

January 2012

# Beyond Practice and Constraint: Toward Situating Female Sexual Agency on St. Croix, USVI

Jamae F. Morris

*University of South Florida*, [jfmorris@mail.usf.edu](mailto:jfmorris@mail.usf.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#),  
and the [Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

## Scholar Commons Citation

Morris, Jamae F., "Beyond Practice and Constraint: Toward Situating Female Sexual Agency on St. Croix, USVI" (2012). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.

<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/4173>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

Beyond Practice and Constraint:  
Toward Situating Female Sexual Agency on St. Croix, USVI

by

Jamae Fontain Morris

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Anthropology  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: S. Elizabeth Bird, Ph.D.  
Nancy Romero-Daza, Ph.D.  
Kevin Yelvington, Ph.D.  
Eric Buhi, Ph.D.  
Ellen Daley, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:  
March 23, 2012

Keywords:  
ethnography, praxis, women, health, Caribbean

Copyright © 2012, Jamae F. Morris

## Dedication

To Amari, my heartbeat, your unconditional love and selfless support is inspiring. I am dedicated to making the world you will inherit better. I love you more than words could ever express.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I must acknowledge my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. S. Elizabeth Bird – who I am certain secretly doubles as superwoman. She has always believed in and nurtured my scholarship, and she has offered the same support during the construction of this work. I can only hope to become the kind of scholar that she is. Second, it is imperative that I acknowledge my wonderful committee members: Dr. Kevin Yelvington, Dr. Nancy Romero-Daza, Dr. Ellen Daley, and Dr. Eric Buhi, who, from the conception of the project to my doctoral defense, have continued to offer invaluable insight and support. Collectively, all of you make up my dissertation dream team. Thank you. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all of the wonderful individuals who contributed to my research during my time in the field. They work as school administrators, leaders of local community programs, doctors, nurses, health administrators, legal and social advocates, students, cashiers, and much, much more. They are the ones who speak truth to power. The analysis that follows is not at all a challenge to their effort; rather, my desire is for it to be understood as a reflection of their effort and critique.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Towards Situating Female Sexual Agency in St. Croix .....	1
A Brief History of the U.S. Virgin Islands .....	5
History of St. Croix.....	10
St. Croix Today.....	12
Population and Economics.....	13
Education and Resources .....	17
Community Violence and Violence Against Women.....	20
Local Sexually Transmitted Infection Rates.....	24
Religion.....	25
Local Policy .....	26
Contribution to USVI Scholarship.....	28
Sexual Health in the USVI.....	29
Study Aims .....	31
Chapter Two: Framing the Research .....	32
Overview.....	32
Establishing an Analytical Framework.....	33
A Subaltern Practice Theory.....	37
Defining and Framing Agency.....	40
Agency, Power, and Resistance: A Brief Note.....	42
On Locating and Identifying Agency .....	43
Defining and Situating Sexual Agency.....	44
Agency, Praxis, and Sexual Praxis: Establishing a Conceptual Bridge.....	48
Framing the Research: Justifying the Use of Caribbeanist Scholarship.....	49
Gender in the Caribbean .....	50
Black Female Sexuality in the Caribbean.....	52
Answering the Call: Female Sexual Agency in the Caribbean.....	58
Chapter Three: Ethnographic Methodology .....	59
Structuring the Methodology .....	59
Research Plan.....	60
Research Site.....	63

Data Collection .....	66
Sampling and Recruitment.....	66
Participant Observation.....	67
Informal Interviews.....	69
Semi-Structured Interviews .....	70
Monitoring of News Media.....	74
Voice Notes.....	75
Data Analysis.....	76
Ethnographic Data .....	76
News Media Research.....	77
Ethical Considerations .....	77
More on Protecting Anonymity .....	80
So Much for Native Anthropology .....	82
Gender and Identity in the Field .....	86
Scholarly Contributions .....	88
Chapter Four: The Public, the Body, & the Public Body .....	89
Instituting Control.....	89
The Traditional and the “New Age” Woman: Exploring the Shift.....	90
Not as Simple as “Self-Control”: the Cruzan Woman and Her Body.....	93
The Private in the Public: Control and the Social Gaze.....	97
A Fieldwork Vignette: A Trip to the Beach, a Lesson on Gender.....	99
Social Gaze, Social Stigma, and Social Infections .....	101
Sexual Subjectivities.....	104
A Fieldwork Vignette: Being Young and Fertile, the Researcher in the Research.....	109
Pregnancy, Birth Control, Abortion, and Stout.....	110
Controlling the Body.....	114
Chapter Five: Gendered Dispositions & Relationships Positionalities.....	115
Structuring Gender.....	115
Gendered Space .....	116
Gendered Dispositions: Two Types of Women and Three Types of Men.....	120
A Fieldwork Vignette: Three Types of Men.....	124
Multi-partnering on the Big Island .....	124
Social Discourse Surrounding Male Multi-partnering.....	125
A Fieldwork Vignette: “Wen dey gone wit your husband dey gone wit everything.” .....	130
Male Multi-partnering: A Woman’s Concern.....	132
Operating Under the Surface: Female Multi-partnering.....	136
Side-ting’s, Wifey’s, and the Side-ting vs. Wifey Party.....	139
Female Competition.....	141
On Hess Men.....	143

Situating Economics The Pursuit of Commodities and the Performance of the Body .....	145
Importance of Relationships: More than Economics.....	148
Structuring Gender, Structuring Relationships.....	150
Chapter Six: Between Practice and Constraint .....	151
Agency and Context.....	151
Operating in the Cracks .....	153
Placing Economics in Perspective .....	157
Applying Anthropology: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Application.....	159
Future Research & Writing.....	166
Conclusion .....	168
Chapter Seven: Afterword .....	170
Facing an Economic Blow .....	170
Works Cited .....	172
Appendices.....	182
Appendix One: Women Interview Protocol .....	183
Appendix Two: Provider Interview Protocol .....	186
Appendix Three: Women Interview Demographic Table .....	188
Appendix Four: Provider Interview Demographic Table .....	189

## List of Tables

Table 1: Research Schedule .....	60
Table 2: Women’s Semi-Structured Interview Participant Demographic Information Sheet.....	188
Table 3: Provider’s Semi-Structured Interview Participant Demographic Information Sheet.....	189

## Abstract

Women are shaped by the social structure, but they are not simply passive products. They act. They respond. They pursue. This holds true for many aspects of women's complex and dynamic lives, including their sexual health. Daily, women negotiate social expectations, individual proclivities and desires, and the need to provide for themselves and their families. Through the use of ethnographic methodology, focusing on three major social pillars—the regulation of the female body, the organization of social space, and the structuring of gender—this investigation, based on the island of St. Croix, USVI, seeks to offer an ethnographic assessment of women's attempts to enact sexual agency and the social structures that constrain their decisions. As scholars continue to work toward a better understanding of the sexual health of women in the Caribbean, establishing a better understanding of their sexual agency is essential.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Towards Situating Female Sexual Agency in St. Croix**

After living on island for couple of months, I ventured out to visit a local Saturday night jam, a party or social event. Amari, my 5-year-old daughter, was back in the States for the summer, which provided me with additional time and flexibility to explore. I had been hearing about this venue on the radio since I landed on island. One of the most popular DJs in the territory would be there, so there was sure to be good music and a big crowd—I was certain to engage in some rich participant observation. Like a good anthropologist, I got there early to ensure that I could secure a good seat at the bar. When I arrived, the crowd was pretty mixed, and there were still several groups of people enjoying the \$20.00 per person unlimited seafood special; before the venue transitioned to music and dancing, it served as the hotel restaurant. Soon, more people began to arrive, and I began to engage in conversations. Some were more brief, like my conversation with a local businessman, likely 45 or 50 years of age, who had lived between St. Croix and the U.S. for more than 20 years and who was intent on arguing the validity of the social science notion of agency, and some were brief but extremely telling. One woman from the States, likely in her 50s, who had lived on island for years and who had overheard parts of my conversation with the businessman, with a cigarette in hand while drinking a martini, asked me why I had moved to the island. Excited to transition to a new

conversation, I shared, “I am here doing research on women’s health.” Her response remained with me as I continued my research, “Good. We need it. I could never let a man treat me the way that these women do. They are so disrespected. They have no choice.”

From her perspective, local women were mistreated and controlled; regulated by gender and relationship norms, they had no voice and, essentially, no agency. As provocative and as interesting as her assessment was, it in many ways conflicted with the way I had heard some local women describe themselves: assertive, vocal, and proud. While attempting to reconcile these two seemingly disparate realities, I had to admit that there were many other reasons to question the existence of female agency on the island. There were high levels of poverty, particularly for female-headed households; relatively limited economic opportunities, except for those fortunate enough to pursue advanced degrees off island or who could rely on family and professional affiliations to secure highly sought after positions; high levels of domestic and sexual violence, much of which was said to go unreported; accusations of political disregard, in that issues surrounding women’s rights were dismissed or went unaddressed. These factors were all compounded by a general acceptance of male multi-partnering and an expectation of female fidelity.

These realities are powerful. They serve to establish a broad understanding of women’s context and provide insight into the challenges women engage daily. However, they do not allow space for the consideration of the ways in which women act—the strategies women employ to negotiate and respond. An overemphasis on oppression effectively reinforces the erasure of women’s voices. It ignores attempts on the part of the women to enact agency, to act in ways directed toward meeting or securing their self-defined needs and desires, even though their efforts may maintain the cycle of

oppression, inequality, and poverty. It is easy to lose sight of or dismiss the possibility of agency when one focuses solely on surface manifestations and examples of dominant power. Agency is not cut and dried, and it is not always easily seen. This is particularly true for an interrogation and exploration of sexual agency, which, because of its nature, manifests in relatively private and unstructured spaces.

In this dissertation, I seek to reach below the surface – to explore the complexity of women’s lives in St. Croix. Despite social constraints, women act. Even when those efforts are not systematic attempts to dismantle a system built on gendered inequality, acknowledging them is integral, as they are central to understanding agency, and thus women’s experiences on island. Directed toward providing some insight into the social structures that seek to constrain female sexual agency, and highlighting the spaces within which women seek to enact it, this project is centered around three large themes: the regulation of the female body, the organization of social space, and the structuring of gender and gendered relations in heterosexual relationships. Without a doubt, other relationship types exist on the island and a full understanding of female sexual agency would include consideration of these; however, my project focuses on the central piece of an intricate picture—the experience of heterosexual females on island.

As the primary objective of the study was to understand and explore female sexual agency on St. Croix, USVI, and identify social and structural barriers that inhibit and stifle this type of agency, more emphasis was placed on exploring the ways in which women described the local context, their understanding of male/female relationships, and their descriptions/critiques of local trends in sexual praxis, particularly the sexual praxis of women, as opposed to eliciting detailed descriptions of their own behavior. Sex and

sexuality are often directly and indirectly explored in local and regional music and public discourse; however, speaking specifically about one's own sexual behavior, especially for women, whose bodies are often the targets of social gaze and critique, is taboo. My broad research goal has three components:

1. To explore how women describe and perceive the local social and cultural context and their ability to guide their own sexual health decisions, whether speaking in general or providing specific examples. This involves allowing women the opportunity to talk about and discuss their own understandings of sex, sexual practices, and the social expectations and realities that guide and regulate that behavior.
2. To examine how women act on their sexual health. This involves two different considerations: 1) allowing women and other stakeholders to identify the ways in which women are able to make choices regarding their sexual health and 2) providing them with the opportunity to discuss whether the responses to women's sexual health needs (including STI care or contraception) are constrained by other structural factors (for example, church membership, violence, community, family, economic constraints, social policy).
3. To identify social and structural constraints on women's sexual agency. This involves analyzing and documenting the social, economic, historical, and

cultural factors that shape how women understand and act on their sexual health and exploring larger social shifts and institutions which structure and guide current approaches to sexual behavior, including, but not limited to, music, religion, education, economics, and politics.

Before I outline the specifics of the study, it is imperative to establish a contextual frame for understanding gender and gendered power relations. Female sexual agency does not happen in isolation, but is constantly framed and contested by cultural norms and social structure. Thus the remainder of this chapter will explore pieces of the social context most central to situating female sexual agency, including a consideration of history, economics, policy, violence, education, and health.

### **A Brief History of the U.S. Virgin Islands**

The U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) is comprised of three major islands, St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John, and also includes more than fifty small islets, islands, and cays. In 1917, the U.S. purchased the Danish territory. Motivated by national and international politics, the U.S. paid \$25 million for the strategically placed islands, which could serve the U.S. Military as a naval stronghold to defend approaches to the Panama Canal and which would avert German acquisition and use of the islands during World War I (Creque 1968; Dookhan 1994). In March 1917, an act was introduced to the U.S. Congress that would establish the government of the Virgin Islands. Under this form of government, the President of the United States held executive power; however, he could delegate his power to a governor and to other individuals, to be chosen from the army or

the navy, whom the president could appoint. The responsibilities of the government officials, including the governor, the government secretary, and the dispatching secretary, were conferred upon U.S. naval officers. This system of government remained from U.S. purchase until 1931.

Though purchased to offer the U.S. Navy strategic advantage, the military base established in the territory did little to contribute to the war, and, after the end of the war in 1918, its importance continued to wane. The collapse of the post-war boom in the 1920's resulted in a downturn in the already struggling economy in the USVI; this was exacerbated by the extension of the Prohibition Act into the islands, now known for their production of rum. The appointed naval administration had done a lot to improve the social conditions of the Virgin Islands but little to improve economic growth, resulting in large deficit costs to the Federal Government. In 1931, the Chief of the Efficiency Bureau in the U.S. recommended that the key to freeing the territory from the need for federal aid was to invest in its economic rehabilitation. President Hoover agreed and plans were made to begin economic regeneration. The responsibility for administering the territory's affairs was now placed under the U.S. Department of the Interior, which was also responsible for other underdeveloped territories, and the naval officers who had governed the territory for nearly 14 years were replaced with civilian officials.

The constitution was reformed through the introduction of the Organic Act of 1936 (Creque 1968). Executive power was to be held by the governor, chosen by the U.S. President but requiring the input and approval of the Senate (Dookhan 1994). The governor could exercise legislative veto power, which could only be overridden by a two-thirds majority of a Council; however, a final decision would be reserved for the U.S.

President. The territory remained under the supervision of the Department of the Interior, to whom the governor was to report annually. During this period, large federal appropriations granted to the Virgin Islands reflected the Federal Government's recognition of responsibility for the territory's welfare.

