiences in ways we may have not otherwise been able to articulate. This is because analyzing Hip-Hop images and lyrics can be used to serve and produce a counter story or a reclamation of Black femininity and sexuality, which can be a positive and powerful avenue to influencing the mindset and sexual decision making of young Black girls. Through collectively analyzing another popular Hip-Hop artist Janelle Monae, a woman who actively resists the stereotypes and scripts of Black femininity and sexuality in her presentation and music, the group was also able to identify ways that Black femininity and sexuality can be celebrated, expressed, and redefined to be intersectional, delicate, beautiful, and strong.

### *Limitations*

While my findings are reflective of particular Black voices, it does not allow me to make broad claims about the impact of stereotypes and scripts on the sexual behavior of young Black girls and the concepts that need to be remedied in sex education to achieve sexual health. This has been a commonly identified limitation of using a BFT, HHF, and CRT framework (Amoah, J., 1997; Freeman, M., Vasconcelos, E., 2010; Simien, E., Clawson, R., 2004; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Taylor, U., 1998). Due to the heterogeneity of focus group and the small focus group format, I can not claim that all Black women identify these stereotypes, agree to these counter stories, reclamations and new definitions, and suggestions (Amoah, J., 1997; Freeman, M., Vasconcelos, E., 2010; Simien, E., Clawson, R., 2004; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Taylor, U., 1998). But I can offer an alternative discourse and framework, grounded in the lived experiences and opinions of my focus group participants, about Black femininity and

Black sexuality in relation to sex and sex education, that can sew the seeds for future research to test the merit and expand the discussion and categories of this subject on a larger and more diverse, population of Black girls.

An additional common limitation of the theories deployed could be my dual positionality as both researcher/facilitator and participants; the potential to distort power in the research process, the ability to shape the findings to my ontological views, and issues with reflexivity due to dual roles (Amoah, J., 1997; Freeman, M., Vasconcelos, E., 2010; Simien, E., Clawson, R., 2004; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Taylor, U., 1998). In recognizing this from the beginning of the research project, I found it important to be aware of my insider and outsider status and how this impacts data collection, to ensure fluidity in the conversation, and to be mindful of how my contributions shape the conversation. However, it is important to recognize that in using a BFT and HHF framework, this dual positionality is not seen as a limitation as it has purpose; to demarcate the hierarchy of traditional research, to elevate the voice of Black women, and for mutual empowerment and capacity building through community based discussion and elements of sisterhood (Amoah, J., 1997; Freeman, M., Vasconcelos, E., 2010; Simien, E., Clawson, R., 2004; Sefa Dei, G., Singh Johal, G., 2005; Taylor, U., 1998).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, while a portion of the purpose of this paper was to call for consistent and comprehensive sex education for adolescents across Canada, the main purpose was a call to visualize and attend to the most forgotten in this conversation, the Black female student of colour. As suggested, this entails more than just developing and cementing comprehensive education, but one that is as reflective and conversational, encompassing all the identities of the students that informs and influences the sexual practice in their lives. In making a case for this,

the paper discussed how the present policy structure inherently leaves the Black female population out of this conversation while continuing to ignore the stereotypical and harmful racial and gendered scripts that shape young Black girl's sexual decision making and sexual identity. I then created a platform for discussion around ways that this could be remedied from the voices and opinions of Black women in a small focus group. These insights and lived experiences helped me craft tangible solutions and recommendations, in research and practice, that can extend this conversation in ways that paramount co-construction, collaboration, cultural and ethnic attendance, and accessibility.

I feel firm in stating that the conversation no longer needs to focus on proving a need for including Black women in critical educational conversation around sex, but rather shifting priorities to focus on co-creating ways for this to be taken up by the most influential stakeholders. Yet, until this comes to fruition, the sexual literacy and health of Canadian adolescents of colour, continues to hang in the balance. Thus, accompanied with this call for anti-racist and intersectional sex education, comes a call to intersecting communities and researchers, to actively participate in uncovering and rewriting the narratives and discourses that currently inform our policy and political structure to push meaningful issues onto the political and educational agenda.

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## Appendix A



**McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)**  
 c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support  
 MREB Secretariat, GH-305  
 1280 Main St. W.  
 Hamilton, Ontario, L8W 4L8  
 email: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca  
 Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142

**CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH**

Today's Date: Mar/31/2020

Supervisor: Dr. Saara Greene  
 Student Principal Investigator: Ms. Renata Hall  
 Applicant: Renata Hall  
 Project Title: The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Health Discourse and Education  
 MREB#: 3710

Dear Researcher(s)

The ethics application and supporting documents for MREB# 3710 entitled "The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Health Discourse and Education" have been reviewed and cleared by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants.

The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. The above named study is to be conducted in accordance with the most recent approved versions of the application and supporting documents.

Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the Annual Report in advance of the yearly anniversary of the original ethics clearance date: Mar/31/2021. If the Annual Report is not submitted, then ethics clearance will lapse on the expiry date and Research Finance will be notified that ethics clearance is no longer valid (TCPS, Art. 6.14).

An Amendment form must be submitted and cleared before any substantive alterations are made to the approved research protocol and documents (TCPS, Art. 6.16).


Researchers are required to report Adverse Events (i.e. an unanticipated negative consequence or result affecting participants) to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible, and no more than 3 days after the event occurs (TCPS, Art. 6.15). A privacy breach affecting participant information should also be reported to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible. The Reportable Events form is used to document adverse events, privacy breaches, protocol deviations and participant complaints.


Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Test Instruments	Stimuli to Elicit Response	Feb/06/2020	1
Confidentiality/Data Security	Student Resources	Feb/06/2020	1
Recruiting Materials	Recruitment Poster Draft 2	Mar/19/2020	2
Recruiting Materials	Advertisement social media version 2	Mar/19/2020	2
Recruiting Materials	Email Recruitment Script version 2	Mar/19/2020	2
Recruiting Materials	Email Reminder Recruitment Script version 1	Mar/19/2020	1
Letters of Support	Student Resources version 2	Mar/19/2020	2
Interviews	Focus Group Guide and Script version 3	Mar/23/2020	3
Letters of Support	Follow Up Email Script version 2	Mar/23/2020	2
Confidentiality/Data Security	OathConfidentiality	Mar/23/2020	1
Consent Forms	Letter of Information and Informed Consent FOR ETHICS version 3	Mar/23/2020	3
Recruiting Materials	Follow Up Email Script version 3	Mar/29/2020	3
Consent Forms	Oral Consent Log Version 2	Mar/29/2020	2
Consent Forms	Oral Consent Script Sample version 2	Mar/29/2020	2
Response Documents	revisions 3	Mar/29/2020	3

Dr. Violetta Ioneski

Dr. Violetta Ioneski, MREB Chair, Associate Professor,  
 Department of Philosophy, UH-308,  
 Dr. Sue Becker, MREB Vice-Chair, Professor,  
 Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour, PC-312.

Appendix B



**McMaster University** 

**THE FEMALE GAZE:  
RECLAIMING AND  
REDEFINING BLACK  
FEMININITY AND  
SEXUALITY**

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED:**  
**IF YOU ARE A BLACK & FEMALE  
IDENTIFIED STUDENT PLEASE  
CONSIDER TAKING PART IN MY  
THESIS STUDY!**

**YOU WILL BE ASKED TO TAKE PART  
IN A ONLINE FOCUS GROUP VIA  
ZOOM, WHICH WILL BE 1-2 HRS IN  
LENGTH**

**A \$10.00 STARBUCKS  
GIFTCARD WILL BE  
EMAILED TO YOU FOR  
YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

**FOR INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:**  
**RENATA HALL, MSW (C)**  
**HALLR1@MCMASTER.CA**

**UNDER SUPERVISION OF  
DR. SAARA GREENE**

**THIS STUDY HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY, AND  
RECEIVED ETHICS CLEARANCE, FROM THE  
MCMASTER RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**

## Appendix C

### Email Recruitment Script

**Renata Hall, Bsw, Bsc**

Masters Candidate in Social Work

### **The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Health Discourse and Education**

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**E-mail Subject line:** McMaster Study – Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexuality

Hi, \_\_\_\_\_ (name):

I hope this email finds you in good health and spirit!

I am emailing to invite you to participate in a master's thesis project, titled "The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Health Discourse and Education". First and foremost, I would like to thank you for your expressed interest in the study as I feel you would be a great participant for this project. Your participation would involve taking part in an online focus group which will range from 90-120 minutes in length and be facilitated on the app ZOOM. The online focus group will not be video recorded, meaning, your face will not be seen and only your voice will be heard. In these online focus groups, you will be asked questions about your experiences and insights about sexual health, education, and decision making as a Black Female. These focus groups will be audio recorded on a Phillips PocketMemo Digital Voice Recorder (DPM6000/01) and facilitated through the app ZOOM. The ZOOM application platform is encrypted and password protected and the files stored on the audio recorder is on an encrypted USB flash drive as well. The student researcher conducting the meeting will be the only one able to access these recordings. Once transcription is complete, the audio recording will be deleted to anonymize the data. Focus groups will be facilitated by Renata Hall, a Master's of Social Work candidate. Dr. Saara Greene, the supervisor of this Master's thesis project, will not be present for the focus groups or have knowledge of what you said during the focus group.

The risk of this study includes potential emotional discomfort and/or distress and anxiety when discussing sensitive topics, such as race, gender, sex, and lived experience in relation to these things. Additionally, there is a social risk in the event a breach in confidentiality, meaning, that you are able to be identified in the study as participant. These risks include a violation of privacy that may cause much distress. Disclosure of personal information may result in a significant impact on your everyday life in the event of a breach of confidentiality. Though we will take every precaution necessary to protect your confidentiality and privacy, you should be aware of the psychological and social risks involved in the study.

You can stop being in this study at any time during the focus group or refuse to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with. Attached to this email is a copy of letter of information, informed consent, and the lyrical stimulus that will be used during the study. This

gives you the full details about your potential participation in the project for you to determine your comfortability around participation and consent to some of the topics that are sensitive/explicit in nature and to participation in the study. You are invited to review this package and contact the student investigator, Renata Hall with any questions, concerns, or with your intention to participate.

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or questions about your right as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted, you can contact:

The McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142  
c/o Research Office for Administration, Development and Support (ROADS)  
E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

If you feel this is something that might interest you, please let Renata know. Any questions or concerns can be answered by email or phone call. Once you feel comfortable with the information provided and want to participate, you will be contacted with the date of the online focus group and provided a ZOOM web link to join.

I would like to remind you that your participation is entirely voluntary! Please take your time to think about whether or not you would like to be a part of the study. There may also be benefits to your participation. Your participation will be compensated with a \$10.00 online Starbucks giftcard which will be emailed to you once the online focus group is complete.. In addition, peer support is also facilitated during and after the focus group and will be facilitated by Renata Hall, who is seasoned in peer-support, crisis management, and counselling experience. . This peer support is provided to address any concerns related to social or psychological distress, to discuss how your participation made you feel, or to give space to any additional questions, concerns, and comments. With that bening said, you may not feel that these benefits to participation are applicable to you. In light of this, it is repeated that you can choose to cease participation at any time either through stopping verbal contribution to the focus group and muting your microphone on ZOOM or leaving the ZOOM meeting. You will still be compensated regardless.

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration. After a week, we will send you a one-time follow-up reminder email.

**Renata Hall, Bsw, Bsc**  
Masters Candidate in Social Work  
School of Social Work  
McMaster University, Hamilton Ontario  
**905-730-5649**  
**Hallr1@mcmaster.ca**



## Appendix D



### Information Letter and Informed Consent Form

#### **A Study about The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexual in Sexual Health Discourse and Education**

##### Student Principal Investigator

##### **Renata Hall**

Master of Social Work (MSW) Student  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
hallr1@mcmaster.ca

##### Faculty Supervisor

##### **Dr. Saara Greene**

School of Social Work  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
greenes@mcmaster.ca

### **Purpose of the Study:**

The “Female Gaze” is the exploration of racial, gendered, and sexual identity intersections through a female and feminist focused lens. Drawing on lived experience and personal narratives, the purpose of this project is to analyze these intersections in order to explore how they contribute to shaping Black femininity and sexuality, and toward sexual health decision making. I invite you to join a focus group of Black female university students to discuss and reflect on these overarching questions using *your feminine gaze*: How do you understand your own sexual health, and how do your perceptions of your sexuality as a Black female impact your sexual decision making? This inquiry will be explored in the focus group through collaborative discussion and through reflecting on popular examples of hip hop lyrics written and produced by female hip hop artists.

I hope to use this information to co-create knowledge about how the Black female sexual script can be rewritten, redefined, consciously raised, and promoted amongst Black girls in a way that enhances sexual health and literacy. I hope the outputs, analysis, and potential publishing of the discussion from the focus group can be adapted to create tangible opportunities and suggestions to include Black femininity and sexuality in the sexual health discourse, education, policy and programming (i.e. policy proposals in sex education, community programming), and ways to disseminate sexual education to Black communities.

### **Procedures involved in the Research:**

If you choose to participate in this project, you will be asked to participate in an online focus group facilitated through the application ZOOM, with other Black and female identified students at McMaster University or those who are McMaster Alumni. The online focus group will be facilitated by Renata Hall, the student principal investigator of this project and a Master of Social Work Student. Renata will facilitate the group as well as the documentation. Documentation include audio recording during the session through an encrypted Phillips PocketMemo Digital Voice Recorder (DPM 6000/01) and written notes to aid analysis and transcription. Audio recording will not be conducted through the ZOOM application to protect your privacy. It is anticipated that the focus group will be comprised of 8-12 students.

During the focus groups, you will be asked to answer a few questions about your experience as a Black woman and how this pertains to sexual health and decision making, media representations of Black women, and historical societal representations of Black femininity and sexuality. You will also be shown and/or asked to listen to lyrics from two popular Black female hip hop artists to reflect on their expression of Black femininity and sexuality and how this informs media representations of Black women. The lyrics and discussion resulting from the lyrics may be explicit in nature, including profane language and sensitive topics around sexual activity. You may review these questions prior to the focus group for preparation purposes:

1. In a Brainstorm method, what words have been used to be a Black woman? And How would you describe being a Black woman?
2. When you think about black women and sex, what words come to mind and why do you think black women's sexuality is framed in this way? Where do you think that comes from? And how would you describe Black sexuality?
3. If we reflect on the words you have just brainstormed to define black women and black women and sex, when you think about the lyrics and the videos that I sent you, how do you think those things bump up against each other?
4. How do you think that impacts young black women or yourself when it comes to making decision about sex?
5. How do you that the decisions mentioned affect the sexual health of young black women? Or How do these things define the sexual health of young black women?
6. What would need to happen in sex education to support young black women to believe in the value of their sexual health and make it worth protecting?
7. If you were to take sexual health education over again, what would you like to see/be covered?
8. Where did you get this information of what you'd like to see covered from?
9. If you were to give your younger self advice about sexual health what would your message be?
10. there anything we forgot or is there something important that we should know about in relation to this topic?