Throughout the 1930s, several unsuccessful attempts were made to revive the sugar industry. With the entrance of U.S. into World War II, the economy continued to weaken; however, the war resulted in a resurgence of the territory's importance as a military stronghold. Higher wages offered for constructing military bases provided a viable economic alternative to struggling farmers, and the end of the war was not accompanied by a return of laborers to agricultural work. Several attempts were made to return to agriculture from the 1940s to the 1960s with little success. The move from agriculture was also fueled by the move to tourism, which picked up in the 1950s because of the closing of Cuba to American tourists. The number of tourists visiting the Virgin Islands increased from around 16,000 in 1949 to approximately 1.1 million in 1969. By the 1960s, industry also became seen as a lucrative economic alternative to agriculture in the territory. Most notable were two major industries established in St. Croix in 1966: Hess Oil Virgin Islands Corporation and Harvey Alumina Virgin Islands. Combined, these new companies would invest more than \$100 million into the territory. The combination of tariff preferences, tax advantages, and low employee wages made it highly profitable for the companies to operate there. The transition from agriculture to tourism and industry resulted in significant growth, as agriculture became little more than a marginal economic activity ultimately influencing how the territory acquired food. Though some meat, dairy, and vegetable products continued to be produced, most of the

food in the Virgin Islands had to be imported, resulting in a significant increase in the cost of living.

Growth in tourism and industry impacted all parts of life in the territory. Tourism and low duty costs attracted more and more businesses, including hotels and resorts, to the Virgins Islands. The amount of overseas trade also increased from \$3.6 million in imports in 1936 to \$260.2 million in 1969, while exports increased from almost \$800,000 to nearly \$124 million. With increased economic expansion came increases in annual governmental revenues. In 1969, the Virgin Islands reported more than \$96 million dollars in revenues, compared to reported revenue of \$288,000 in 1936, which permitted increases in government expenditures for health, education, and welfare.

This economic progress was paralleled by political strides. In 1950, a resident Virgin Islander, Morris de Castro, was appointed governor. In 1954, the Organic Act of 1936 was revisited and revised. The two municipal councils were replaced with a single legislative body, and each major island was made into its own voting district. Collectively, five members of the legislature represented the voting districts (two for St. Thomas, two for St. Croix, and one for St. John). Six additional members-at-large were elected from the Virgin Islands as a whole, effectively balancing the representation of the individual islands with that of the entire territory. Members could not pass laws in conflict with congressional legislation; however, Congress had the power to annul legislation passed in the Virgin Islands. The revised act also extended adult suffrage by removing the language requirement included in the previous version of the act. In the Organic Act of 1936, only men and women who could read and write English and were

otherwise qualified by age or citizenship could vote, disenfranchising thousands of Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans.

Currently, the Revised Act of 1954 still guides and regulates the structure of the government in the USVI, though some amendments have been made. Most notably, in 1968 legislation passed that allowed for a democratically elected government. Under the most recent version of the Act, there is one locally-elected Governor, (presently John DeJongh), who reports to the Secretary of the Interior, and one locally-elected Lieutenant Governor (Vargrave Richards), with both positions carrying four-year terms. Further, instead of the 11-member legislative body mandated under the previous version of the act, there is now a 15-member, unicameral legislature comprised of seven members each from St. Thomas and St. Croix and one member-at-large who must have connections to St John. Additionally, there is one locally-elected member of Congress, (currently Donna Christianson), who serves a two-year term. Though the congressperson can both serve and vote in committees, he or she cannot vote on the House floor. The USVI has no representation in the Senate, and no residents of the USVI can vote for the U.S. President, though they are permitted to vote in the primaries. Judicial power in the USVI resides with the U.S. District Court and the Territorial Court.

Since the USVI is an unincorporated territory of the U.S., it is protected under the U.S. constitution but retains its own authority for taxation under the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. The territory, both now and in the past, uses this flexibility to attract national and international businesses. As became the trend in the 1950s and 1960s, tourism and manufacturing are currently the principal industries in the USVI. In 1995, profits from tourism were estimated at over \$800 million, and as the territory's primary

economic activity, it accounts for more than 80 percent of the territory's GDP and employment (CIA Factbook 2010). The manufacturing sector has grown to include companies specializing in petroleum refining, rum distillation, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and textiles. This sector of the economy continues to grow; the tax incentive program implemented by the USVI government has attracted over 2,500 foreign sales corporations to be established there. Residential and business revenue are retained in the territory, and in fiscal year 1995, the USVI government reported \$342 million in local revenues. Agricultural development in the territory has remained limited: only 1 percent of the labor force is engaged in agriculture (CIA Factbook 2009), since its decline in the 1930s. The overwhelming majority of food products continue to be imported.

### **History of St. Croix**

Prior to Danish purchase in 1933, St. Croix was owned by five different powers (the Spanish, the British, the French, the Knights of Malta, and the Dutch). For a brief period of time, prosperity on the island, primarily due to sugarcane cultivation fuelled by slave labor, made it one of the wealthiest islands in the region (Dookhan 1994). The island's economy was based on trade: exporting sugar, rum, cotton, molasses and hard woods and importing other goods the settlers needed. The number of slaves in St. Croix doubled between 1755 and 1848 (Dookhan 1994). The overwhelming majority were plantation slaves relegated to working in the fields. In 1803, the island's population had increased to more than 30,000 inhabitants, more than 26,000 of whom were slaves. However, the prosperity was short lived. In 1802, Denmark officially ended its role in the slave trade. This discussion dealt a significant blow to the international trade circuit,

since St. Croix had previously served an important role in the triangular trade routes that connected Europe and Africa with the Caribbean. Though participation in the slave trade ceased, plantations in the colony were still heavily dependent on slave labor.

By the early 1840s, public opinion in Denmark supported the emancipation of slaves in the colony. However, this was met with much resistance from the slave-owners, who would incur a great deal of financial loss. Eventually a compromise was made between the Danish crown and the settlers. The royal decree called for all children born after July 28, 1847, to be considered free, and all slaves to be emancipated after an interim period of 12 years, so as to protect the interests of all parties (Dookhan 1994). Dissatisfied with the decree, the slaves organized and held an open protest, an act that mirrored the growing unrest in the Caribbean with European rule. News of revolutions on other islands—Martinique and Guadeloupe in particular—had reached St. Croix, and on July 2, 1848, the revolt began. Initially limited to noisy demonstrations, the unrest, by the morning of July 3, resulted in the destruction of several houses in Frederiksted. Whites, scared that the slaves might burn down the whole town, avoided the use of firearms. With conditions in Frederiksted worsening, by noon the Governor, General von Scholten, proclaimed the freedom of all slaves. The abolition of slavery, coupled by declines in sugar prices, forced the economy of St. Croix into decline.

With the sudden emancipation of the slave population, the local officials put in place regulations that required laborers to seek paid employment, either on the plantation on which they had labored previously or elsewhere on island. Labor contracts lasted one year, and could be terminated by either the worker or the employer (Dookhan 1994). Payment ranged between five and 25 cents per day depending on whether or not rations

were offered. This system lasted for close to 30 years. During that time, tension mounted. Former slaves, unsatisfied with working conditions and pay, began to seek employment and apprenticeships in the cities. To respond to the decrease in available labor, planters began shipping in immigrants and foreign laborers with little success (Dookhan 1994). On October 1, 1878, the day contracts were to be renewed, slaves gathered in Frederiksted, and what began as a protest turned violent. The crowd of ex-slaves began to destroy and burn local shops and homes. Military attempts to disperse the crowd simply redirected the tensions to local plantations. The violence continued for days, led by several key individuals, the most famous of which were four females, now called Queens: Queen Mary, Bottom Belly, Queen Agnes, and Queen Mathilda (Oliver 2009). Their legacy continues to play an important role in local history.

Approximately 40 years later, the U.S. Government purchased the island, along with St. Thomas and St. John. Despite small improvements in the economy, it continued to decline until the 1950s and 1960s when tourism and industry were introduced. This trend continues today; even with the increase in revenue fueled by the presence of the refinery and other industries, some residents of St. Croix continue to struggle economically.

### **St. Croix Today**

Simply flying over St. Croix provides insight into the beauty of the island. The island is lush and green. There are two main routes that move between the two major cities, Christiansted, located on the eastern side of the island, and Frederiksted, located on the western side. One is Centerline Road, also known as Queen Mary Highway, and the

other is Melvin H. Evans Highway, named after the territory's first elected governor. The latter links some of the major roads on island to important locations on the southern coast, including the Hovensa Oil Refinery and the Henry E. Rohlsen International Airport. Most of the time the island is pretty slow and peaceful, except during major local celebrations such as Carnival, Village, and the Agricultural Fair, and when the streets of Christiansted or Frederiksted are filled with tourists. In 2008, more than 2.8 million tourists visited the Virgin Islands. Serving as the major tourist post and bringing in the overwhelming majority of tourist revenue since at least the 1950s, St. Thomas has received the majority of the administrative attention and resources. Creating a tension between the major islands, this buttresses desire on the part of some Crucian residents to secede from the territory, and secure a separate association with the U.S. (Roopnarine 2011:47). Crucians list many reasons for their desire for secession (for detailed list see Roopnarine 2011) not least of which includes fewer cruise ships, higher levels of poverty, and higher unemployment rates on St. Croix.

**Population and economics.** Of the 106,405 individuals currently living in the USVI (U.S. Census Bureau 2011), almost half live on St. Croix. According to the 2000 Population and Housing Profile, the island is 76 percent black, 13 percent white, and 14 percent other. More than 20 percent of residents report Hispanic or Latino heritage; more than two-thirds of these have Puerto Rican ancestry. These numbers, reflecting western ideas of social organization, are telling, but they do little to reflect the true diversity on the island. More than one-third of the population on St. Croix is "foreign-born," a term used in the 2000 Housing Profile. The overwhelming majority, 93 percent, come from

other islands in the Caribbean. Locally referred to as “down-islanders,” these individuals and families primarily migrate from other Eastern Caribbean Islands down the chain of islands that comprise the Lesser Antilles. The most heavily represented islands are Antigua and Barbuda (17 percent), St. Kitts and Nevis (16.5 percent), St. Lucia (15.7 percent), and Dominica (11.5 percent). Though speaking to the larger pattern of social tensions in the territory, Oliver’s (2009) assessment of sentiments regarding down-islanders reflects ethnic and social dynamics on St. Croix as well: “often discriminated against for their legal status as well as their subtle cultural differences, these individuals come to the Virgin Islands in search of economic opportunity, and the territory depends on them for much of its blue-collar and domestic labor” (2009:9). They play an integral role in the struggling local economy.

It is estimated that more than one-third of families on St. Croix live in poverty, with almost 36 percent of families making less than \$15,000 per year. This statistic becomes more compelling when household composition is taken into consideration. More than 66 percent of female-headed households with children under age five live below poverty level, and one of every four households on the island are female-headed (Population and Housing Profile 2000). In 2000, the overall median household income on the island was \$21,401. A reflection of economic conditions, the island receives a larger food stamps and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) allotment than both of the other major islands combined.

According to the USVI Department of Labor, in 2011 St. Croix had an unemployment rate greater than 10 percent. This number is powerful in and of itself; however, it does not reflect the number of individuals working multiple jobs—this

situation was commonly reported for women. And if close to 90 percent of the labor population is employed but a large percentage continues to live below poverty level, the unemployment rate provides no insight into wage gaps and underemployment. Data from the Virgin Islands: 2000 report released by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2003 detail social, housing, and economic characteristics in the Virgin Islands and represent, in addition to the report referenced above, some of the most recent social and economic data available (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). The U.S. Census Bureau will release 2010 social, economic, and household data for the U.S. Virgin islands between May and December 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Per the report, approximately 60 percent of Crucians participate in the formal labor force compared to more than 77 percent of residents from St. John and 68 percent of residents from St. Thomas. The most recent unemployment rate mentioned above, parallels the unemployment rate offered in the report. Of the three major islands in the territory, St. Croix has continued to have the highest unemployment rate, 11 percent. Women are most heavily burdened with unemployment. According to the report, the rate for women was slightly higher than the overall rate, 12.6 percent. A brief consideration of age offers further insight. Only 40 percent of the males aged 16 to 21 and less than 80 percent of the males aged 22 to 34 participate in the formal labor force in St. Croix. The rate is slightly lower when only Frederiksted is considered—35.7 percent and 68.8 percent respectively. The same pattern holds true for women. Overall, a smaller percentage of women in St. Croix participate in the formal labor force. Similar to employment patterns for males, Frederiksted has the second lowest level of formal labor force participation for women aged 16 to 21 and the lowest level for participation for women aged 22 to 34.

Not only are Crucians, and Crucian women more specifically, less likely to be formally employed, in 1999 more than 61 percent of the formal labor did not attain year around employment. Women also disproportionately bear the burden of underemployment, as men are more likely to attain year around employment than women. More than 54 percent of individuals holding full-time, year-around employment were men, though on-island women outnumber men, 100 to 91. On St. Croix, not only are men able to secure more long-term employment, on average they are paid substantially more than women. The median earning for men working year around was \$29,570 per year, compared to \$22,209 for women. Of those working year around and earning more than \$50,000 per year, more than 75 percent are men. Women are also less likely to own a business or be self-employed and more likely to serve as an unpaid family worker, likely providing childcare or other domestic assistance. Women who do participate in the formal force, almost 30 percent, often work for the local government. Since the beginning of 2012, several hundred government employees were released from their jobs; given the numbers of women employed by the local government, women were likely the ones most heavily impacted by the layoffs.

These employment statistics are compounded by a large number of high school dropouts—only 55 percent of Crucians aged 18 to 24 have at least a high school education. Further, on island, almost 20 percent of 16 to 19 year olds are not enrolled in high school and are not employed, higher than both St. John and St. Thomas. Moreover, these numbers indicate that the island has a large underemployed and unskilled labor force. According to a report from the USVI Department of Labor (2011), the seventh largest employer in the territory is Plaza Extra Supermarket, St. Croix. The majority of

employees are teenagers and young adults employed at minimum wage or receiving wages primarily in the form of tips. Equally as telling, in 2000 the local government employed 5,082 people—more than one-fourth of the local labor force (Population and Housing Profile 2000). Though there are individuals on the island who occupy white-collar jobs and receive large salaries, they are in the minority. This is particularly true for young mothers. A local community advocate offered an elucidating description: “They [young women] will call me, and they don’t have no skills. Unemployment here sucks, so they can’t get a job. If they do get a job, it is usually like custodial or cleaning.”

**Education and resources.** For those who graduate from high school and go on to pursue a college education, many pursue opportunities on the U.S. mainland, and only a portion return to the island to live. The University of the Virgin Islands, a HBCU, has two campuses on the two largest islands, St. Thomas and St. Croix, and during the spring semester of 2010 had an enrollment of nearly 2,600 students. Most are from the Virgin Islands, but students from the U.S. and more than 15 other islands in the Caribbean also attend, with most at the St. Thomas campus.

The amount of resources the U.S. Government makes available to states is not equally available to the U.S. territories. Thus, as one provider noted “A lot of the benefits that are awarded to the women of lower income on the mainland is not extended to us here although we're U.S. territory.” A meeting with a local official made this even more clear; in the territory there is a Medicaid cap, no SSI, and no DSH (Disproportion Share Hospitals), defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as “payments [that] provide additional help to those hospitals that serve a significantly disproportionate

number of low-income patients” (US DHHS 2012). The local Medicaid program is paid in part by the Federal Government and in part by the local government. To qualify for MAP (Medical Assistance Program)—the local equivalent to Medicaid—a family of four cannot make more than \$8,500 per year cumulatively—\$5,500 for the head of household and \$1,000 for each additional person in the family. As funds for this type of assistance are so limited, according to one local health practitioner, the income guidelines basically match those of TANF. Essentially, a family of four can make no more than \$708 per month or approximately \$177 per week.

All Medicaid recipients in the territory are required to use either the territorial hospitals or the Health Department clinics for all their medical needs. Both the Health Department in St. Croix housed in the Charles Harwood Medical Complex and the island’s only hospital, Juan F. Luis Hospital & Medical Center, are located in Christiansted. Island residents can also access Frederiksted Health Center (permitted to accept MAP), maintained by Frederiksted Health Care Inc. (FHC) and located in Frederiksted, and several private medical practices spread through the island. FHC also maintains a clinic located on the grounds of one of the local high schools. Some residents use local medicinal plants, mainly in the preparation of teas, to respond to some health issues. Palada et al. (2003) report that many residents continue to grow medicinal plants in their home gardens, and more than half the farmers on St. Croix are involved in cultivating medicinal plants and local herbs. Nevertheless, residents largely reported using the more formal medical centers.

In addition to the medical centers, there are a number of organizations on island that offer a variety of education and prevention resources to the community. With focuses

ranging from substance abuse assistance to domestic violence to HIV education, each organization seeks to make a local impact and largely increases the extent to which locals have access to a diversity of health resources. The list below includes some of the most well-known and well-established local organizations.

The Village (WestCare): On the island for over 15 years, the Village provides residential and counseling services for individuals working to overcome drug addictions.

VI Perinatal Incorporated (VIPI): Incorporated in 2003, VIPI works to support uninsured mothers and their children by helping them secure primary care. It also offers several health-related programs focused on strengthening and empowering families.

The Women's Coalition: This organization, more than 30 years old, is directed toward working to end violence and oppression—including rape, sexual assault, incest, and domestic violence—and offers a variety of community-based programs and services: a 24-hour crisis line, temporary housing, emergency aid, and various training seminars.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition (DVSAC): Serving St. Croix for more than 25 years, DVSAC organizes and leads education, prevention, and response efforts directed toward ending domestic and sexual violence on island.

VI Community AIDS Resource & Education Inc. (VICARE): VICARE has worked in St. Croix for 17 years. This organization provides a range of services and programs related to HIV education, testing, and prevention, and offers support for individuals living with or infected by HIV/AIDS.

Per Anhk: Working on island for more than 20 years, Per Anhk promotes and supports holistic and natural health for local residents. Offering a variety of services including two programs directly aimed toward women and young girls, its staff integrates strategies that promote health, culture, art, tradition, and education.

**Community violence and violence against women.** Accurate domestic and sexual violence statistics for the territory are not available. Available data only scratch the surface, as these crimes remain grossly underreported. Related factors include: fear of public rebuke or dismissal, legal marginalization, and cultural and social norms that promote silence on issues occurring in the private domain. The Women's Coalition publishes an information booklet for victims of domestic violence. A brief excerpt from the pamphlet provides some insight.

Until fairly recently, our society and culture has not acknowledged that violence amongst family members is just as much of a crime as when committed against strangers. Often times when domestic violence did occur, the police refused to

arrest the abuser because it was deemed a private matter. Our society highly values its right to privacy and so what occurred behind the closed doors of the family home was to remain there. [Women's Coalition]

Reinforcing the proliferation of domestic violence in the territory, specifically domestic violence homicides, the VI Police Commissioner, Novelle Francis Jr., in an op-ed piece for the *Virgin Islands Daily News* on October 4, 2010, commented on the increased number of domestic violence homicides that had occurred in the territory that year, more than those recorded in any previous year. One case, occurring in early May 2010, involved a woman whose ex-husband stuck her over the head with a fire extinguisher. Even after being struck, she managed to get away but later died from her injuries. Each case listed was unique. However, like the case mentioned above, most victims were women, and all emerged from the private domain, situated within intimate and personal heterosexual and familial relationships. Many cases do not result in the death of the victim, but they are equally telling and important for establishing an understanding of women's context. Brief consideration of a story that unfolded while I was on the island demonstrates its relevance. Chronicled in the *St. Croix Avis*, September 12, 2010, to September 24, 2010, these circumstances begin to frame dynamics explored in the research. Though the events occurred on St. Thomas, they are more than relevant, given the alleged perpetrator's place in local government, the connections between the two islands—in terms of history, people, resources, media etc., and the extent to which this story circulated on St. Croix.

Early in 2010, a local seven-term lawmaker and gubernatorial-nominee, Sen. Adlah Donastrog, was charged with “third-degree assault, use of a deadly weapon in the commission of a crime, two counts of aggravated assault and battery, and brandishing a deadly weapon” (*St. Croix Avis* March 25, 2010:2). He had allegedly choked a young woman, waved a gun at her, and pushed her out of his car. The victim was his 19-year-old mistress. According to reports, on January 28, after recently having an abortion (paid for by the senator), she showed up unexpectedly to his home. When he asked her to leave, at the time he was entertaining another young woman, an argument ensued. While Donastrog claimed that he simply took her to her mother’s house and dropped her off, prosecutors asserted that he waved a gun at her and later strangled her before forcing her out of the car. Shortly after charges were filed, the alleged victim recanted her story, suggesting that it was all her fault and that he had never threatened or hurt her. The trial, which began on September 20 and included the testimony of his second mistress, lasted only a few days, and after only five hours of deliberation, jurors found the senator not guilty.

The details of the case are telling: a married senator with at least two young mistresses is accused of domestic violence. However, other details make this situation event more thought provoking. On Wednesday September 21, 2010, after leaving the courtroom, the young mistress initiated an altercation with a woman whom she believed to be the other mistress. She was subsequently arrested, and the next day, she appeared in court to faces charges of disturbing the peace and assault. The series of events illustrated the obvious imbalance in power, not only because of age—the senator was 47—but also because of his role in government and his economic resources. Both young women

worked in the service industry, holding relatively low positions. Second, very little was said about the fact the he had at least two mistresses, and that the women were willing to testify in court, both in his defense. Third, his wife was all but missing in the print media coverage, until the *Virgin Island Daily News* (2010) reported that she walked out of the courthouse with him the day he was acquitted. Fourth, and most powerful, in the gubernatorial primary, which took place less than 10 days before the trial began, the senator received more than 30 percent of the vote, to become the democratic nominee for governor. His infidelity, his transgressions, his case were all but muted or forgotten.

In this dissertation, I shall show how this particular case is emblematic of gender relations and sexual agency more broadly. Domestic violence is intimately tied to sexual agency, and a full understanding of female sexual agency cannot be established without a critical and in-depth consideration of violence against women. Although considerations of domestic violence—physical, emotional, and social—are woven throughout the results section, this work is directed toward understanding the components of female sexual agency defined above: the regulation of the body, the organization of gendered space, and the structuring of gendered norms and gendered relations. Recommendations for adding a component more focused on domestic violence are offered in the conclusion.

Acts of community violence also plague the territory. Most victims are young black and Hispanic/Latino men. In 2010, the *St. John Source* published a chronological log of all of the homicides in the territory. There were a total of 59, of which 29 had occurred on St. Croix. The same source reported 43 homicides in the territory in 2011, including 28 on St. Croix (2012). The *Virgin Islands Daily News* (2012), reporting a

slightly higher territorial number, reported that 90 percent of the victims and 80 percent of the assailants were men.

As soon as I landed on the island, I became aware of the frequency and breadth of these crimes. No more than two days after I arrived, a 17-year-old boy was found murdered under a tree very close to my home. His was the latest in a series of killings that had begun several weeks prior. When locals found out I had just moved on the island, they would warn me about the violence and would implore caution when traveling and allowing individuals into my circle. Given the size of the community, many people were either familiar with the boy or with the victims of one of the murders that preceded his. These acts, these crimes, create ripples in the community.

**Local STI rates.** Similar to other islands in the Caribbean, the U.S. Virgin Islands has disproportionately high sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates. Females account for approximately 40 percent of new HIV cases per year, and black females account for 54 percent of the cumulative number of AIDS/HIV cases among females reported in the territory. Black and Latina women combined account for 93 percent of cumulative cases among women, which is to a large extent connected to the racial and ethnic representation on island. Heterosexual contact is the most common exposure category for women (HIV Surveillance Report 2010). Most women are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS between the ages of 25 and 44, (HIV) 67.4 percent and (AIDS) 65.7 percent respectively. Since the HIV Surveillance Program began, 49 percent of females with an AIDS diagnosis have died. The U.S. Virgin Islands did not mandate local physicians to report AIDS cases until 1994, though cases were found in the territory a decade prior. In 1998,

the law was revised to include confidential name based reporting. Since 2004, more males were diagnosed with AIDS than females. The trend fluctuates in HIV reporting. The USVI ranks second in the nation, behind New York, for the number of adolescents and adults per capita living with HIV/AIDS. Between 1983 and 2008, there were 360 HIV/AIDS cases reported on St. Croix. Except for the number of cases, information was not divided by island (HIV Surveillance Report 2010).

The USVI currently has one of the highest rates of persons living with HIV in the nation. Some researchers have cited this statistic as a means of supporting the need for HIV/AIDS research in the territory; however, what is less noted but equally compelling is the rates of other sexually transmitted infections. The rate of chlamydia in the USVI is greater than 400 per 100,000 (CDC 2009a). Even more telling is the rate of this infection among women aged 15 to 24; at 15.5 per 100,000, this is currently one of the highest rates in the nation (CDC 2009a). Similarly, the rate of gonorrhea among the same age group of women is 2.0 per 100,000, surpassed in the nation only by Nevada, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Wisconsin (CDC 2009b). Since 2005, gonorrhea infections were diagnosed 2.5 times as frequently among females than males.

**Religion.** Unofficial reports suggest that there are between 100 and 200 churches on island. Almost 60 percent of residents are Protestant; of these Baptists comprise 42 percent and Episcopalians 17 percent. More than one-third of the population practices Roman Catholicism (CIA Factbook 2010). Many people on the island attend church; one local reporter described the island as made up of socially-conservative-leaning democrats. As true as this may be, I found that though most young women reported a

familiarity or affiliation with a particular church, religion did not emerge as a major theme. Women reported attending church only once or twice per year, with two notable exceptions. They suggested that though many people on the island attend church, this is more common for people 35 years of age or older, unless forced by an older adult in the family. As a result, religious motivation is not heavily represented in my findings. This does not at all discount the role of religion in the territory, especially since the people creating policies and voting largely fit into the older age group. It simply frames its role within the study.

**Local policy.** Legal statutes, which in essence frame and reflect structurally established values and ideology, impact local women and have very real implications for their sexual agency. Though a full and lengthy legal exegesis would exceed the scope of this study, a directed consideration of several key statutes provides a solid platform for connecting macro-level policy decisions to the grounded, lived realities of women on the island. We will begin with the local laws regarding rape and their marital and age requirements.

As outlined in the VI Codes, Title14, Chapter 85, §1700-1703, a woman or man cannot be considered the victim of rape crime when his or her spouse is the perpetrator. This requirement applies to both the legal requirements of aggravated rape (covered in §1700 & §1700a) and for rape (covered in §1701- §1703). This policy, and its parameters, suggests that spouses have unlimited and unrestricted sexual access to their partners. Though the statute is phrased such that it includes men and women, it impacts women in particular, since they are more often victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Once a woman enters into a legal marriage, arguably her body is no longer hers, as it can be accessed and penetrated by her partner at any time. She no longer has the ability to say no, regardless of the circumstance. The age requirements for these statutes are just as telling. Generally speaking, in the statutes for rape, 16 is the age of consent, although the law suggests that in such a case the girl's partner must be within five years of her age. In reality, this is not always the case; it is generally legal—and socially acceptable—for an older male to pursue a young girl as long as she is 16. The implications of this policy are evident. Educators reported that older men in their cars line up outside schools waiting to pick up young girls; Curtis (2009) also mentions similar observations. These policies are important. They determine whether or not a wife can hold her husband legally accountable for unwanted sexual advances or whether young girls are understood as fair game for older men. Local advocates fight daily for new legislation or changes to existing legislation that would offer women more rights and protections.

On August 20, 2010, the Governor signed legislation that would offer additional layer of protection for victims of domestic violence. The legislation requires that employers allow the victim time off for issues related to the case, and prohibits them from firing or demoting women who are harassed at their jobs. The legislation also prevents landlords from punishing a tenant for needing to call the police during a domestic violence dispute, and puts in place several mandates related to the sentencing of those found guilty. Advocates heralded this new legislation as a success, as it responded to issues that surfaced as they sought to assist victims. Providers, and to some extent community members, are familiar with and at times critiqued existing policies, realizing that very basic protections for women and young girls are compromised, and that these

policies buttress male dominance and gender inequality. The most recent domestic violence legislation represents progress, but providers asserted that more work needs to be done.

### **Contribution to USVI Scholarship**

Comparatively speaking, few ethnographically driven and informed projects have explored culture and social life in the United States Virgin Islands (USVI). Historical accounts, a result of the diligent scholarship of local, regional, and national scholars, are an exception (Bough & Marcridis 1970; Boyer 1983; Creque 1968; Dookhan 1994; Jensen 1998; Pons 2007; Willocks 1995). A simple Google Scholar search reveals that much of the research conducted on the island centers around the natural sciences; cultural and social life has gone largely unexplored. Some provocative and notable exceptions exist. These include older works like that of Lewis (1972), whose work explores cultural, political, and social development in the territory, and Olwig (1985), who describes the development of St. Johnian culture over three centuries and through three major social/economic shifts. There are also more contemporary works like that of Oliver (2009) in her exploration of black womanhood and performance through the consideration of pageantry in the USVI, and Nevarro's (2010) dissertation that centers on global and local tensions through an analysis of the Economic Development Commission program in St. Croix. All represent notable attempts to respond to this gap in the literature. These works not only enhance the breadth and depth of social science scholarship on the Caribbean and in the U.S., as the territory sits at the nexus of both, they also force a more nuanced approach to the exploration of life in the Caribbean.