The online focus groups should take approximately one and a half to two hours to complete. Online focus groups will take place through the online application ZOOM. ZOOM is an encrypted online audio and video platform to conduct meetings in a safe and private way. Upon review on these forms and continued expressed interest and consent, you will be emailed a date, time, and online link to the ZOOM meeting to participate.. With your permission, Renata Hall will audio record these focus groups for the purposes of written transcription and analysis, meaning that the audio files recorded will only be kept until the focus groups have been typed up. The focus groups will be audio recorded on a Phillips PocketMemo Digital Voice Recorder (DPM6000/01). Files (audio and written transcriptions) will be encrypted—audio files will be stored on an encrypted USB flash drive as well that is attached to the audio recorder. When listening to the audio recordings for transcriptions, transcribers will do so in a private office space. The focus group recording for this project will be transcribed by Renata Hall. Once this is completed the audio recording of the focus group will be deleted. Additionally, with your permission, Renata Hall, the facilitator, might take some handwritten notes during the online focus groups to assist in connecting some of the things you say to some major themes of the project. The notes will be reviewed with you at the end of the online focus group to ensure you feel comfortable with and understand anything recorded. These notes will be shredded once they are reviewed by Renata and or/ Dr. Saara Greene, Faculty Supervisor of the project and are typed up. We will also request to use some direct quotations from the online focus

groups and, with your permission, might include them in the written report and potential publishing of the project.

**Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:**

There are risks involved in participating that you should be aware of and consider when taking part in the online focus group process. You may feel uncomfortable and/or anxious when answering some of the questions about your personal experiences of being a Black female, sexually active (or not), or generally talking about race and gender in relation to yourself and society/media/history. Additionally, you may experience some emotional distress when talking about or hearing other participants talk about their shared and/or individual experiences. You might also worry about disclosing your honest feelings and opinions based on how others might react to what you are saying.

Additionally, there are social risks to this study in the event of a breach in confidentiality, which means your personal information being shared and thus allowing you to be identified in the study. The research team cannot breach your confidentiality unless you pose a significant harm to yourself or others, but a risk is present. While every participant will indicate verbal consent after review of the oral consent form and letter of information prior to participating in the focus group and thus will not be permitted to share your information about the focus group elsewhere, we can not guarantee that everyone will abide by this rule. You will not be asked to share your name or any other identifying information in the focus group and we will take every necessary and possible step to maintain your confidentiality, including deleting audio recording of the online focus group once it is transcribed.

To alleviate any potential stress, anxiety, or discomfort, you do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or questions that make you feel uncomfortable/distressed/ or anxious. Additionally, if the lyrical content and resulting discussion also produces potential stress, anxiety, or discomfort, you do not need to participate in that portion of the discussion. You can participate within your own comfortability and mute your microphone at anytime during the online focus group. Moreover, you can withdraw from the study at any time by muting your microphone or cancelling the online call without any sort of penalization or consequence, meaning that you will still receive compensation for your participation. If you need a break during the focus group while discussing particularly sensitive topics, you can let the research team know and/ or mute your microphone. We can check in with you at a later date. You may request to stop audio recording at any time during the online focus group. We will take every necessary measure to protect your privacy and confidentiality and subsequent social risks as outlined above.

You will also be provided a list of services and supports in the community to contact should you need them to ensure that you feel safe, comfortable, and supported after the focus group. Renata Hall is also a co-facilitator for a student led group, United in Colour, where she frequently does peer support. Should you need additional support immediately post group, Renata will make herself available for debriefing and discussion through the application ZOOM—this will not be used as data, will not be audio recorded, and will not be considered part of the study. Additionally, if interested, a debriefing online focus-group may be held for those who would like to extend the conversation, need additional peer support, or general debriefing of subject matter. This would not be audio recorded or used for analysis but rather, it is an extension for additional supports in response to the aforementioned risks. Please indicate during oral consent if this is of interest to you.

**Potential Benefits:**

It is hoped that you will benefit from this study through an opportunity and safe space to talk about your experiences, subjects considered “taboo”, and intersections of your identity as a Black Female in a space and format with your peers that is heavily engrained in sisterhood, mutual reciprocity, and Afro-centricity. Additionally, it is hoped that the focus group will facilitate a space for mutually beneficial peer support, solidarity, consciousness raising and reflection, as well as acquiring new health education. If you choose to participate, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences in a way that may liberate you of frustrations, allows you to engage in critical reflexivity in regards to sexual health, experiences, and decision making, and contribute to feasible change in sexual health education and practice. However, it is also important to note that you may not benefit from participating in this study in the ways outlined above. Again, if you feel there is more risk to participation than benefits, you have the right to cease participation at any time without penalty or loss of compensation.

**Payment or Reimbursement:**

If you agree to participate in the focus group, you will be emailed an online \$10.00 Starbucks gift card as compensation for your participation. This gift card will be emailed to you within 24-48 hours of your participation in the online focus group to an email you provide for main correspondence on this project.

**Confidentiality:**

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. We will not use your name or any information that would identify you, other than the fact that you are a Black female student at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Your verbal informed consent is the only thing that indicates your participation in this study and will be given before the online focus group is recorded to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Dr. Greene will not be present for the focus group, nor will she know that what you personally said or contributed to the focus group. She will only have access to the anonymized data once the audio recording is deleted and transcriptions are typed with your identifying information removed.

However, we are identifiable through the stories we tell. Others, including peers and friends among the school community, may be able to identify you based on the reference you make. Please keep this in mind when deciding what to mention or comment on during the online focus group. Additionally, as mentioned above, there are social risks that come with a potential breach in confidentiality, so please keep that in mind as well when answering questions in the online focus group.

We ask that you respect the privacy and confidentiality of others participating in the online focus group. In this process, you are not permitted to share identities of participants or what they spoke about with others. It is your responsibility to follow these conditions. It can not be guaranteed that people in the focus group will abide by these confidentiality requirements. However, every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality. Please keep this in mind when participating in the online focus group.

Once the study is complete, audio recordings of the online focus group and any additional handwritten notes will be shredded and deleted. The online focus group will be maintained in the form of written transcriptions with no identifying information and will be deleted five years after completion of the project.

**Legally Required Disclosure:**

Although the research team will protect your privacy as outline above, if the law requires it, we may be required to reveal certain personal information if it pertains to imminent and substantial risk to your safety

or someone else's. For example, if there is disclosed physical abuse and/or harm to yourself, others, or a child or disclosed imminent suicidal activity or actionable ideation, your confidentiality would be broken for your or others safety.

**Participation and Withdrawal:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be a part of the study or not. If you decide to be a part of the study, you can stop and withdraw from the online focus group at anytime for whatever reason, even after giving your verbal consent if the focus group is underway. If you want to stop being in the online focus group you can simply stay and stop talking and mute your microphone or you can leave through cancelling the call, but it will not be possible for you to pull your data from the flow of the conversation because of the interconnected nature of this type of group discussion where a persons' comments can stimulate the sharing of comments made by others in a group.

If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. You will still have access to the compensation listed above if you choose to withdraw after the commencement of the online focus group. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

**Information about the Study Results:**

It is expected that this study be completed and transcribed by June 15th, 2020. While full analysis may not be complete, if you would like a brief summary of the result to review and approve, please let us know how you would like that to be sent to you (there is an option for this at the bottom of this form). This will provide you the option of reviewing the report and presentation prior to publication submission, dissertation, and any other outputs.