**Sexual health research in the USVI.** Broadly speaking sexual health research in the Caribbean is limited; this type of research in the U.S. Virgin Islands is even scarcer. The few articles located that addressed sexual health in the USVI all centered on HIV/AIDS and increased risk among vulnerable populations: MSM (men who have sex with men), substance abusers, FSW (female sex workers), and heterosexual women. These works are based on a limited time in the field and research methods that only superficially explore sex, sexuality, and sexual behaviors. Though they establish preliminary understanding of sexual health in the USVI, they lack the depth and detail that can only be gleaned through extended and focused consideration and analysis. Two of the articles, which explore sexual health in the USVI, are modeled after the same structured-interview protocols, the NIDA Risk Behavior Assessment and AIDS Knowledge Scale (Surratt & Inciardi 2005; Surratt et al 2005). A third article was also based on data collected using the NIDA Risk Behavior Assessment (Surratt 2007). These instruments were heavily directed toward gauging high-risk behavior including drug use, sex work, client characteristics, health status, and STI history. Though the analysis for each of these studies was based on the responses of more than 100 to 200 individuals, the methodology used did little to get to the cultural, social, and economic factors that underpin sexual decision-making and sexual health. Moreover, this approach to interviewing limits the extent to which individuals and communities are able to identify, contextualize, and define the factors that influence their own sexuality and sexual behavior, a problem common to investigations into sexuality in the region. Missing from this investigation, but somewhat included in Nelson, Todman, and Singer's (2007),

research is the incorporation of methods that allow the community members to freely address their understandings, desires, and needs.

Similar to the research listed above, Nelson, Todman, and Singer's (2007) research, in the form of rapid assessment, targeted vulnerable populations. The research, which took place over a five-month period, was based on data collected in the form of focus groups, key informant interviews, street intercept interviews, observations of high-risk sites, and site social mapping. Further, like Surratt (2005), this research was based on data from all three of the major islands in the USVI. Targeted toward increasing awareness, lowering high-risk behavior, and increasing service availability in the entire territory, this project took a broad stroke approach to investigation. Rapid assessment as an approach to research, though useful and necessary when under time and resource constraints, is limited in its ability to fully understand and contextualize matters as complex as sexual health. If the goal is to understand, as WHO states, "underlying social, cultural and economic factors that make individuals vulnerable to risks and affect the ways in which sex is sought, desired and/or refused by women, men and young people" (WHO Sexual Health), a more in-depth approach is required. I believe that use of anthropological methodology, such as participant observation, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews would offer a more detailed and thick understanding of the sexual context, and in turn sexual behavior and sexual agency, and thus constitute a marked enhancement over previous studies.

## **Study Aims**

This ethnography, by exploring how women explain their context, its constraints, and their responses and by incorporating provider experiences and insights, works to situate and contextualize female sexual agency. Women are shaped by the social structure, but they are not simply passive products. They act. They respond. They pursue. As Ellis asserts, “Caribbean women experience many problems and face situations that constantly undermine their independence. To overcome this, they...draw on their strength and resourcefulness, devising unique strategies to overcome the obstacles that threaten to curtail their freedom” (Ellis 1986:1). Daily, women negotiate social expectations, individual proclivities and desires, and the need to provide for themselves and their families. Through the use of ethnographic methodology, focusing on three major social pillars—the regulation of the female body, the organization of social space, and the structuring of gender—a more grounded and nuanced understanding of women’s experiences and challenges regarding sexual health and the manifestation of sexual agency in St. Croix and in the Caribbean is offered.

## **Chapter Two: Framing the Research**

### **Overview**

Literature describing the sexual practices of black women in the English-speaking Caribbean has often provided very different, and at times contradictory, pictures of women's ability and freedom to make decisions regarding sex (Clarke 1966; Lewis 2003; Kempadoo 1996). At one end of the continuum women are depicted as sexually free and unrestrained, and at the other, they are understood as heavily regulated by social, economic, gender, and political guidelines. Though some dissimilarity can possibly be attributed to local and cultural differences between the lives of women from different islands, variations in reports of women's sexual agency emerge even when the same cultural group or island is under consideration (Clarke 1966; Sobo 1993; Chevannes 2002). Further, when considerations of women's ability to make decisions about sex and sexual practices in the Caribbean are offered, they are often embedded in investigations of family structure, rarely serving as the center of analysis. Though arguably connected to or at times regulated within family structure, female sexual agency extends beyond direct considerations of the family. An investigation into women's sexual agency and constraints on women's ability to act on behalf of their sexual health can have implications for issues of reproductive health, health education, health policy, and economics—this list is by no means exhaustive. As scholars continue to work toward a

better understanding of the sexual health of women in the Caribbean, establishing a better understanding of their sexual agency is critical. Based on the island of St. Croix, USVI, this investigation seeks to offer an ethnographic assessment of women's attempts to enact sexual agency, as well as the cultural and social pressures, structures, discourses, and experiences that constrain their decisions.

### **Establishing an Analytical Framework**

Any attempt to explore agency and conceptualize its manifestations, many of which are not easily identified, must also explore and interrogate the context within which agency is enacted. Counter to the ideological underpinnings of voluntarism, which marks all individuals as having free will, agency is both a product of and a response to a specific context—given the global flows of people, resources, and information, context must be understood as relatively flexible and loosely bound. Individuals and systems are neither completely free nor completely static; rather, they are both continuously shaped and constituted in a somewhat cyclical relationship. Thus, any attempt to understand or mark agency as autonomous, essentially separating it from the context within which it is produced, is misguided. The theoretical framework most well suited for a consideration of the mutual constitution of both individual practices (sometimes manifested as agency), and the social structure is practice theory. In a very broad sense, this paradigm seeks to articulate the relationship between “the practices of social actors ‘on the ground’ and the big ‘structures’ and ‘systems’ that both constrain those practices and yet are ultimately susceptible to being transformed by them” (Ortner 2006:2).

The seminal works in this framework (Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1979, and Sahlins 1981), while focusing on the process of social reproduction and to a lesser extent the possibility of social change, conceptualize the relationship between actors and the social systems within which the actors act differently. Bourdieu, using the concept of “habitus” (appropriated from Mauss) or “systems of durable, transposable dispositions,” speaks to the process by which practices are shaped by the social structures from which they emerge while simultaneously, by virtue of being practiced, reproduce those same structures. Largely products of history, the dispositions contained within the habitus, while being both infinite and limited, are understood as natural and function outside the realm of conscious thought. Individuals only appear to have free will. Deeply internalized, the habitus shapes behaviors, responses, understandings, goals, intentions, and dispositions; this process ultimately serves to reinforce and reproduce the social system. Within this framework, agency is virtually impossible as “the habitus...produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent” in the structure of which they are a product (1977:78). Social actors largely, if not solely, through practice reproduce the conditions and systems by which they are shaped. Bourdieu’s “theory of practice” serves as an adequate conceptualization for a general approach to articulate the dynamics of social reproduction; however, as other scholars have noted (Ortner 2006, Sewell 1992, and Ahearn 2001), it fails to 1) centralize questions of power and social inequality intrinsic to social structures and 2) account, or in many ways allow, for the possibility of social change and transformation, considerations critically important to understanding the contexts, practices, and experiences of marginalized or subaltern populations (Ortner 1996). Giddens, in some ways, takes a step closer.

Similarly, in his “theory of structuration,” Giddens frames the dialectic relationship between individuals and social systems by exploring the recursive process by which social structures constitute and are constituted by social action. However, unlike Bourdieu, Giddens argues that the structure of society is “both enabling and constraining” (Giddens 1979:68). The social structure, and the structuring of social actors, is never total or complete and, thus, provides space for action, and by implication the possibility of social change. Adding to this, he asserts that, “*all social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them*” (Giddens 1979: 72—emphasis in original). Individuals are not totally ignorant or unaware of the characteristics of the social structure or of their oppression. This awareness, coupled with the incomplete nature of social structures, allows for the possibility of action. Thus, structure, according to Giddens, is not a barrier to action, but rather it is a part of it. However, he reiterates that agency, like social actors, is constrained and is a product of the social structure. Just as social actors are shaped so too is their agency and its possible manifestations: “all action exists in continuity with the past, which supplied the means for its initiation” (1979:70). While entertaining the possibility for action, he stops short of exploring the possibility of historical or social transformation (Yelvington 1995, Ortner 1989, 1996, 2006). Both Giddens and Bourdieu, by discounting or underemphasizing human agency and the capacity for social transformation, largely reduce social actors to “bearers’ of the properties of the structures within which they operate” (Yelvington 1995:5), ultimately failing to capture or convey the complexity of the social context or the human experience. Sahlins’ work, though more grounded in history and more directed toward social transformation, receives similar critiques.

Interested in the process by which culture is reordered by human action, Sahlins (1981), in his historic and ethnographic account of social transformation in Hawaiian society, suggests that individuals use their culturally structured concepts and projects to understand and act on new situations, which at times results in unintended consequences, i.e., social transformation: “people act upon circumstances according to their own cultural presuppositions, the socially given categories of persons and things”(Sahlins 1981:67). Though interested in the ways in which social reproduction turns to social transformation, Sahlins is charged with offering a rather mechanized portrayal of the relationship between social reproduction and social transformation and of providing little or no consideration of the tensions inherent in social relations and in the social structure (Ahearn 2001). Rather than creating a complex actor, he essentially creates an actor primarily driven by the social structure (Ortner 2006).

Critiques of early practice theory center primarily on three points: 1) portrayals of individuals or social actors as heavy constrained and conditioned by the social structure, thereby precluding the possibility of social change (Gose 1988); 2) ignoring or underemphasizing issues of power, both power as domination or power as resistance or agency (Ortner 2006, Sewell 1992); and 3) with the exception of Sahlins, dismissing the role of people in creating history (Archer 1982). By emphasizing the complexity of social structures and social actors, by centering questions of power, and by establishing a grounded understanding of the historical and social context, the work of scholars, particularly within the discipline of anthropology (Ortner 1984, 1989, 1996, 2006 and Yelvington 1995), utilizes a more refined and well developed framework. The major

premise of practice theory is sound, and did not need to be abandoned; it simply needed to be enhanced.

The central assumption of practice theory is relatively simple: society helps to shape people's thoughts and actions, and in return by thinking and acting people shape and reproduce society. Ortner contends that this is perhaps "the profoundest truth of social life" (2006:2). However, she also warns that its conceptual simplicity is deceptive, as social systems and social actors are complex and interact within complex webs of relations. Notions of static reproduction fail to capture or frame the realities and contradictions, tensions and ambiguities, inherent in social structures and in the lives of people who engage them. As Sewell notes, "in the world of human struggles and strategems, plenty of thoughts, perceptions, and actions consistent with the reproduction of existing social patterns fail to occur, and inconsistent ones occur all the time" (1992:15). Thus, any appropriation of practice theory, particularly in projects that seek to analyze and explore the practices and experiences of the subaltern, must account for this complexity. Centering on questions of power and agency, Ortner (1996) offers a provocative and useful reframing: a feminist/subaltern practice theory.

### **A Subaltern Practice Theory**

Ortner (1996) creates a conceptual and theoretical bridge between feminist and subaltern perspectives and practice theory. She asserts that these perspectives, broadly speaking, could benefit from practice theory as they frequently fall into one of two traps: "too much construction (textual, discursive, etc.) on one hand, too much making (decontextualized 'resistance') on the other" (1996:4). According to Ortner, practice

theory is the “only framework that theorizes a necessary dialectic between the two extremes” (1996:4). She adds to this by arguing that traditional practice theory is “detached from concerns of feminist, minority, postcolonial, and subaltern theorists,” particularly in the work of Giddens, who uses a model of power that is primarily based on capitalist class relations, which operate in ways distinctly different than structures of gender and race (1996:5). She offers an alternative approach organized to both explore power relations and structures beyond considerations of economics and class, which accounts for both social structures and social actors, without privileging one over the other.

Taking direction from Gramsci and Giddens, Ortner holds that hegemonies, systems of dominance, are not total or complete. There are always cracks, always spaces, always the potential for practices to function counter to the structure. Identifying and exploring these spaces is critically important to understanding the practices and experiences of the oppressed, for it is in these spaces that agency manifests. She suggests that traditional approaches to practice theory, by failing to centralize questions of power and to consider change, cannot capture or explain the realities of the subaltern. Social actors are not drones, ignorant to their oppression. They are aware, and, at times, they respond and even resist, enacting practices that can be missed if the focus remains solely on the process of social reproduction.

One can do practice analysis in a loop, in which ‘structures’ construct subjects and practices, but subjects and practices reproduce ‘structures.’ Or one can do—what shall we call it? subaltern practice theory?—and choose to avoid the loop, to

look for the slippages in reproduction, the erosions of long standing patterns, the moments of disorder and outright ‘resistance.’ [Ortner 1996:17]

This “looser more disruptive version of practice theory,” while still acknowledging the social structure, allows for a greater consideration of the fractures that exist. “There are always sites, and sometimes large sites, of alternative practices and perspectives available, and those may become the bases of resistance and transformation” (1996:18). Using subaltern practice theory enables a more in-depth and directed interrogation of the range of practices people utilize, which do not always manifest as resistance and which are often complex and riddled with contradictions. This approach, by focusing on the sites of alternative practices, does not overemphasize resistance or agency and still maintains and seeks to understand social structure. Agency manifests in a specific context; therefore, agents, the actors of agency, “are always involved in, and can never act outside of, the multiplicity of social relations in which they are enmeshed” (Ortner 2006:130). Agency and context are bound. In fact, by considering “everything [as] slightly—but not completely—tilted toward incompleteness, instability, and change,” a subaltern theory of practice accommodates a more nuanced approach to understanding both (1996:18).

More than exploring structure and agency in a general sense, this project explores the structure, context, and constraints related to a particular type of agency in a particular context—sexual agency in St. Croix, USVI. Though exploring larger social discourse and ideology in order to frame female sexual agency, throughout the project I focus less on larger instances of social reproduction and more on the social spaces within which

agency is enacted and social practices and discourses that seek to constrain female sexual agency. To facilitate a more fluid intellectual exegesis, the next few sections of this chapter will be directed toward three ends: 1) defining and framing concepts and terms central to the research, 2) establishing conceptual links between key concepts, and 3) exploring relevant social science literature. We will begin with considering agency.

### **Defining and Framing Agency**

“Oppression is damaging, yet the ability of social beings to weave alternative, and sometimes brilliantly creative, forms of coherence across the damage is one of the heartening aspects of human subjectivity” (Ortner 2006:57). Exploring agency is a critically important and essential intellectual and scholarly endeavor. In a world rife with inequality and oppression, marginalized groups find ways and spaces to act. All acts do not result in social transformation; all acts are not necessarily directed to do so. Operating on the macro and micro levels and manifesting both as individual and collective acts, they are simply an intentional response or disposition practiced counter to the structure, or toward particular components or cultural ideals in the structure. Agency fundamentally represents a deviation from reproduction, though the deviation may be slight and in effect have little or no longer-term impact.

After suggesting that defining a term is half the battle in social science research, Ahearn moves to define agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (2001:112). Though she labels it a bare bones definition and states that it “leaves many details unspecified” (112), a position I share, it does capture two points necessary in any definition of agency, particularly one grounded in the tenets of practice theory: 1) it

situates agency in social/cultural relations and 2) by asserting that it is mediated she hints at an underlying structuring process. Ortner makes this point very clear asserting “agency is never a thing in itself but is always part of a process” (2006:136). Augmenting Ahearn’s definition by adding some needed depth, for this project, agency is understood as a form of power accessed at the level of the individual, though at times it can be harnessed at the group level. It is most frequently enacted in the small, unstructured spaces within the larger web of power relations. Within marginalized communities, it is primarily comprised of small acts and dispositions that reflect the directed efforts of individuals and populations to meet their own, self-defined needs, i.e., strategic and intentional attempts to maximize one’s ability to meet one’s own needs and desires. Emphasis must be placed on intention because, as Ortner notes, “intentionality in agency...differentiates agency from routine practices” (136). Relating back to Giddens’s and Ortner’s assertions that oppressed groups are at least partially familiar with the characteristics of the social system and their oppression, intentionality in this context requires knowledge of social expectations and indirect and direct efforts, both large and small and sometimes only manifesting in disposition, to counter it. Sewell’s definition of agency also marks the intentions of social actors as critically important: “the strivings and motivated transactions that constitute the experienced surface of social life” (1992:2).

The capacity for agency is a human universal (1992). Birthed in different contexts, it takes on different, locally relevant, forms. Again, it is individuals’ or groups’ attempts to meet their self-defined needs and desires, which are largely context-specific and reflect the social structure within which they are enmeshed. “Agency might include highly conscious plots and plans and schemes; somewhat more nebulous aims, goals, and

ideas, and finally desires, wants, and needs that may range from being deeply buried to quite consciously felt...all the ways in which action is cognitively and emotionally pointed toward some purpose” (Ortner 2006:134). It is important to take a more nuanced approach to understanding and situating agency. As Ahearn (2001) asserts, it cannot simply be understood as resistance. Within relations of power, agency is complex and contradictory, as humans have various motivations for pursuing particular ends.

**Agency, power, and resistance: a brief note.** Power is not unidirectional. In fact, its strength as a tool lies in its ability to produce other powers, including that of resistance and that of reproduction (Foucault 1981). Agency can arguably be found in both reproduction and resistance, although it is most readily attended in acts of resistance (Ahearn 2001), that is, intentional attempts on behalf of an individual or group that reflects the desire to act in their own best interest, thereby countering norms established by larger social institutions and discourses. However, locating agency solely in acts of resistance feeds a false binary—resistance or reproduction—which, I argue, undermines the realities of the oppressed: 1) as Ahearn (2001) argues, resistance is only one form of agency; 2) forms or acts of agency are frequently small in scale—they are often subtle and operate in the shadows; 3) acts of agency are at times rife with contradictions and complexities (sometimes acts effectively counter one component of the social structure while simultaneously serving to reproduce the larger social framework); 4) following a similar line of thought, because one engages in practices that are counter to a particular piece or component of the social structure, does not mean that one is attempting, or even interested in, changing the entire thing; and 5) there are many stratagems woven into the

social structure that serve to maintain power imbalances and inequalities, so although individuals are familiar with characteristics of their oppression, they are most often only “partially knowing” (Ortner 2006, Giddens 1979) as social structures are structured to appear natural. These points are not intended to undermine agency but rather to provide some insight into its complexities.

**On locating and indentifying agency.** Theorizing and situating agency are a scholarly endeavor; on the ground people are largely concerned with living and life, and in circumstances of oppression and constraint find creative ways to meet their needs. Thus, as scholars, we should not preoccupy ourselves with creating detailed models for categorizing agency and establishing insight into the magnitude of acts; rather, I contend, we should explore the hegemonic cracks and the practices that are enacted and pursued within them. The cracks provide room for alternative practices that counter the social structure but may or may not be identified as agency or resistance. “We are not required to decide once and for all whether any given act fits into a fixed box called [agency]. As Marx well knew, the intentionalities of actors evolve through praxis, and the meanings of acts change, both for the actor and for the analyst” (Ortner 2006:44). Though centering on resistance, Ortner makes an important point—I have taken the liberty of replacing her use of the word resistance with agency. As stated throughout her work, she understands resistance as a form of agency; thus I contend that my substitution is appropriate. What may be considered an act of survival today, may be understood as agency tomorrow. “In a relationship of power the dominant often has something to offer, and sometimes a great deal (though always of course at the price of continuing in power). The subordinate thus

has many grounds for ambivalence about resisting the relationship” (45). Relations between the dominant and the oppressed are complex, and responses to power inequalities and acts of agency can be contradictory in nature. By acting, the oppressed, in many ways, place themselves at risk.

Given the emergent nature of agency, as the meaning of acts can change, and given the very understandable ambivalence toward covert acts of agency on the part of marginalized groups, I intentionally do not label acts as acts of agency or reproduction. Rather, I discuss the range of acts, the constraints, and the contexts—the characteristics of and the events within the cracks of hegemony. I explore the tensions and the ambiguities, leaving room for understandings and notions of agency to develop.

### **Defining and Situating Sexual Agency**

The use of the concept of sexual agency in social science and public health literature is varied and, in some instances, contradictory. Interestingly, much of the literature using the concept has failed to discuss these contradictions and proceeds to use the term as if there is a universal, uncontroversial understanding. However, in order to fully understand and analyze female sexual agency, these contradictions must be explored and unpacked. Analysis of the analytical framework within which the uses of the concept are situated is the first step, as it begins to reveal the source from which these disparities emerge. While some uses of the concept seem to be situated and explored within the legacy of social investigation into and consideration of power relations and agency, others do not.

Obviously situated within the health behavior model, which emphasizes individual behavior, for Crosby et al (2008) “sexual agency was defined as young women’s sexual desire and expressed attitudes towards sexual pleasure” (Crosby, DiClemente, Wingood et al 2008:41). Operationalized by sexual sensation seeking, sexual gratification achieved through penile-vaginal sex, and whether the women endorsed the statement “stopping to use a condom during sex takes all of the fun out of sex” (2008:42), this definition, or at least its predictor variables, conflates sexual agency with high-risk and sensation seeking behavior based on penile-vaginal penetrative sex. Narrow and oversimplified, it misses or possibly ignores the various contexts within which sexual acts and sexual decisions take place. Further, this definition seems to be based on a very skewed understanding of agency. Why does a woman’s assertion that pausing to use condoms “takes all the fun out of sex” constitute sexual agency, as opposed to her insistence on its use? Further, why doesn’t a woman’s insistence on types of sex more heavily directed toward female sexual satisfaction, such as cunnilingus, constitute sexual agency rather than satisfaction achieved through penile-vaginal sex? This is not to suggest that a woman’s insistence of the use of condoms during sex or her preference for cunnilingus are better representations of sexual agency; rather, these questions highlight the spaces that the authors project and that their understanding of sexual agency have failed to consider and explore. Sexual agency, according to this definition, is potentially dangerous and found in high-risk and highly sexualized contexts. In addition to their hetero-normative tone, these authors, implicit in their use of the term, overlook the complexities of the concept and its operationalization and fail to acknowledge the small

spaces in the larger web of social and power relations within which women enact or attempt to enact sexual agency.

More accurate but still lacking is Wood, Mansfield, and Koch's (2007) definition, which describes sexual agency as "women's ability to act on behalf of their sexual needs, desires, and wishes" (189). Their conceptual and analytical energy is primarily directed toward the needs, desires, and wishes that surface during the act itself, thereby failing to connect sexual agency and the enactment of agency to actions outside of those related directly to the physical performance of sex. Most poignant about their definition is its emphasis on "acting on behalf of"; this facilitates a broader, more accurate, and more productive discussion of women's understanding and assertions of sexual agency. However, I would contend, as does Curtis (2009), that women's sexual agency, and constraints on their sexual agency, must also be understood in relation to larger social forces and discourses that consequently impact sex. For example, Curtis discusses the negative stigmas associated with women who purchase condoms from local stores in Nevis. This too has implications for sexual agency that an overemphasis on the act of sex misses.

Unlike the works mentioned above, Curtis (2009) does not offer an explicit definition of sexual agency though she acknowledges that the concept is central to her work. However, she does clarify what she means by agency: "the way girls act in a deliberative manner to produce certain outcomes, whether or not they are conscious of the social constraints that have determined these outcomes" (2009:7). Though missing an extended, theoretically-based discussion of the concept and its position in relation to concepts such as power, she does offer insight into the constant social tensions under

which sexual agency is enacted. To highlight these tensions she quotes Ortner: “people (try to) act upon the world even as they are acted upon” (2009:7). Her use of this quote highlights the importance of exploring and understanding the context of sex and sexual acts, as there are forces that serve to constrain sexual agency even as women seek to constitute it. This research takes a similar stand and adds to it by asserting that agency cannot, or rather should not, be explored or understood in isolation, but rather as responses or negotiations that take place within a larger network of power relations.

This project’s use of the term sexual agency builds on the understanding of agency outlined above and applies it to acts and behaviors related to the sex and sexual health of women. Thus, it refers to the ways in which women act to meet their own sexual needs and desires, including but not limited to the physical act of sex. To borrow from Curtis’s definition of agency, sexual agency speaks to the ways women act in a “deliberative manner to produce certain [sexual and sex related] outcomes” (2009:7), including their decisions regarding the type and use of contraception; attempts to gain access to sexual health resources, information, and care; partner selection; control over and initiation of aspects of the physical act of sex; and their pursuit of sexual acts and behaviors that fall outside of traditional social discourse. All of these acts, or attempts, have to be understood in relation to the social tensions and mechanisms that work to constrain them. Moore (1999) asserts “understanding the agency of others and how they act in the contemporary world is thus a matter of comprehending the spaces and oscillations between integrating notions and diverse experiences”(15). Agency emerges in the space between the social discourses that work to shape an individual’s, or for this

investigation, a woman's life and her understanding of her life, her experiences, and her needs and desires.

The ability to enact sexual agency is for some extremely limited and, thus, should not be overemphasized. Lutz and Nonini (1999) warn against fetishizations of agency by asserting "some people, in some places and times, cannot act as agents in anything more than the nominal sense" (104). Individuals, particularly women, at times live and must function within a network of power relations that severely limits their ability to act in their own best interest; however, as Wojcicki and Malala (2001) suggest about sex workers in South Africa, it is also important to consider and explore the micro-level decisions that women make in their lives, specifically with regard to sex negotiation, and recognize these as aspects of agency (101). Even in the most oppressive and imposing of circumstances, there may be spaces that allow for women to enact sexual agency and choice. These simple acts must be considered and are important components for understanding how women experience and act on their sexual health.

**Agency, praxis, and sexual praxis: establishing a conceptual bridge.** Agency, as defined above, ranges from overt acts of resistance to very internalized dispositions and goals. This approach, which facilitates a more nuanced understanding of agency, may blur an understanding of agency as "practice" or action. To circumvent this, the notion of praxis is used throughout the project to denote informed and intentional action that, at least in some ways, works counter to the social structure. Praxis is action and, like agency, requires at least partial awareness of the social structure. Agency can include both action and dispositions whereas praxis refers exclusively to action. Building on

Marx, Freire defines praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (1970:36). Though I admire Freire’s work, I would not attach praxis only to its macro-level transformative potential, which I do not deny; rather, I would assert that praxis is very present on the micro-level and is evident in small acts. Referencing Marx, Ortner contends “the intentionalities of actors change through praxis” (Ortner 2006:44). Praxis is a process; it too develops. For example, what begins as an individual attempt to institute family planning through covert contraception use or abortion practices has the potential to become transformative, but does not necessarily need to become so to be considered praxis.

To further ground the notion of praxis in the research, I move to explore and analyze a specific form of praxis, sexual praxis. Kempadoo utilizes sexual praxis to speak to the ways in which “sexuality is made visible through behaviours, activities and interactions between people, in relations, and in the ways in which desires are actualized” (2009:2). This definition, intended to emphasize how sexuality is practiced, informs my use of the concept in the analysis and discussion that follows.

### **Framing the Research: Justifying the use of Caribbeanist Scholarship**

The U.S. Virgin Islands, while politically part of the U.S., are geographically situated in the Eastern Caribbean. Though the influence of the U.S. mainland on the USVI is evidenced in media, policy, tourism, and trade, the themes that emerged during field research clearly paralleled themes present in Caribbean sexuality studies—multi-partnering, transactional sex, domestic violence, etc.—rather than those found in explorations of black female sexuality based on the U.S. mainland. Further, during

interviews, participants clearly marked their experiences and their observations as “Caribbean,” distinguishing them from their understandings of gender relations and female sexuality in the U.S.; examples of this are included in the results chapters. Though part of the U.S., in many ways they are more closely associated with other islands in the Caribbean. Therefore, when organizing the literature to which I hope my research adds and within which it is situated, I have overwhelmingly referenced literature based in the Caribbean. Given the points cited above, I believe this to be the most appropriate approach.

### **Gender in the Caribbean**

Investigations in to gender and gender relations have always been a part of Caribbean kinship studies (Trouillot 1992). To the degree that Yelvington (1996b) asserts that it permeates through every aspect of life in the region. Men and women are often relegated to differing and at times conflicting domains. By asserting that men’s and women’s spheres do not overlap, Sobo’s (1993) work maintains a theme salient in previous scholarship. Both Ellis (1986) and Wilson (1969) juxtapose male and female roles in society and in the family. Leading one of the most expansive projects directed toward specifically studying the experience of women in the region, Ellis argues these distinctions begin to emerge early in life. Women, according to Ellis, are trained to be independent, as men are unreliable, while concurrently being conditioned to believe that securing a relationship is integral. And, counter to the female experience, men remain highly dependent and ultimately become dependent on their female partners, whom men, because of their dependence, come to resent. Focusing on the domestic, Wilson (1969)

frames this divide as occurring along notions “reputation” and “respectability.” For him, reputation, the primary domain of the male, was defined by orientation toward equality, virility, and lower class norms. On the contrary, respectability, the female domain, was directed toward status and womanhood. A number of scholars have critiqued Wilson’s distinction for failing to consider the ways in which women also pursue reputation and for failing to consider the role of social power and economics (Besson 1993; Yelvington 1995). Interested in the ways in which gender norms are used to structure sexual praxis, I found his notions of respectability and reputation to be relevant in a very general sense (looking at larger social values opposed to lived experiences). Referencing sexual behavior more directly, Wilson asserts, “males are esteemed for their virility and are granted a freedom which they are expected to exploit. Females are, ideally, constrained in their sexual activities before and after marriage” (1969:71). His assessment largely mirrors themes found in the research; however, like Yelvington (1995) I argue, the picture he creates is much too clear and simple. Reality is much more complex.

Barrow (1998) warns that over emphasis on the male and female roles in the family, particularly during this time period, misses the ways social issues, like poverty, unemployment, and economic instability, influence household structure and gender roles in the Caribbean. The research of both Sobo (1993) and Yelvington (1996) takes this turn and makes explicit some of the complexities of the male-female relationship by interrogating some of the ways in which power is pursued. Sobo (1993) asserts that sexual relations are the battleground for the power struggles of males and females. Thus, sex and sexuality served as both a way of reinforcing and challenging power relations. Yelvington (1996), in his research based in Trinidad, analyzes the use of flirting as a tool

for exercising and resisting power while simultaneously working to create and reinforce gendered identity. Gender is not fixed; rather, it, and the meanings associated with it, is contested and resisted in many ways. This project, while acknowledging the social organization of gender and gendered relations, highlights the ways in which gender is challenged and reproduced.