**Questions about the Study:**

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

[Hallr1@mcmaster.ca](mailto:Hallr1@mcmaster.ca)

905-730-5649

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

## Appendix E

### Stimuli to Illicit Response

Janelle Monet- PYNK

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=2&v=PaYvIVR\\_BEc&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=PaYvIVR_BEc&feature=emb_title)

Lyrics

Pink like the inside of your, baby  
Pink behind all of the doors, crazy  
Pink like the tongue that goes down, maybe  
Pink like the paradise found  
Pink when you're blushing inside, baby  
Pink is the truth you can't hide, maybe  
Pink like the folds of your brain, crazy  
Pink as we all go insane  
So, here we are in the car  
Leaving traces of us down the boulevard  
I wanna fall through the stars  
Getting lost in the dark is my favorite part  
Let's count the ways we could make this last forever  
Sunny, money, keep it funky  
Touch your top and let it down  
Ah, yeah  
Some like that  
Ah, ah  
Some like that  
Ah, yeah  
Some like that  
'Cause boy it's cool if you got blue  
We got the pink  
Pink like the lips around your, maybe  
Pink like the skin that's under, baby  
Pink where it's deepest inside, crazy  
Pink beyond forest and thighs  
Pink like the secrets you hide, maybe  
Pink like the lid of your eye, baby  
Pink is where all of it starts, crazy  
Pink like the halls of your heart  
So, here we are in the car  
Leaving traces of us down the boulevard  
I wanna fall through the stars  
Getting lost in the dark is my favorite part  
Let's count the ways we could make this last forever  
Sunny, money, keep it funky  
Touch your top and let it down

Ah, huh, yeah  
Some like that  
Ah, ah  
Some like that  
Ooh, yeah  
Some like that  
'Cause boy it's cool if you got blue  
We got the pink, huh  
Yeah, some like that  
Oh, some like that  
Yeah, some like that  
'Cause boy it's cool if you got blue  
We got the pink  
Pink like the inside of your, baby (we're all just pink)  
Pink like the walls and the doors, maybe (deep inside, we're all just pink)  
Pink like your fingers in my, maybe  
Pink is the truth you can't hide  
Pink like your tongue going round, baby  
Pink like the sun going down, maybe  
Pink like the holes in your heart, baby  
Pink is my favorite part  
Songwriters: Charles Joseph, Glen Ballard, Janelle Monae Robinson, Nathaniel Irvin Iii, Richie Supa, Steven Tyler, Taylor Parks, Wynne Bennett  
© Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, BMG Rights Management, Warner Chappell Music, Inc.,  
THE BICYCLE MUSIC COMPANY  
For non-commercial use only.  
Data From: [LyricFind](#)

### Nicki Minaj- Rich Sex

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9re75Jws0A>

#### Lyrics

Full blown, run rich, Brinx  
Yo! Mula! Yo! Yeah  
Ayo  
I know what these niggas like, and it ain't my charm  
I ain't stupid, this \$250 on my arm  
I like money more than dick, nigga, that's a fact  
You think pussy's everything? Well, let's have a chat  
A-a-ass out, pussy fat, point me to a rich nigga  
Who gon' Rico, Ace me, pay in full my money, Mitch nigga?  
I'ma help him fuck the check up, I'ma run the business  
If your girl don't get it poppin', put me on your wishlist  
Hitlist, now he sendin' gifts like if it's Christmas

He say, "Baby, everyday we ballin'," I say, "Swish, swish"  
Got him callin' nonstop 'cause he don't wanna miss this  
I said, "Don't panic, keep the faith, nigga, Big's bitch"  
(Real rich nigga sex)  
If you know your pussy worth a Benz truck  
(Rich sex)  
Don't let homie fuck unless his bands up  
(Rich sex)  
Go to DR, get that fat transfer  
(Rich sex)  
It ain't such a thing as broke and handsome  
(Rich sex)  
If you let that broke nigga fuck, we tellin'  
(Rich sex)  
If you let that broke nigga fuck, we tellin'  
(Rich sex)  
If you let that broke nigga fuck, we tellin'  
(Rich sex)  
If you let that broke nigga fuck, we tellin'  
(Rich sex)  
Lil' mama said she only fuckin' on a rich dick  
I cum in her face and tell her, "Now you lookin' rich, bitch"  
Her friend in the other room, can I get a witness?  
We could have some rich sex, cannot have no rich kids  
Facts, all my bitches have no limits  
Fucked her in a helicopter, now she screamin' "Sky's the limit"  
Fuck her in the drop top, now she screamin' "Sky's the limit"  
Sent her back to who she with, now she screamin' "Why I'm with him?"  
Damn, lil' mama said she only suckin' on a rich dick  
Make you put your money where your mouth at, that's some lipstick  
Let's fuck on the money 'fore we count that, that's some rich shit  
Pussy smell like money when I'm down her, that some Nick shit  
(Real rich nigga sex)  
If you know your pussy worth a Benz truck  
(Rich sex)  
Don't let homie fuck unless his bands up  
(Rich sex)  
Go to DR, get that fat transfer  
(Rich sex)  
It ain't such a thing as broke and handsome  
(Rich sex)  
If you let that broke nigga fuck, we tellin'  
(Rich sex)  
If you let that broke nigga fuck, we tellin'  
(Rich sex)



If you let that broke nigga fuck, we tellin'  
(Rich sex)  
If you let that broke nigga fuck, we tellin'  
(Rich sex)  
Rich who? Got bricks, too  
The rich get richer, that's my ritual  
Rich crew, link my bitch, too  
Mack took the Wraith, me and Tune flew  
I don't even know where we going these days, where we landing  
Queen, where we going again?  
To the moon, Alice, the goon palace  
We don't get fly, we take flight, haha  
Woo! Haha, ahh-haha, ahh!  
You mad, doggie? You mad, doggie?  
(Next stop: New York)  
Hahaha, rrrr!  
Songwriters: Aubry Delaine, Dwayne Carter, Jawara Headley, Jeremy Edward Reid, Onika  
Tanya Maraj  
© Universal Music Publishing Group, Warner Chappell Music, Inc., Kobalt Music Publishing  
Ltd.  
For non-commercial use only.  
Data From: [LyricFind](#)

### Nicki Minaj- Anaconda

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDZX4ooRsWs&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDZX4ooRsWs&feature=emb_title)

#### Lyrics

My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't  
My anaconda don't want none unless you got buns, hun  
Boy toy named Troy used to live in Detroit  
Big dope dealer money, he was gettin' some coins  
Was in shootouts with the law, but he live in a palace  
Bought me Alexander McQueen, he was keeping me stylish  
Now that's real, real, real  
Gun in my purse, bitch, I came dressed to kill  
Who wanna go first? I had them pushing daffodils  
I'm high as hell, I only took a half a pill  
I'm on some dumb shit, by the way, what he say?  
He can tell I ain't missing no meals  
Come through and fuck him in my automobile  
Let him eat it with his grills, he keep tellin' me to chill  
He keep telling me it's real, that he love my sex appeal  
He say don't like 'em boney, he want something he can grab

So I pulled up in the Jag', and I hit him with the jab like  
Dun-d-d-dun-dun-d-d-dun-dun  
My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't  
My anaconda don't want none unless you got buns, hun  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt  
(Look at her butt)  
Look at, look at, look at  
Look, at her butt  
This dude named Michael used to ride motorcycles  
Dick bigger than a tower, I ain't talking about Eiffel's  
Real country-ass nigga, let me play with his rifle  
Pussy put his ass to sleep, now he calling me NyQuil  
Now that bang, bang, bang  
I let him hit it 'cause he slang Cocaine  
He toss my salad like his name Romaine  
And when we done, I make him buy me Balmain  
I'm on some dumb shit, by the way, what he say?  
He can tell I ain't missing no meals  
Come through and fuck him in my automobile  
Let him eat it with his grills, he keep telling me to chill  
He keep telling me it's real, that he love my sex appeal  
He say he don't like 'em boney, he want something he can grab  
So I pulled up in the Jag', Mayweather with the jab like  
Dun-d-d-dun-dun-d-d-dun-dun  
My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't  
My anaconda don't want none unless you got buns, hun  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt  
(Look at her butt)  
Look at, look at, look at  
Look, at her butt  
Little in the middle but she got much back  
Little in the middle but she got much back  
Little in the middle but she got much back  
(Oh my God, look at her butt)  
My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't  
My anaconda don't want none unless you got buns, hun  
My anaconda don't, my anaconda don't  
Don't want none unless you got buns, hun  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt  
Oh my gosh, look at her butt

(Look at her butt)

Look at, look at, look at

Look, at her butt

Yeah, he love this fat ass, hahaha!

Yeah! This one is for my bitches with a fat ass in the fucking club

I said, where my fat ass big bitches in the club?