### **Black Female Sexuality in the Caribbean**

Sexuality is rarely the salient or prominent issue under examination in literature on the Caribbean (Kempadoo 2003). Sharpe and Pinto (2006) claim that this gap in the literature is likely the result of fears concerning the reproduction of the negative stereotypes birthed during colonization. In 1984, Spiller argued “black women are the beached whales of the sexual universe, unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting *their* verb” (Sharpe and Pinto 2006: 247—emphasis in original). There was an obvious response to this call, evident in the increasing amounts of scholarly works available regarding the sexuality of black women in the U.S., but this reality remains true for black women in the Caribbean (2006).

As Kempadoo notes at the beginning of the second chapter of her book, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor*, “a substantial body of literature exists that has produced ideas about Caribbean sexual relations, identities, and behaviors, while avoiding an explicit focus on sexuality” (2004:15). Black female sexuality in the Caribbean has largely been observed and analyzed through the lenses of mating patterns, conjugal unions, reproduction, and economic relations, and specific behaviors were often labeled as immoral, unstable, and loose. One of the first works to speak to women’s

sexuality in the Caribbean was that of Clarke (1966). Clarke argued the black women in Jamaica were exclusively heterosexual, enjoyed a great deal of sexual freedom and agency, and acted autonomously from their male partners. She indicated that a number of the women in her study “preferred a variety of lovers to having just one man and being faithful to him” (1966:95). Though Clarke’s work, and that of others (RT Smith 1956; Henriques 1953), set the tone for future works looking at the sexual practices of black women in the Caribbean, some have challenged her observations regarding female sexual agency.

In the Caribbean, sexuality seems to be something that men have and are free to explore, while women are expected to relate to it only defensively. Though from time to time there are claims of female sexual autonomy in the region, women’s sexuality is still policed by social and gender conventions in ways that do not seem to constrain the behavior of men. [Lewis 2003:7]

Rather than being free to manage and express their sexuality, women and their sexuality are heavily regulated and guarded. Martinez-Alier’s (1974) assessment of gender roles follows in the same vein. In her evaluation of sex roles and social inequality, she argues that gender roles and sexual codes are guided by the hierarchical nature of the social system. Even when claims of sexual freedom are made, women’s behaviors, sexual and otherwise, are constrained by the social structure, even more so than their male counterparts. Despite some critiques, the themes and frames used in Clarke’s work continued to surface in literature assessing black Caribbean women and their sexual

practices. Later work, like that of Whitehead (1978) labeled family structures, matrifocal households, and conjugal unions, and thereby women's sexual practices, as positive adaptive strategies directed toward responding to conditions of poverty and unemployment, marking women, at times though their sexual behavior, as actors making the best of their circumstances. Though in some ways reframing the sexuality and experiences of Caribbean women, this assessment continues, though more loosely, to use the Western-nuclear family as a model, and thus, it could still be argued that her behaviors remain pathological, even if her behaviors are understood as necessary responses to her social circumstances. As Reddock asserts, "the 'disorganized' Afro-Caribbean family was characterized by what was seen as unnatural 'matrifocality'...never understood in its own right but always as a deviation from a Western or European norm" (2004:xvii).

Not all assessments of black Caribbean women's sexual behaviors attempted to spin a more positive tone. Some authors marked women and their sexual behaviors as the sources of social instability in the Caribbean. Dann (1987) suggested that the inadequacies and deficiencies experienced by men in the Caribbean could be explained by women's dominance in the household and their engagement in "loose" sexual relations. Modeling the vicious cycle, young men ultimately scripted their own behavior against the male absenteeism and multi-partnering they observed while living with their mothers. Correspondingly, after citing the belief of the Barbados Government in universal health care and that health services offered at government facilities are free, Kumar & Bent (2003), in their study of the characteristics of HIV-infected mothers in Barbados, suggest that factors like early age at the onset of sexual activity, repeated

pregnancies, and multi-partnering contributed to the vertical and horizontal transmission of AIDS in country. Women and their sexuality are marked as the root of social and familial ills. When not being marked as pathological, their sexuality was marked as being directed toward one of two ends: procreation or economics.

Clarke labeled the women in her study as independent and the sex they engaged in as natural and directed toward procreation, beginning a trope found in much of the subsequent work. “A woman is only considered ‘really’ a woman after she has borne a child” (1966:96). MacCormack and Draper (1987) made similar observations about the Jamaican men and women in their study: “in Jamaica... sexuality is usually conceptually linked with the desire to create children. For both men and women, perceptions of self-identity and social power are contingent upon the expression of sexual potency which is confirmed by childbirth” (1987:143). Womanhood and sexuality are tied to childbirth; although a woman, according to Clark, is sexually autonomous, her sexuality is inextricably tied to the family and, as evidenced in Sobo’s work, the family’s survival, i.e. economics. Citing a woman who “bluntly denied that she would ever consider having sexual relations without financial gain” (1993:185), Sobo asserts that traditional sexual liaisons, distinct from sex work which is frowned upon, often include an informal, indirect exchange of money. Buttressing an understanding of black female Caribbean sexuality as a tool to achieve womanhood, through procreation, and financial assistance, these works, though likely well intended, may miss or discount the complexity of women’s lives and thus the complexity of their sexual praxis.

Also focusing on economics and sex work, Kempadoo adds that “dominant values of sex as intimacy and love hinder rather than sustain broader visions of sexual and

gender inequality and justice” (1996:80). She contends removing these attributes reveals that female sexual choice and sexuality can become a vehicle to afford women greater economic freedom, independence, and domestic flexibility. Turning dominant understandings of sex work on their head, Kempadoo’s assessment reframes sex work as a legitimate occupation; sex work is not the problem, but rather the injustice and exploitation experienced by sex workers. Kempadoo’s approach is very appropriate for reframing and interrogating sex work; however, caution should be taken when trying to apply this perspective too broadly. Economics is an undeniable part of female sexuality, maybe sexuality in general, in the Caribbean and globally, but women, including those in this study, cite many discourses, some of which are a reflection of “dominant values,” as they reflect on their sexual praxis and the practices of other women in their community. These rationalizations cannot be ignored and thus must also be included in establishing an understanding of female sexual agency in the Caribbean

Unlike Kempadoo’s work, which centers on the woman as the object of consumption, Curtis (2009) explores the ways in which desires for global goods influence young girls’ sexualities in Nevis and the ways in which sexualities motivate the desire to consume. She contends that economic development in Nevis has changed the ways young girls engage, experience, and express their sexualities. She asserts “globally mediated images, sexual scripts, and commodities may incite new subjectivities” (2009:5). Interested in the exchange of sex for goods and services, Curtis employs the phrase “commodity erotics” to explore both sides of sexual-economic exchange. As she asserts, there are instances when goods compel sexuality and instances when sexuality compels the purchase of goods. In Nevis, sexuality and consumer culture are linked. Older,

economically stable men are attracted to young girls, and girls are attracted to older men who are willing and have the ability to purchase them goods and services. Like Kempadoo, Curtis asserts that sexual practices and sexualities are embedded in economic systems rather than directly determined by them. Similar to my caution regarding Kempadoo's work, Curtis is specifically interested in looking at the relationship between the global economy and young girls' sexual subjectivities. In fact, the relationships between young girls and older men mirror a central theme in my research. However, she is not necessarily trying to establish a more general understanding of female sexual agency, which I assert, extends beyond purely economic considerations. Sexual relations and female sexual agency in the Caribbean are much more complex and nuanced.

Leo-Rhynie, who calls for the recognition of multiple realities among Caribbean women during the provision of healthcare, asserts that "sexuality is intricately bound up with male-female power relationships" (1997:242) and that these considerations must be taken up in order to fully understand the health practices of women. Sobo, who argues that sexual practices are the battle grounds for gendered power struggles, effectively adds to Leo-Rhynie's insight by suggesting that gender relations and male-female power struggles are not only bound up in the expression of sexuality and sexual praxis, but they are also constituted by them. An interrogation of female sexual agency and its context allows for the consideration of all of these components: power relations, social structure, economics, family structure, dominant ideology, gender, and sex, and thus contributes to a more nuanced and enhanced understanding of women and their sexual behavior.

## **Answering the Call: Female Sexual Agency in the Caribbean**

“Caribbean sexuality is both hypervisible and obscured. That is, it is celebrated in popular culture as an important ingredient in Caribbean social life and flaunted to attract tourist to the region, yet is shrouded in double entendre, secrecy, and shame” (Kempadoo 2003:1). Similarly structured, the discourse that surrounds sex, particularly the sex of black females, depicts sexuality as loose, unrestrained, and pathological. More recent works have sought to challenge these notions while simultaneously creating a more detailed and elaborate understanding of sexuality in the region. However, explorations of female sexual agency are overwhelmingly centered on sexual-economic exchanges—sex work, sex tourism, and transactional sex—which “lend support to ideas that women’s sexual agency is tied to economic concerns” (Kempadoo 2009:11). More work must be done.

Kempadoo, in an article reviewing trends in Caribbean sexuality studies, calls for more explorations of female sexual agency in the Caribbean as these projects “create possibilities for more complicated analyses of women’s sexuality” (2009:12). Using in-depth ethnographic methods and grounded in the experiences of local women and local health providers, my project responds to this call. Women’s lives are complex and their sexual agency, both constrained and enabled by society, reflects this complexity.

## **Chapter Three: Ethnographic Methodology**

### **Structuring the Methodology**

This project was designed to be emergent. Themes and insights gained in the field helped to shape more focused and narrow research questions as the study progressed. Though research protocol was constructed before beginning any fieldwork, its structure, organization, and content at times shifted to reflect the local and social realities of women. Agar speaks to this by asserting that in ethnography “the process is [and should be] dialectic and not linear” (Agar 1996:62). Beyond changes to the interview protocol, the research design of this project also reflects this perspective and parallels what Agar describes as the funnel approach: “breadth and humanity at the beginning of the funnel, and then, within the context of that beginning, depth, problem focus, and science at the narrow end” (Agar 1996:65). The research was designed to establish broad-based understandings through intensive, extended participant observation at the beginning of the project and to progress toward a more narrow and directed focus, through the use of semi-structured interviewing, toward the end of data collection. Further, several different data collection strategies were used to strengthen scientific validity and reliability of the project because, as Agar also argues, “without science we lose our credibility. Without humanity, we lose our ability to understand others” (1996:65).

## **Research Plan**

The research was structured to progress through three phases: participant observation, focused data collection, and analysis, each of which will be discussed in more detail below. The research phases and a timeline are also offered in table 1. Phase one of the project, which began in March 2010 and continued through June 2010, was primarily directed toward two goals: 1) establishing a basic familiarity with the research context and 2) establishing my presence as a researcher. Devoting more than 14 weeks to constructing a preliminary understanding of the island and to creating networks that could be used later in the research process was essential and represented more than a third of my time in the field. Soon after moving on the island, I began to gauge the full cultural, social, and linguistic gulf that sat between my experiences on the mainland and what I was observing and experiencing on island. In order to conduct a project that was adequately, accurately, ethically, and respectfully sound, I needed to spend an extended period of time gaining my anthropological bearings. During this phase, I engaged in participant observation and conducted several informal interviews throughout the island. At the beginning, most of my tasks largely resembled the routine most would engage in after moving to a different location. Each day I worked to develop and enhance my understanding of the layout of the island, the local dialect, the most efficient and cost effective ways to procure food, the best schools (my then 5-year-old daughter had relocated with me), and so on. Given the size of the island and its relatively small population, most knew immediately that I was not a local. This served as a gateway to spark many conversations and ultimately provided me with opportunities to conduct several informal interviews. During this time, I also began collecting one of the local

papers, *The Avis*, each day. Reading the daily newspaper kept me abreast of local news and events—I often knew more about what was going on than one of my neighbors. At times, information taken from the paper would direct my participant observation and network building efforts. I learned about several community and political events and attended quite a few of them—even when I was unable to attend, knowledge of the events served as great conversation starters. At one event in particular, which was directed toward supporting the candidacy of a local politician (I moved to St. Croix during an election year), I met a gentleman on island who was very well connected and who proved to be extremely helpful throughout the remainder of my time in the field.

Phase two of the project began in July 2010 and continued through November 2010. This portion of the project was directed toward conducting semi-structured interviews with providers and local women. I began this phase by following up with and interviewing providers and other individuals who worked with young women in the community. Many of these connections, frequently established during the first phase of the project, ultimately provided the means by which I was able to recruit local women. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit providers and convenience and snowball sampling were used to recruit the women. I conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with a total of 26 providers and women. Though I initially intended to only conduct ten interviews with providers and community stakeholders, I was able to interview 14 individuals. For the project, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 local women between the ages of 18 and 34. At the outset of the project, I intended to interview 20 local women. However, at the behest of a local provider, who asserted that I would likely experience some difficulty recruiting women without an incentive, I begin

looking for funding to compensate the women who participated. I was able to secure funding for 15 women. Each would be given a \$20 gift card to the local Kmart. The amount of the incentive was commensurate with an incentive offered by another study being conducted on the island during the same time frame. During recruitment, more than 20 women expressed a willingness to be interviewed; however, due to issues that will be explored below, only 12 were interviewed. Though this is by no means a statistically representative sample, the frequency and consistency of themes across the interviews suggest that I approached the point of saturation, used as a measure to justify sample sizes in qualitative research, in the data. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006:65) define data saturation as “the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the code book.” The authors suggest that guidelines about the number of interviews needed to achieve saturation are missing in social and behavioral science literature. However, based on the analysis of 60 semi-structured interviews from their own research, they assert that thematic discovery can be achieved in as few as 12 interviews, with more than 73 percent of themes emerging in the first six interviews (for a more in-depth discussion on sample size selection see Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006; Bertaux 1981; or Morse 1994). Further, given the length and depth of each interview and the striking similarity in themes and responses offered by the women, I believe that my sample, along with my research notes from participant observation, provider interviews, informal interviews, and media observations, provides valuable insight into female sexual agency and therefore represents a substantial contribution to the literature. Interviews with the providers generally lasted about an hour, whereas interviews with women often

lasted closer to two hours. More than 31 hours of semi-structured interview data were collected.

Phase three of the project, which began in November 2010 and continued through August 2011, involved reviewing and transcribing audio files and voice notes (discussed further below) and engaging in data analysis. Some of the interviews were transcribed by contracting assistance (most of the provider interviews). I transcribed all remaining interviews, which primarily consisted of the interviews with the local women, on my personal computer. All transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy before analysis began. Field notes and interview data were analyzed using ATLAS TI.