Fuck the skinny bitches! Fuck the skinny bitches in the club!

I wanna see all the big fat ass bitches in the muthafuckin' club

Fuck you if you skinny bitches, what?! Kyuh

Haha, haha

I got a big fat ass (ass, ass, ass)

Come on!

Songwriters: Anthony Ray, Ernest Clark, Jamal Jones, Jonathan Solone-Myvett, Marcos

Palacious, Onika Tanya Maraj

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Data From: [LyricFind](#)

## Appendix F

### Email Script for Follow-Up Focus Group

**Email Subject Line:** Request for Follow-up focus group for Masters Thesis Study: The Female Gaze- Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Health Discourse and Education.

Hi, \_\_\_\_\_(name),

I hope you are doing well!

I am emailing to invite you to participate in a follow up online focus group facilitated on the app ZOOM for the master's thesis project, titled "The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Health Discourse and Education". I wanted to expand our initial conversation from the first online focus group and allow participants to discuss anything that we did not get to in the first focus group and/or offer additional debriefing and support. The purpose of this online follow up focus group is not for data collection. Therefore, you will not be recorded and whatever you say will not be used in the study. This is to provide a safe space for ongoing support as needed to extend the mediation of any risks, due to the sensitive nature and topic of this thesis project. This focus group will take approximately 60-90 minutes to complete.

First and foremost, I would like to thank you for your initial participation, it is extremely appreciated. As previously stated, risks in this study include potential emotional discomfort and/or distress and anxiety when discussing sensitive topics, such as race, gender, sex, and lived experience in relation to these things. Additionally, there is a social risk in the event a breach in confidentiality, meaning, that you are able to be identified in the study as participant. A breach in privacy and confidentiality might result in a loss of privacy. Though every measure will be taken to protect your identity and privacy, it should be known that there is a risk when participating in the study.

You can stop being in this study at any time during the focus group or refuse to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with. This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or questions about your right as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted, you can contact:

The McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Research Office for Administration, Development and Support (ROADS)

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

If you feel that this is something that might be of interest to you, please let me know and I can email you the date, time, and ZOOM link for the online follow-up focus group. Any questions or concerns can be answered by Renata Hall via email or phone. . If you decide that this is something that you are interested in participating in, we will contact you with the date for the follow-up group.

Your participation is entirely voluntary! Take your time to think about whether or not you wish to participate. Thank you very much in advance for your time and consideration.

Take care,

Renata Hall, Bsw, Bsc  
Master's of Social Work Candidate  
School of Social Work  
McMaster University  
[Hallr1@mcmaster.ca](mailto:Hallr1@mcmaster.ca)  
905-730-5649

## Appendix G

***The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining  
Black Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Health  
Discourse and Sex Education***  
Student Principal Researcher: Renata Hall,  
MSWc



### **Oral Consent Script**

#### **Introduction:**

Hello. I'm Renata Hall. I am conducting interviews about Black femininity and sexuality as it pertains to sexual decision making and experiences of sexual education. I'm conducting this as part of research for my Master's thesis at McMaster University's School of Social Work Department in Hamilton, Ontario. I'm working under the direction Dr. Saara Greene of McMaster's department of Social Work Department who is also the acting director of the School of Social Work.

As you expressed interest in my project through your response to my online media posting about my thesis, I find it important to go over with you, the full procedures, risks, and benefits to your participation in this study to ensure you are fully consenting to participation. Due to the online nature of this focus group and project, obtaining your consent has to be orally done. I take it that you have reviewed the letter of information that I sent to you and the lyrics when you initially expressed interest. This consent is to go over, in a shorter format, information you found on that form and to ensure that you are comfortable with participation.

#### **Study procedures:**

I'm inviting you to do an online focus group with approximately 6-8 other black girls affiliated with McMaster University through the online application ZOOM. This take about 60-90 minutes. I will ask you questions about your experiences as a black female and experiences of sexuality as a black female and its connection to sexual decision making and sexual education. For example, questions such as: *What words would you use to describe Black female sexuality? OR If you were to take sexual education over again, what would you like to see or be covered?* would be pathways to facilitating discussion around this topic. Once I have gathered participants, I will determine a date and time that works best for all and set up a ZOOM link on that date, which will be sent to you via email.

#### **Risks:**

There are risks involved in participating that you should be aware of and consider when taking part in the online focus group process. You may feel uncomfortable and/or anxious when answering some of the questions about your personal experiences of being a Black female, sexually active (or not), or generally talking about race and gender in relation to yourself and

society/media/history. Additionally, you may experience some emotional distress when talking about or hearing other participants talk about their shared and/or individual experiences. You might also worry about disclosing your honest feelings and opinions based on how others might react to what you are saying.

Additionally, there are social risks to this study in the event of a breach in confidentiality, which means your personal information being shared and thus allowing you to be identified in the study. The research team cannot breach your confidentiality unless you pose a significant harm to yourself or others, but a risk is present. While every participant will indicate verbal consent after review of the oral consent form and letter of information prior to participating in the focus group and thus will not be permitted to share your information about the focus group elsewhere, we can not guarantee that everyone will abide by this rule. You will not be asked to share your name or any other identifying information in the focus group and we will take every necessary and possible step to maintain your confidentiality, including deleting audio recording of the online focus group once it is transcribed.

To alleviate any potential stress, anxiety, or discomfort, you do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or questions that make you feel uncomfortable/distressed/ or anxious. Additionally, if the lyrical content and resulting discussion also produces potential stress, anxiety, or discomfort, you do not need to participate in that portion of the discussion. You can participate within your own comfortability and mute your microphone at anytime during the online focus group. Moreover, you can withdraw from the study at any time by muting your microphone or cancelling the online call without any sort of penalization or consequence, meaning that you will still receive compensation for your participation. If you need a break during the focus group while discussing particularly sensitive topics, you can let the research team know and/ or mute your microphone. We can check in with you at a later date. You may request to stop audio recording at any time during the online focus group. We will take every necessary measure to protect your privacy and confidentiality and subsequent social risks as outlined above.

You will also be provided a list of services and supports in the community to contact should you need them to ensure that you feel safe, comfortable, and supported after the focus group. Renata Hall is also a co-facilitator for a student led group, United in Colour, where she frequently does peer support. Should you need additional support immediately post group, Renata will make herself available for debriefing and discussion through the application ZOOM—this will not be used as data, will not be audio recorded, and will not be considered part of the study. Additionally, if interested, a debriefing online focus-group may be held for those who would like to extend the conversation, need additional peer support, or general debriefing of subject matter. This would not be audio recorded or used for analysis but rather, it is an extension for additional supports in response to the aforementioned risks. Please indicate during oral consent if this is of interest to you.

**Benefits:**

It is hoped that you will benefit from this study through an opportunity and safe space to talk about your experiences, subjects considered “taboo”, and intersections of your identity as a Black Female in a space and format with your peers that is heavily engrained in sisterhood, mutual reciprocity, and Afro-centricity. Additionally, it is hoped that the focus group will facilitate a space for mutually beneficial peer support, solidarity, consciousness raising and reflection, as well as acquiring new health education. If you choose to participate, you will have the

opportunity to share your experiences in a way that may liberate you of frustrations, allows you to engage in critical reflexivity in regards to sexual health, experiences, and decision making, and contribute to feasible change in sexual health education and practice. In addition, for your participation, you will also receive a \$10.00 online Starbucks gift card that will be emailed to you 24-48 hours after the focus group has taken place. However, it is also important to note that you may not benefit from participating in this study in the ways outlined above. Again, if you feel there is more risk to participation than benefits, you have the right to cease participation at any time without penalty or loss of compensation.

I will keep the information you tell me during the interview confidential. Information I put in my report that could identify you will not be published or shared beyond the research team unless we have your permission. Any data from this research which will be shared or published will be the combined data of all participants. That means it will be reported for the whole group not for individual persons.

**Voluntary participation:**

- Your participation in this study is voluntary.
- You can decide to stop at any time, even part-way through the interview for whatever reason, or up until approximately **June 15<sup>th</sup> 2020**.
- If you decide to stop participating, there will be no consequences to you.
- If you decide to stop we will ask you how you would like us to handle the data collected up to that point.
- This could include returning it to you, destroying it or using the data collected up to that point.
- If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.
- If you have any questions about this study or would like more information you can call or email Renata Hall at **(905) 730-5649** or [hallr1@mcmaster.ca](mailto:hallr1@mcmaster.ca)

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Research Office for Administration, Development & Support (ROADS)

E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

I would be pleased to send you a short summary of the study results when I finish going over our results. Please let me know if you would like a summary and what would be the best way to get this to you.

**Consent questions:**

Do you agree to have the interview audio recorded?

Do you agree to have your responses from this project used in future related projects?

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results via email?



Do you agree to be contacted via email about a follow up focus group for debriefing and peer support and understand that you can always decline the request?

So you agree to have direct quotation of your conversation with the facilitator used in any reports or presentations?

Do you have any questions or would like any additional details? *[Answer questions.]*

## Appendix H

**The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Sexuality in  
Sexual Health Discourse and Sex Education**

**Student Principal Investigator: Renata Hall, MSWc**

**RESEARCHER'S LOG FOR  
RECORDING VERBAL CONSENT**

Participant Code	Participant Pseudonym	Dates	Audio Recording (Y/N)	Future Projects (Y/N)	Summary of Results (Y/N)	Follow up Focus Group (Y/N)	Direct Quotations (Y/N)	Additional Questions (Y/N)
BF01	ESI	08/04/2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
BF02	NAANA	07/04/2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
BF03	Did not participate	08/04/2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
BF04	ADJOA	08/04/2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
BF05	Did not participate	14/08/2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
BF06	ARABA	08/04/2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
BF07	CHOCHOE	14/08/2020	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
BF8- Researcher	GRACE							

**Appendix I**

**The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black  
Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Health  
Discourse and Education**

*Hamilton Focus Group*

*Draft guideline and template*

## **Introduction – Black Femininity and Sexuality in Sexual Discourse and Sexual Health:**

In this thesis study, I aim to provide alternative discourses and strategies to redefining and reclaiming the stereotypical scripts of Black femininity and sexuality found in society and sexual education. These scripts have been shown to directly impact and shape the sexual experiences and sexual decision making of Black women and girls living across Canada. *The Female Gaze: Reclaiming and Redefining Black Femininity and Black Sexuality in Sexual Health Discourse and Education* was framed from the thematic and lyrical analysis of a focus group of 6 sexually active Black women living in Canada. To advocate for reflective, non-discriminatory, anti-colonial definitions of Black women in society and sexual education, it is important to understand and paramount the ways Black women talk about their femininity, sexuality, and experiences of sex education and sexual decision making.

As a critical approach to interpreting textual and lyrical/musical elements consider a range of legal, economic, social, political, institutional and practical factors, an analysis of language, in the way it is created, understood, and used, is necessary to gain reflective and true insights into lived experience in a way that amplifies the voices of Black women in Canada. As language, lived experience, and popular media are never innocent, there are multiple sites of analysis for definitions and descriptions of collective experiences, that can include process, practice, and knowledge generated by participants in narrative focused research such as this. This means that commonly used words/themes/definitions/imagery, as they align with the narrated experiences of Black women, has analytical significance, showcasing women's sexual, feminine, racial, and cultural histories as well as present-day experiences. As this pertains to scripts of femininity and sexuality, sexual decision making, hip hop, and sex education, as the women participated in the focus group, there were some consistent and repetitive themes/phrases/ and words that added collective nuance to their narration. This is what frames the present codebook.

During the two-hour focus group, we allocated time for a facilitated and collaborative discussion about the stereotypes and scripts of Black femininity and Black sexuality found in larger society and in popular media, such as hip-hop. We then further extended this conversation to explore how the nuances of Black women's experiences femininity and sexuality not only dispels the negative stereotypes thrust upon Black women but how they can be used to inform sexual education in a positively impactful way for young Black girls who are constantly seeped in the negative imagery and stereotypes of Blackness. We recorded and anonymized these group discussions and then reviewed some transcripts, taking note of what themes arose when women spoke about femininity, sexuality, hip-hop, and sexual decision making, and sexual education.

In reviewing the sample of participants from this focus group, we identified various ways Black femininity and sexuality could be reclaimed, redefined, and ultimately, described. The following codebook explores the nuanced ways that the women in the focus group describe these concepts. These will be reflected in **themes** that are presented as **chapters** (numbered below). The **themes** closely follow the [Question List](#), which was thematically organized to facilitate the focus group to draw out the intricacies of these women's lived experiences. This will be reflected across the 5

**chapters** that comprise this Codebook. Each **subtheme** will detail the common thread of Black femininity and sexuality, what impacts sexual decision making, and what can be envisioned for sex education in Ontario. The chapter begins with an explanation of the sub-theme and presents an exemplary quote to highlight the sub-theme.

### **Coding Instructions:**

I first reviewed the focus group study participant transcript and identified sections of text (quotes) that represent the nuances of Black female experiences of sexuality, femininity, and sexual decision making as well as the common themes/imagery/stereotypes in society and media of Black femininity and sexuality. Then, I reviewed how these themes/imagery/stereotypes as well as self-definitions based off of nuanced experiences, shape the understanding and reflection of popular hip-hop artists such as Jonelle Monae and Nicki Minaj. After pulling out common reflections on this content, I then analyzed how the women collectively spoke about how this impacts the sexual decision making of themselves, potential impacts on young girls, and how these things frame what should be encompassed in sex education for young Black girls in Ontario. It is important to note that the same section of text (or quote) or image may be applicable to different sub-themes.

In completing this work of identifying text or image that aligns with a sub-theme (or coding), I found that two or more sub-themes can be reduced into one sub-theme, or I found additional sub-themes that aren't listed as chapters below due to it being a polarized, individual experience. I highlighted the entire quote that is to be included, not just one word out of the transcript. This way it is clear where the quote started and stopped to be transferred into analysis.

## **Chapter 1. Black Femininity**

The women were asked to think deeply and produce words/themes/ and descriptive definitions of Black femininity. This was discussed through stereotypical scripts/images/words commonly used to describe Black women in media, interactions, and society. This conversation was extended to compare and explore how this group of Black women describe themselves.

### **1a. Stereotypical Scripts and Definitions of Black Femininity**

The following subtheme of "Unfeminine" was crafted from a stimulating group discussion about stereotypical descriptions/definitions/and imagery of Black femininity. These definitions and words were amalgamated from accounts of words/imagery/definitions women saw or heard in popular media or in their personal interactions of being a Black woman in society that describe Black women as being aggressive, bold, or vulgar.

#### *Sample Quote:*

- "I was going to say aggressive. At the same time, I find people also said we are very open about it, we are very, I guess, bold in a sense. It's used often, at where I work,

that's kind of what I get because I work mainly with men. I find that's something they say a lot especially about me." (Naana)

### **1b. Personal Definitions of Black Femininity**

The following subtheme of "Inherently Nourishing" was crafted from a stimulating group discussion about personal definitions and descriptions of Black femininity. This conversation gave the women an opportunity to reclaim and contest stereotypical definitions and frame this discussion in relation to their personal experiences of being a Black female. A lot of this discussion circumented around the women describing themselves or other Black women as home makers, family oriented, friendly, or as warm or accepting.