Table 1. Research Schedule

<b>Stages of Research</b>	<b>Time Period</b>
Phase One:	March 2010 thru June 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaged in participant observation, informal interviews, and archival research.</li> <li>• Identified key informants</li> <li>• Began media monitoring</li> <li>• Began semi-structured interview recruitment</li> </ul>	
Phase Two:	July 2010 thru November 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued media monitoring</li> <li>• Conducted extended semi-structured interviews with 12 women 18 to 34 years of age</li> <li>• Conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 health providers and other community stakeholders</li> </ul>	
Phase Three:	November 2010 thru August 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcribed informal and semi-structured interviews and voice notes</li> <li>• Coded interview data using Atlas TI</li> <li>• Reviewed and analyzed field notes and media monitoring</li> </ul>	

**Research site.** The research primarily took place in Frederiksted. Locally, the island is largely spoken of in three parts: West or Frederiksted, Mid-Island, and East or Christiansted. According to the USVI Statistical Digest (2000), an official report that

organizes the island into nine sub-districts, Frederiksted has a population of 3,700. In local discourse, the island is divided quite differently. Locals describe either the side of the island they live in or the area in which they live. Some of these names correspond with the sub-districts named in the report; however, some are not listed. For example, while on the island, I lived in an area called Two Brothers; this area is not listed in the digest. Though local descriptions of the islands layout are not reflected in some official documents, I will continue to use the official published data, as local discourse is not formalized and/or organized for public reporting. I will make comments and amendments when appropriate.

Most of the population in Frederiksted, 84 percent, is black. Though more than 13 percent of the population is white, most white residents live in Christiansted. Residents in Frederiksted come from many different places in the U.S. and the Caribbean; a large majority of residents move to St. Croix from Caribbean islands like St. Kitts, St. Lucia, and the Dominican Republic. The majority (54 percent) of the total population in this sub-district is female; the gender imbalance increases when only the adult population is considered. Of the 2,133 adults aged 18 and above whom live in Frederiksted, almost 60 percent are female (Housing and Population Profile 2000). This imbalance can also be seen when considering household composition. Of the 893 family households, more than 550 are female-headed with no husband present, and the overwhelming majority of those households have children under the age of 18. Some households may have adult male residents; however, their presence is often informal, particularly in public housing, where rules regulate cohabiting for women who receive housing assistance. Men are frequently more transient, moving between the households of their family members or their female

partners. More than half of families in this part of St. Croix live below the poverty line. This dynamic is likely related to the large number of female-headed households, as little more than 51 percent of women participate in the formal labor force, and more than half of households in this sub-district live on less than \$15,000 a year. It is important to note that many women participate in the informal labor force. They sew, sell baked goods or local produce, watch local children, and so on. I observed that most of the women selling baked goods or locally grown produce were older women, unless a young child was there to assist. It was more difficult to gauge the age of the women who were commissioned to sew dresses, school uniforms, and other garments.

Most of the children who attend school on the island are required to wear school uniforms, including all who attend public school, elementary through high school, and some who attend private school and preschool. At times, uniforms are available for purchase at several well known local stores; however, many parents or guardians commission local women to make the uniforms, especially the skirts or jumpers required for girls. The local women I was directed to were all older (generally over 40 or 50 years of age). Though young women are not as overtly engaged in these aspects, they still participate in informal labor, such as hair styling and braiding, to earn extra income. In general, women do not join the informal labor market to increase their surplus; rather, their participation is central to their survival. Low rates of participation in the labor force and low incomes may also be related to the low levels of educational attainment; more than 40 percent of the population aged 25 or older has not received a high school diploma (Housing and Population Profile 2000). Additionally, most women between the ages of

15 and 24 have at least one child; on average women between the ages of 25 and 34 have two children; and those between the ages of 35 and 44 have three children.

### **Data Collection**

**Sampling and recruitment.** The majority of the data collected were based on snowball, convenience, and purposive sampling techniques. Though these techniques limit the generalizability of the data, given the scope and objectives of the research project these techniques were most appropriate. This project was primarily directed toward contributing rich, grounded data based on several months in the field, archival research, and ethnographic interviews, and thus is not tied to random sampling techniques. Informal interviews were conducted throughout the island, as the island is only 28 miles long and 7 miles wide, although formal interviews with women were primarily conducted in Frederiksted or Mid-Island. More than 20 informal interviews were conducted; participants were approached at community events, local restaurants, small businesses, and so on. Snowball and convenience sampling are the most appropriate recruitment technique when conducting informal interviews, as its strength as a research method lies in its organic and flexible nature. Women participating in the extended semi-structured interviews were recruited either in Frederiksted or Mid-Island. Half were recruited at local community centers, and half through a key informant connected to the local university. I also attempted to recruit through relationships I had cultivated with a young, local business owner and through other more casual relationships. However, using the established community institutions with their established networks of relationships proved most effective. The island, to a very large

extent, is a network of relationships based on familial and social bonds. For a non-local, it can be very difficult to gain access without a local connection. To some extent this also proved true for the provider interviews, although several providers were willing to speak with me before I established or spoke of my local contacts. Purposive sampling was primarily used for selecting potential participants for the provider and stakeholder interviews as the number of individuals in St. Croix who provide these services and/or who work within a related capacity in the community is limited.

The strength of qualitative research methods, particularly those mentioned above, lay in their ability to engage the community on the ground and uncover the structural and social underpinnings of a given phenomenon. Though purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling techniques limit the generalizability of the results, the purpose of this investigation was to elicit rich, in-depth ethnographic data, which is enhanced by the selection of these particular sampling techniques. Additionally, the various data collection techniques used throughout the project, through the process of triangulation, served as a basis to compare and understand the frequency of particular themes through the data collection and analysis process, which enhances the study's reliability. As Jick (1979) notes, triangulation is based on the premise that the shortcomings of one data collection technique are balanced by the strengths of another. This project was based on five sources of data collected through four different methods: participant observation, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews with women, semi-structured interviews with providers, and media observation.

**Participant observation.** Bernard describes participant observation as “getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their daily lives” (1994:136). Though he admits that some research projects, primarily those structured around rapid assessment, may be based on only several weeks of participant observation, he suggests that extended participant observation not only increases the validity of the study but also provides more insight into sensitive cultural issues. Although participant observation was used throughout my time in the field, it served as the primary method of data collection during the first phase of research. Daily explorations of the entire island were ripe with opportunities to explore and better understand female sexual agency, through observation and engagement in what was there and by questioning, through the interview process, what was not. Trips to local grocery stores (there are only two major grocery chains on the island, Plaza Xtra and Pueblo, though there are several smaller grocers), the farmer’s market, health food stores, restaurants, downtown Frederiksted and Christiansted, the beach, community events, and Sunny Isle (the local mall) were all opportunities to engage in rich participant observation. In fact, I argue that there is no way one could truly understand the layout and cultural structure of the island without living there or at least staying for an extended period of time, particularly if one is not from another island in the Caribbean. Each day I was able to build on the information collected and the relationships built the day prior. I kept regular records of my experiences, a selection of which are extremely relevant to establishing an understanding of female sexual agency and are thus offered in the results sections below. Like the semi-structured interviews collected, participant observation was conducted by what I would call snowball

exploration. Each place and each informal interview opportunity led me to another place. This method was well suited for establishing and enhancing an understanding of the research context. Participant observation, with its emphasis on immersion, is ideal for discovering what people do. Unlike some of the other methodologies, such as structured interviews or surveys, participant observation is organic. It occurs where people are, and places people at the center of deciding what symbols, practices, and sites are marked as significant. Angrosino posits that this methodology allows the researcher to become “immersed in the flow of events as they are unfolding” (2005:39). Sexuality and sexual praxis, and the local discourse that surrounds it, take various forms and involve both performance and interpretation, and to that end can be considered relatively unbounded. Whether in the laundromat, as Curtis (2009) describes, or in the factory, as Yelvington describes (1996), the almost ubiquitous nature of sexuality calls researchers to engage the phenomena where it takes place; participant observation facilitates that practice. Use of this method was central to becoming familiar with and understanding the social context, the discourses, and people’s actions throughout the entire research process; however, it alone can do little to elicit direct understandings and interpretations from the community.

**Informal interviews.** While engaging in participant observation, I conducted more than 20 informal interviews. Neighbors, shop owners, clerks, child care workers, and individuals I met by chance were most in tune with life on the island and were frequently willing to provide insight and advice. Teen pregnancy and male/female relationships in general were heavily represented in public discourse. They were frequently the topic of conversation, and I served as a listening, and at times inquiring

ear. Much of the first phase of research was based on participant observation; however, informal interviews provided moments to elucidate and interrogate any patterns I found. Bernard asserts “informal interviewing is the method of choice during the first phase of participant observation, when you’re just settling in and getting to know the lay of the land” (Bernard 1994:209). Informal interviews were conducted with adults aged 18 and older and were intended to enhance my understanding of sex, sexuality, sexual behavior, and the public discourse surrounding these topics in St. Croix. The selection of participants, apart from establishing a minimal age requirement, was not constrained by other variables such as gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status as all of these individuals participate in, and essentially makeup, the research context. Also relatively organic, informal interviews serve to provide additional direct information regarding a particular social phenomenon. Just as participant observation is a process that can follow and adjust to the dynamic and shifting nature of sexuality, so too are informal interviews. They can take place wherever people are: in churches, bars, grocery stores, bookstores, waiting rooms, or on the street. They are relatively unobtrusive, and thus are less likely to interfere with daily life or appear threatening. This is particularly important in sexuality and sexual health research. Guided by participant observation and formative theory, this method allows the researcher to gain bits of information that can reinforce or redirect observations. While flexible and organic, informal interviews do not generally allow for the thick narrative responses that are achieved through more structured approaches. Thus, both participant observation and informal interviewing were paired with two forms of semi-structured interviews and media research.

**Semi-structured interviews.** What I have termed an extended semi-structured interview is modeled after the life history interview. It is similar to the life history interview in structure and in depth; however, unlike a life history interview, the scope of the interview is constrained. Utilized to elicit and explore women's understanding of the social context of their own sexual agency, including considerations of particular types of sexual praxis, and the social discourse surrounding female sexuality and sexual behavior, these interviews were integral to develop an understanding of manifestations of and constraints on female sexual agency in this particular context. This approach to interviewing, based on the use of an interview guide, combines the flexibility of unstructured interviewing with the focus of a structured interview (Bernard 1994). Though the protocol for the interviews was developed before entering the field (protocol are included as Appendix 1 and 2), relevant themes, which emerged through participant observation and informal interviews, augmented and refocused my approach. Adjustments were also made as the interview process progressed. For example, initially, the research questions for the interviews with women did not explore issues related to domestic violence. However, after engaging with some of the public discourse surrounding domestic violence, including several key news articles found in *The Avis*, and after interviewing several providers, I began to understand its relevance and connection to women's enactment of agency and therefore integrated it into the protocol. Similarly, the original version of the research protocol had a section designed to gauge women's awareness and use of local sex colloquialisms and position names, modeled after a strategy used by Debra Curtis (2009). This proved to be ineffective and inappropriate as it made women extremely uncomfortable and stifled the rest of the

interview. Once this piece was removed, interviews were more fluid and produced an immense amount of rich and relevant data. Further, including that piece was not critically imperative to developing an understanding of female sexual agency. Many of these women were interviewed after meeting with me for the first or second time. A researcher who has been in the community for several years and has been able to build an extremely strong rapport would be best suited for exploring that kind of information, which would certainly provide important and provocative data for analysis. This is even more true in a community as small as St. Croix. Individuals are very concerned about their personal information being exposed to the public and therefore they are guarded—understandably so, as I will explore below.

As mentioned above, women were primarily recruited through a local community health center and a connection at the local university, which produced a range of women. Some lived in public housing, and others did not; some were students, and others were not; some were employed, and others were not; some were in long term relationships, and others were not. Their ages ranged from 18 to 34, with a mean of 22.8. Interviews lasted between 1 to 2 hours, with the average interview lasting 96.5 minutes. The 12 interviews conducted produced rich and detailed ethnographic data. Further, though the anecdotal details of the interviews differed, there was considerable overlap in the themes and responses of the women. Interviewing too few women would have limited my ability to identify trends from which to understand sexual agency, and recruiting a very large number not only would have strained the project's resources, but also was also unnecessary given the scope and design of the study. A table including limited demographic information for each participant is included as an appendix (Appendix 3). I

believe the number interviewed and the themes that emerged provide needed insight into female sexual agency and offer a unique contribution to Caribbean sexuality studies, as defined by Kempadoo (2009). Additionally, these interviews, and the themes that emerged, were analyzed and considered with informal interviews, two additional types of data collection strategies, participant observation and media research, and semi-structured provider interviews.

During phase two of the research process, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with local health care providers, including doctors, nurses, health educators, and other community stakeholders. A table presenting limited provider demographic information is included as an appendix (Appendix 4). Some of the providers were locals, and all had worked in St. Croix for several years. Daily, these individuals engaged and responded to issues related to sexual health and sexual agency. Extremely knowledgeable and passionate, they provided valuable and grounded insights into the factors that influence how women acted on or are constrained from acting on their sexual health. Further, they, more than most, were familiar with local policy and funding decisions that impact sexual health and the provision of services. Interviews lasted between approximately 30 minutes and 2 hours. More than 693 minutes of interview data were collected. Given the relatively small number of professionals who work in this capacity, recruiting 14 participants facilitated the development of a relatively comprehensive understanding of local issues regarding sexual health and the enactment of female sexual agency. Providers were recruited through both purposive and snowball sampling. Providers and community stakeholders are very familiar with each other's work, and, at

the end of most interviews, they would share the name of colleagues they believed would be willing to participate and would provide valuable insight.

Extremely rich data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, both with women and providers. However, as with life histories, semi-structured interviews, though information-rich, are limited. As they are based on one individual's experience, insights gained from this method cannot be taken as a representation of a large communal understanding. This again speaks to the critical role of triangulation in strengthening the results of the research. The final method used in triangulation was media research.

**Monitoring of news media.** To augment the data attained through the qualitative strategies mentioned above, I also monitored local news media throughout the first two phases of the research. Given the scope of the study and the strength of the other qualitative research methods, particularly when considered collectively, a full and systematic analysis of news media was outside the scope of the study, and not needed to develop an understanding of sexual agency. However, regular monitoring of news media did serve to elucidate and provide public examples of some of the themes and patterns that emerged in the research. For the first six months of the research process, from March to September, *The Avis*, one of two popular local newspapers, was collected almost daily. The *St. Croix Avis* publishes six papers per week; only one issue is published each weekend. In total more than 140 newspapers were collected. During June 2010, no papers were collected as I had a family emergency, which required me to fly back to the states, and during the month of August, due to storms that resulted in some missed issues, I was

only able to collect 21 newspapers. However, over the course of the six-month period, I collected the overwhelming majority of issues. Reading the papers not only kept me abreast of local events, but also allowed me to gauge local responses to issues regarding sex, sexuality, and sexual agency through the consideration of locally-generated and distributed media. Ethnographic considerations of news media, even when limited, provide critical insight into both the cultural context and into particular cultural phenomena, as news media, most specifically locally generated and distributed news media, are grounded in culture “reflecting and reshaping it in an ongoing process” (Bird 2010:2).