#### *Sample Quote:*

- "We are very nurturing. We are very warm, accepting And this is a random conversation I had with one of my white co-workers. And they say a lot of things that they appreciate about some Black women is that they are very traditional....we are home keepers. Whereas most white women don't necessarily do that cooking and all the little things. We are just kind of born that way." (Naana)
  - "Like Wifey" (Adjoa)
- "loyal and traditional was a good one. Not in the send that, like I wouldn't even consider us old school. But more so, in terms of warmth and family orientedness—that kind of traditional. In a way that is different in North America." (ChoChoe)
- "And I just make it a point of being very friendly and warm and inviting because I understand what its like to walk into a place and there is no one that looks like you" (Adjoa)

## **Chapter 2. Defining Black Sexuality**

The women were asked to think deeply and produce words/themes/ and descriptive definitions of Black female sexuality. This was discussed through stereotypical scripts/images/words commonly used to describe Black female sexuality in media, interactions, and society. This conversation was extended to compare and explore how this group of Black women describe sexuality themselves.

### **2a. Stereotypical Scripts and Definitions of Black Sexuality**

The following subtheme of "Inherent Promiscuity" was crafted from a stimulating group discussion about stereotypical descriptions/definitions/and imagery of Black female sexuality. These definitions and words, which produced the central subtheme, was amalgamated from accounts of words/imagery/definitions women saw or heard in popular media or in their personal interactions that reflected a collective mention of "ho" like behavior, a readiness to have sex, and hypersexuality. In addition, labels of "bitch" or being stuck up, was discussed when Black women refuse to engage in sex.

*Sample Quote:*

- “I don’t know why promiscuous comes to mind but it is the first word I think about...especially the way white people would describe Black women, that’s what comes to mind for me.” (Esi)
- “Another one for me is freak. I hear that mentioned a lot. We are often fetishized. Like we are just freaky or we are down to go everything and anything” (Grace)
- “I find a lot of the time, we are either two extremes. So, either you’re all the way, basically the hoe or all the way just stuck up because you say no. It’s like you automatically think you’re better than everyone else and that is how you are seen...even if you’re a friendly person, and I am one of those people, even if you say hi to someone or smile at someone it automatically means you want something or want to have sexual relations...there’s no middle ground” (Naana)

**2b. Personal Definitions of Black Sexuality**

The following subtheme of “Complicated” was crafted from a stimulating group discussion about personal definitions and descriptions of Black female sexuality. This conversation gave the women an opportunity to reclaim and contest stereotypical definitions and frame this discussion in relation to their personal experiences of being a sexually active Black female. This discussion was split in half between discussing and collectively agreeing that Black female sexuality is powerful, free, informed by diversity and agency but at the same time, as something that is shameful, guilty, and unfeminine due to the similar religious upbringings of Christian/Catholic/Anglican faith.

*Sample Quote:*

- “I do like the word free. I think we are very much so in tune with our body because its been so criticized and hyper focused for a very long time. But we have like this knowing of ourselves in sexually healthy ways. So, for me, Black female sexuality kind of looks like an exhibition of being spiritually, sexually, physically free with a person of your choice” (Grace)
- “I also think I like to use the word powerful....over the years I have noticed, within myself, that my sense of worth and sense of sexuality has definitely evolved...the power is within you. So I think, basically, being free in your sexuality means having power over your sexuality and owning your sexuality...just living your truth.” (Naana)

**Chapter 3. Uncovering Stereotypical Roots**

As women were asked to think about the stereotypical definitions, images and scripts of Black femininity and sexuality, they were also asked to explore where they feel these stereotypes originated. A multitude of links and origins were discussed, such as general racial discrimination and media portrayal, but when unpacked further, a common root/theme of origin was “Colonialism” and “Media”. These were generally described as sites and sources of historical oppression, discrimination, and subjugation of the Black female body, agency, and societal

experience/positioning through examples of exoticism, Saara Bartman, and media portrayal of Black women.

*Sample Quote:*

- “The first words that come to mind for me are either like raunchy or trashy. And I do actually think of like music videos. That is what I think of when I think of Black sexuality. I remember my first memory of it I was too young, I was like 9 or 10, and there was a music video on the TV.” (ChoChoe)
- “Even the fact we were considered property to be owned and traded...even our position or the shape of a woman’s body and position in society in relation to her body is different” (ChoChoe)
- “Because we can say it nicely and say like exoticism because I think our Black features have been put on display and shown as crazy...no one thinks you have any humanity left in you just because you have Black features.” (Adjoa)

#### **Chapter 4. Black Femininity and Sexuality Represented in Media**

Women were then asked to think how some of the scripts/stereotypes/images/and themes, both historically and in contemporary times, are presented in popular media, specifically hip-hop culture. This was initially broadly discussed, examining the role of hip-hop music videos, lyrics, and an array of popular artists, both male and female. Then, the conversation was further specified to integrate lyrical content from two popular female hip-hop artists, Janelle Monae and Nicki Minaj, to discuss the impacts of their differing approaches to Black feminine and sexual expression.

##### **4a. In larger Media and Hip-Hop Culture**

The subthemes of “hypersexuality” were analyzed to stem from how women described Black femininity and Sexuality to be presented in larger media, such as TV shows or movies, and hip-hop culture. To contextualize this, they drew upon multiple old and new school hip-hop artists (ie. Queen Latifah, Salt N Peppa, Princess Nokia, and Megan Thee Stallion).

*Sample Quote:*

- “I think its sad because in music the amount of Black women, especially intersectional Black women too...not seeing themselves as being able to express themselves in different ways. Why is it only female rapper that show their sexuality in REALLY one way...but they are a complex person” (Adjoa)
- “Like Queen Latifah is a boss, she didn’t have to be naked to do so. And again, at the same time, I’m not judging Nicki Minaj’s choice...but at the end of the day when you keep doing that all the time is also changes the image of how black women are viewed. You are a representation for the culture.” (Naana)



#### 4b. Janelle Monae vs. Nicki Minaj

The subthemes of Intersectional Representations of Femininity and Sexuality were drawn from an intentional discussion and unpacking of the lyrical and video content of Janelle Monae's song 'Pynk' and Nicki Minaj's songs "Anaconda" and "Rich Sex". Differences between the artists was discussed to deepen a discussion around how Black female sexuality and femininity can be and has been reclaimed in popular media culture such as hip hop and how stereotypes can become more rigidly set.

##### *Sample Quote:*

- "I think what's interesting is that Janelle Monae's song 'Pynk' and when I watched the video...s that I think she softens the word pink so much. An then when I think of someone like me who has been following Nicki's brand...its very pink, barbie, really hypersexual hyperfeminine imagery. But Janelle Monae, I guess people who have very heteronormative views, would say that she is a 'masculine brand' because she likes to wear suits and is not straight and likes ot wear dark colours and she does not have to wear long inches of wigs, she just wears her hair however she wants. And she literally take the imagery that Nicki is always pushing, this pink pink pink pink pink imagery that connects with barbie and that connects to hypersexuality and hyperfemininity and heteronormativity, and she takes it and she blows is out of proportion. She's like pink is beautiful and it is the inside colour of my vagina." (Adjoa)
- "She softens Black female sexuality in a world that constantly presents us as being so hard, as being so aggressive as being so raunchy...her physical presentation as it links to her lyrical content, rejects the stereotypes and scripts of Black femininity and Black sexuality thrust upon us. That you need to have this big ass and you need to be showing it all the time or you need to be dressing like this with gold all over. And it challenges that with suits and more 'masculine traits' but still finds a way to make it soft, to make it sexy, and to make it feminine. That to me is extremely powerful" (Grace)

#### Chapter 5. Impacts on the Sexual Health and Sexual Decision Making of Young Black Girls

Women were given an opportunity to express how the absorption of the scripts and stereotypes presented in popular culture could affect the sexual decision making and sexual schemas of young black girls. The following subthemes, lack of safety and contextual information, summate that discussion.

##### *Sample Quote:*

- "So now if a girl is dressed like, she's feeling really nice and sexy, she wants to dress up to the club, now because she's dressed that way everyman that sees her feels it's their prerogative to touch her ass or to make a comment that is rude and disrespectful because Nicki Minaj does it in her music videos. She allows men to

touch her in ways...you know what that I mean. To me, it does come back to choice but at the end of the day its always what we are trying to teach. It comes down to the perception...is this person a reflection of who I want to be?" (Naana)

- When I was in my teen years and sexual years were starting to come, Nick Minaj was in her prime. These music types of music videos are coming out...what she was doing was just so hypersexualized. So, I'm thinking, everybody finds this sexy, everybody finds this attractive, I maybe need to look this way to feel attractive and to get male attention, which was the point. I was a 15/16 year old girl, I just anted boys to like me...and then you start behaving in certain ways that may or may not be so sexually safe to get this type of attention...you think Nicki Minaj gets attention that way so that's the way I need to do it. That puts you in sexually unsafe scenarios that...say oh, I need to have sex with this guy...it starts influencing your questions, the sexuality, and how you're formulating your earliest perceptions of sexual health yet not one time is condom use mentioned." (Grace)
- "Women are becoming sexualized at a younger age than normal....so now all these kids are rapping and singing these words and they may not understand it but eventually subconsciously or unconsciously you will be taking in these things you are watching. So, these kids, by the time they get to the age of 13, all of a sudden their walking a certain way or losing their virginity at a younger age than they used to. For me, a lot of these things are creating adults a lot sooner than they are meant to be adults." (Naana)
- "It makes girls more curious and not about the things that would keep them safe. Because if you go on Instagram, you don't have to go very far to see an ass but you definitely have to dig to find sexual health clinic or how to have safe sex or where to get a condom. Like those things are not readily available in the media whereas how to get your butt bigger and Nicki Minaj's latest song would be a lot easier to find. So, I think there is a level of curiosity that it invokes but not in the things that are going to make sex safe and even fun or pleasurable." (Esi)

## **Chapter 6. What Needs to Change in Sexual Education to Support Young Black Girls**

Participants were asked to reflect on what needs to change in sexual education in Ontario to remedy the absorption of some of these scripts and the impacts on the sexual decision making and sexual esteem of young Black girls. This discussion circumvented around the way's information should be disseminated to be more inclusive of young Black girls.

### **6a. Challenges to Change**

In discussing this, challenges to making sexual education accessible for young black girls became a rich topic of discussion. The subtheme of shame and inaccessibility became the core to achieving change in sexual education to support young Black girls in healthy sexual development and sexual decision making.

*Sample Quote:*

- “This aspect of religiosity right, then you are thinking because you are raised in a particular household that is often religious is your black that ‘gosh, I shouldn’t be looking at these things’, there’s such shame....The first thing you are going to absorb is this ass you are seeing on Instagram and not dig deeper to unpack some of that and look for sexual health information because some of this is linked back to secrecy.” (Grace)
- “A lot of the time Black moms are fearful of having like the sex-talk because there is a fear of perpetuating that stereotype of pregnant teen or single motherhood and I think that for some reason that there is the idea that if you talk to your kids about sex they are going to want to have sex” (Esi)
- “someone mentioned that there should be sex-ed specific to Black girls and I thought who the hell would teach it? Cause there’s so many white teacher’s and wanting to have that as an option, my immediate thoughts was ‘how’ because it does not seem like it would be likely” (ChoChoe)

### **6b. Remediating Challenges**

They were then asked to describe strategies, pathways, and accessible alternatives to responding to the main challenges presented above. In a brainstorm the following were presented as primary things to keep at the forefront of achieving change for sexual education specific to Black girls: increasing accessibility and dispelling secrecy

#### *Sample Quote:*

- “And I think a lot of the discussion about how people voted in Ontario based on sexual education plan is why our premier lost because she was lobbying for our sex-ed to be taught earlier. And a lot of people were saying that shouldn’t be the case but I am like, ‘you’re baby works a tablet’ ...Like if your toddler can work a tablet, do you not think that they are going to be exposed?...But I believe if you’re old enough to get an STI then you need to know what that means.” (Adjoa)
- “Sex education specific to black girls needs to be informed by black voices, much like this focus group is and it needs to be taught by a black voice too” (Grace)
- “It would have to happen though like an external organization because I don’t know how that would happen through the school board...it would have to build onto existing sexual health curriculum and it would have to be something or someone or people that are coming in to do this specifically and not a school board” (Naana)
- “It could come from a platform of some sort. Like an interactive platform where Black girls can go...so if there is already an existing platform that Black girls can go to and ask questions or links to things that are relevant in their city that would make it so that it is accessible and its always there and its interactive. You can talk to girls that are your age or talk to health professionals” (Esi)

### **Chapter 7. What is Sexual Education Missing, According to You?**

Participants were asked to think of tangible subject matter, if sex education specific to Black girls were to exist, that they felt were core necessities in creating positive sexual decision making and sexual schemas. Based on their lived experiences of sex education in Ontario and sexual experiences in general, the group of women came up with nuance, diversity, and an emphasis on safety as the core subject matter needing to be taught. This points towards themes of arming young Black girls with information that enhances their awareness of sexually unsafe situations, the nuance of the Black girl experience, sexually safe options and contraceptives, and self-esteem/identity development, and masturbation, creating the subthemes of this chapter.

*Sample Quote:*

- “There should be an entire unit on just Black girls. Like Black girls and sex education, HELLO, like this is what people see you as; if you are going to develop early then this may or may not happen, if somebody comes up to you and they are saying things like this and they are speaking very subliminally then this is what they mean. It is a safety risk, it is a security risk...I think for Black women you need to talk about the nuance of it. It’s not as simple as this is what happens when the penis goes into the vagina and you know STIs and stuff. I think there is a very real sexual warfare happening to Black women and I think there needs to be that nuances discussion of, can we talk about interaction, can we talk about how you can be coerced into sex, can we talk about how your uncle that you think is your uncle is viewing you in a sexually inappropriate way and everybody in your family is acting like that’s not a problem. Like, you need to talk about the nuance that nobody else is talking to them about. If they can spot the nuance at an early age, then they can make the choices” (Adjoa)
- “Like a disability and sex, same sex or same gender interaction, even fetishes...I don’t know how early kids will start thinking about that. Like literally anything you can think of because there’s kids that feel odd. So bring it all up. Everything, different types of bodies , ,all types of bodies, interracial couples, literally anything just bring it up so then the one kid that has more questions will read...” (ChoChoe)
- “I think information about birth control options and also how drugs and alcohol affect your body and can maybe influence your sexual decision making. And that would come from experience especially, I find being an adult is interesting because you’ll go out and guys will be like ‘oh can I buy you a rink’ and that’s usually a little opening” (Esi)
- “ We need to talk about the mental aspect because that is important more than anything else...maybe when we are younger, we should work on the mind and their self-esteem or whatever can help because this is something they can do as they grow and progress.” (Naana)

## **Chapter 8. Sexual Advice for Young Black Girls**

The women then thought about their own sexual experiences and information they wish they had growing up as young Black women. This was used as pearls of insight to create sexual advice for

young Black girls, phrased as advice you would give your younger self. Advice circumvented around themes of normalizing Black Girl Magic.

*Sample Quote:*

- “I think for me one of the things is that I went to a white dominant school. Most of the schools I was the only Black person so it was a little hard to have a body or whatever. I always looked older than anyone in my grade...so I think one thing I would tell myself is it’s okay. Accept yourself. Who you are is enough and that other peoples beauty is not the absence of your own” (Naana)
- “I would also normalize to myself the way I was feeling and the way I grew up was okay. I could see a source in my family that I may have been able to ask questions but I wish there was an outside source or school to tell me its normal.” (Araba)
- “You’re beautiful as you are, find the confidence in what you look like and know that because you don’t look like what you see on TV or on Instagram that it does not mean you are not beautiful and it shouldn’t be the reasons that you become so willing to put yourself in situations that you are not okay with to feel beautiful” (Grace)