**Voice notes.** Though more a modern twist on field notes taken during participant observation and not a stand-alone data collection strategy, the use of voice notes toward the end of the project proved helpful. In anticipation of a possible spontaneous interview, I carried around my digital recorder almost everywhere I went. More toward the end of phase two, when driving around in my car, or between interviews, I began recording observations and field notes. By no means did this strategy take the place of the more traditional field note technique of returning home to type up notes as soon as possible. However, it did allow me to make multiple brief considerations of various topics and to talk out thoughts on particular topics while driving in the community. As a strategy for taking field notes, it is extremely flexible and fluid. My personal digital recorder allowed several audio folders to be created, one of which was designated for voice notes, and it also had an attached USB port, which enabled me to quickly load my voice notes on to the computer once I returned home. Further, I was able to record several thoughts or

considerations consecutively and rapidly. While transcribing my interviews and reviewing my field notes, I also took time to transcribe my voice notes. They were also integrated into coding and analysis.

I have studied anthropology for more than eight years now, and I am familiar with many of the data collection techniques. They are often tweaked, deconstructed, modified, or critiqued to enhance their effectiveness. Beyond a shift from hand writing field notes to typing them up, I am not aware of a shift in this component of ethnographic work. Doctors have used a similar technique to record patient notes for quite some time. It is time for anthropology to jump on the bandwagon. Just as technology impacts and changes the communities we explore, it should also impact and enhance the ways we explore and the ways in which we document our explorations.

### **Data Analysis**

**Ethnographic data.** After the interviews were transcribed, all data were coded and analyzed. Before coding and analysis began, transcriptions and notes were reviewed for accuracy and to develop a list of themes. Themes were used to organize and guide coding and analysis. Atlas TI was used to code data. More than 89 codes were created. The codes that appeared most frequently in the data served to direct analysis and structure the results section. Data were grouped according to type; however, all data intersect and contribute to the establishment of a detailed and more nuanced understanding of female sexual agency. The elements of sexual agency were considered both collectively and exclusively: sex, sexual behavior, sexuality, and pursuit of the sexual health resources (including STIs, medical care, etc.). Largely, codes used to understand and interpret the

data were emergent, as they were pulled from the data attained through the fieldwork process. This process was also important because much of the literature and research on black females in the Caribbean have tended to use categories developed in the West to understand their behaviors and family structure.

The notes taken during participant observation were also reviewed, and important themes and events were extracted and compared to the data gathered through the other techniques used. Notes gathered through participant observation were converted to electronic documents, if they were not originally recorded in this form, and were coded accordingly.

**News media research.** Each newspaper was reviewed, and relevant articles were extracted and considered along with the other data collected to understand female sexual agency and its social and cultural constraints. Each edition of the newspaper collected during the course of the project was organized and ordered according to the publication date. Throughout the interview process, participants would reference local events that were also documented in the newspaper. These events were ultimately linked to the themes found in the ethnographic data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Given the topic under consideration, the size of the community within which the research took place, the population under consideration, and the legacy of social science research on black female sexuality in the region, it was imperative to direct a substantial amount of energy toward considering ethics within the project and wrestling with

implications for ethical issues that surfaced during fieldwork. Most salient for me involved the direct consideration of the individuals I worked with. Given the topic on consideration and the size of the community, it was imperative to protect their anonymity (an extended discussion concerning protecting anonymity not just in the field but also in reporting is offered below). The code of ethics for the American Anthropological Association highlights this responsibility: “Anthropological researchers must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities” (1998). Before entering the field, I knew this component of the project would be critically important, as the size of the community is relatively small. Curtis (2009) notes that word of participation in her research study moved quickly through an island population of almost three times the size of Frederiksted. I knew in a community this size it may be difficult to protect the specific identity of the individuals who participated in the project, and that this challenge was exacerbated by the recruitment and selection techniques used. Though some participants were familiar with each other, I made sure that only I was aware of all study participants. Further, though there may have been knowledge of participation, I took additional precautions to protect the information that they provided. First through formal channels, since the population is not considered vulnerable by USF Institutional Review Board standards, I requested and was granted a waiver for the need for written informed consent. This protected any individuals, particularly women who participated in the unstructured or semi-structured interviews, in the event that someone gained access to my research documents. To my knowledge, there was no breach in the privacy of the data or the participants throughout

the study. All documents were housed in my domicile. To add an additional means of protection, interview and research notes were categorized by predetermined codes containing little to no identifying information.

In addition to the need to protect the information individuals provided during the interviews, it was also important to consider the implications of the topic under consideration, broadly defined as sex. Sex and sexual behavior are heavily regulated, and practices that fall outside the norm, if revealed, can sometimes result in exclusion, public reprimand, or violence. This point is particularly poignant when considering women's attempts to assert their sexual agency, as this may involve engaging in processes and practices that challenge traditional and political discourses. Chevannes (2002) and Sobo (1993), focusing on Jamaica, describe some of the risks, including the potential of becoming victim to acts of violence and public critique, associated with engaging in sexual practices that fall outside of what is considered normal. Though their focus was primarily on sexuality, other deviations (such as the use of abortion—with or without medical supervision—to regulate fertility, mate selection practices that challenge traditional and religious guidelines, or multi-partnering to ensure that personal or economic needs are met) may also pose some risk if made public. An exploration of these practices and their implications was important to establishing an understanding of sexual agency, and as the principal researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure, to the highest degree possible, that these topics were explored with respect, privacy, and discretion. Most of the conversations that explored sensitive topics occurred during one-on-one interviews and were primarily held at venues chosen by the participants (most often their homes). Moreover through participant observation and semi-structured and informal

interviewing, I became familiar with the ways in which sex and sexual behavior were most appropriately discussed within this particular cultural context, thereby supporting the exploration of the topic in the most culturally appropriate manner.

The last ethical consideration is that of representation. In the past investigations or insights into black female sexuality in the Caribbean have been couched in tropes and stereotypes created during the colonial enterprise, including the development of ideas of an exotic sexuality where women engage in sex with countless number of partners and are relegated to family structures that exist outside of the nuclear family, collectively serving to push these women more toward the periphery. To respond to this, women were allowed to identify, define, and explain their own sexual realities and subjectivities. They were given the opportunity to contextualize and analyze the social, economic, religious, and political contexts within which the experiences and behaviors take place, thereby creating new frames and understandings upon which an understanding of their lives and sexual agency can and should be based.

**More on protecting anonymity.** There are little more than 50,000 residents on the island of St. Croix—about the same number of people attend my university. St. Croix is about 28 miles long and 7 miles wide, roughly 82.88 square miles; the county I live in is approximately 1,266.22 square miles. The gross difference in size and population density is undeniable. To get to the next closest community, St. Croix residents have to travel at least 20 miles by boat or plane. Simply put, it is a relatively small island with a relatively small population. As many participants indicated, everyone knows everyone else. Doing research in a community this size or smaller poses challenges that do not

accompany research based in larger communities. These challenges are exacerbated when the community is set on an island. For me, the most salient challenge is that of protecting anonymity.

Shortly after arriving on island, I connected with a woman to whom a good friend had referred me. I remember giving her directions to my home. She and her husband were visiting to make sure that I was settling in. After arriving they realized that they knew my downstairs neighbor. Following a brief chat, I began to tell the wife about my research. She had served as a healthcare provider on island for a number of years and offered to help me begin connecting with some key individuals in the community. To do this, she took out her cellular phone and began making phone calls, some of which were made to local senators and other government officials. She must have seen the surprise on my face. I am sure it read, "Who has the direct phone numbers to senators?" She responded by saying, "Don't be surprised. Everyone knows everyone around here." During my time on the island, her comment was proven true over and over again. To connect with anyone, from Commissioners to health care providers at all levels, was often no more than having a chance conversation with the right person. In terms of networking, it was wonderful; however, in terms of protecting the identity of my informants, it posed an issue.

Generally, during the reporting of results, researchers simply replace the names of informants with pseudonyms. However, given the size of the community and the population's general familiarity with each other and, more specifically, with individuals in particular professions, replacing names with pseudonyms is not enough. Another strategy involves simply summarizing the data or limiting the number of quotes included

in the data. However, I believe that excessive summarization and/or incorporating only a few quotes 1) gives too much interpretive freedom to the researcher and 2) limits the voice of the participants, many of whom, due to the structure of society and their social circumstance, have very few opportunities to be heard. Further, I believe that ethnographic approaches, as opposed to other means of collecting data, are particularly powerful and needed, because of the possibility, (and, I would argue, the responsibility), of incorporating and reporting the voices of members of the community within which one works. Thus, to respond to this challenge, throughout the results sections both pseudonyms and general social labels (like health provider, social advocate, or young mother) are used. This, I believe, enabled me to take an additional measure to protect the anonymity of my participants and to make full use of their insights and critiques through the incorporation of their own words and voices.

### **So Much for Native Anthropology**

We, and when I say “we” I am referring to most American-trained/based academicians, myself included, often oversimplify the plains or layers of identity by which individuals and groups identify themselves and upon which they determine group inclusion and exclusion. I must admit when I began studying anthropology, I was driven by the notion of contributing to scholarship as a person of color by researching and exploring communities of color. I was black, and I identified myself as part of a community that stretched as far as the African Diaspora. And though I could not deny, nor would I want to, the scholarly contributions of white anthropologists, I believed that my membership could offer unique, powerful, and poignant insights not available to most

white anthropologists. My skin, and to lesser extent my age, acted as a cultural pass. Because of our shared history, our shared oppression, our shared marginalization, people could let me in without feeling threatened and without questioning my motives or intent. However, after entering the field for this project, rather than being overwhelmed by the benefits of inclusion, I was constantly reminded of the ways in which I was different. Identity is not as simple as black or white, male or female, rich or poor—these are very common and frequently oversimplified oppositions, one could create a blank and fill it with any number of perceived “identity dichotomies.” Rather, identity functions as a web of intersecting self/group understandings, which for different communities have different points of significance.

I can name the points of similarity. I was black; they were black. I was American; they, at least as since 1917, were American. I am a product of the transatlantic slave trade; they are also. I am of Caribbean descent; I was conducting research in an American territory in the Caribbean. I care about the experience and health of women on the island; they did as well. Despite the similarities, there was always one glaring difference. I was not Crucian. Without a doubt, the other intersections of my identity did afford access to various research opportunities and connections. However, both directly and indirectly, I was consistently reminded that I was different. I was a mainlander. In fact, I think to a large extent the combination of my presence, my purpose, and my identity surprised most people. This is how a typical introductory conversation would go.

Local person: You just moved here?

Me: Yes.

Local: Where are you from?

Me: I moved here from Tampa, FL.

Local: Do you have family here?

Me: No.

Local: You moved here by yourself? Why?

Me: I moved here to work on some research for school.

Local: Oh. You go to UVI.

Me: No. I go to a university in the states.

Local: Why would you move here?

Now let me say that, when people heard about what I was doing, when they heard about my educational pursuits, they were impressed, and they would often help me make connections. But there is also a very salient element of skepticism. It was definitely apparent in their disposition, but also clearly stated in the series of questions that followed. Why was I studying in St. Croix? Since I don't have family in St. Croix, do I have family in the Caribbean? Do I plan on living here? How long will I be here? And even after all of that, most were still rather guarded. This line of authentication was so significant that one professional, in an email to another professional regarding offering me some assistance, included the fact that though I was not Crucian, I was of Caribbean descent. Of course, the email contained more, but to include those markers in particular was telling. There was likely some push to let me in because of the work that needs to be done in the territory, but I got the feeling that the verdict was still out on me. And why should it not have been? Here I was—a relatively young researcher who, without any

family connections, packed up and moved to St. Croix with her 5-year-old daughter. Everyone could tell by the way I dressed and the way I spoke that I was not from there. More than that they could tell because they had never seen me before; familiarity is a powerful thing. Locals were used to seeing tourists, primarily white. They were also used to white mainlanders moving to St. Croix to get away from life in the states, mainly older individuals about to retire or looking to start something locally. But me—young, black, American—I was a conundrum. Many local professionals welcomed my presence, though they too wondered what would bring me to this island of little more than 50,000 people.

While at one of the local non-profits waiting to get a meeting with the director, I sparked a conversation with some women in the lobby. I remember clearly that both of the women were not originally from St. Croix, though they had family there, and they both moved there as adults. They spoke about how people treated you differently until you had been here long enough, which could mean a couple of years. I read the same thing on a website directed to providing information for individuals looking to move to St. Croix, so I am sure that my experience wasn't unique and that I was likely in a better position than many others, because I was in fact charged with going out, getting around, and meeting people.

This is more an intellectual consideration of the boundaries of native anthropology rather than a commentary on the challenges that I had being accepted into the community (broadly defined). Everyone I met should have been skeptical. I was a stranger asking for information, information that is sacred and private. Forget my race, my age, and ancestry. I was not Crucian. I should not, and did not, assume the right to

access information. Nevertheless, I did succeed in building the rapport and trust needed to be offered the information and insight that made my work possible.

### **Gender and Identity in the Field**

Whitehead and Conaway (1986) note the importance of considering the implications of gender and identity on fieldwork and on experience in the field. How we understand our identity and ourselves and how the communities we are immersed in perceive and understand us undoubtedly impact our research. Beyond considerations of gender, sex, and sexual identity, many aspects of a researcher's identity intersect to shape experiences in the field. This is my attempt to briefly reflect on some of those intersections and experiences.

Before entering the field, I assumed that my experience may differ, at least to some extent, from the reports I had read of other anthropologists and social scientists in the field, specifically those who conducted research in the Caribbean. I am a young, at the time I was in my mid-twenties, single, black, educated, mother. Though, as I stated previously, my experience in the field was a far cry from what could be considered native anthropology, my identity or perceived identity afforded me access to resources and experiences that were not only relevant to the research but also would have largely been impossible were I understood or perceived differently. Both formal and informal interactions based on gender, interactions with both females and males, including those directly guided by the research process and those which were not, all provided opportunities to understand my research context and ultimately enhance my research. The social markers related to my identity interacted differently at different times to shape

situations and to provide or restrict access. For example, after finding out about why I was on island and about my educational background, many professional women and men would begin providing insights and some, through connecting me with other professionals, offered to assist. Locals on the island celebrate and encourage academic success, particularly the success of young students of color, and I benefited. In other instances, young women offered to participate in the research because I was a young woman, and they wanted to help. Beyond the direct connection to the project, people were compelled to assist me, a fact that I am truly grateful for. After enrolling my daughter in a local school and speaking with the owner about my presence on the island, the owner offered to assist me in anyway possible. Throughout our time there, she would continuously find ways to help or reach out: finding transportation, securing school uniforms for Amari, and sending food home. Many others were equally as helpful, albeit for different reasons, including my potential as sexual partner or mate. All of these experiences shaped my understanding in the field and shaped the research. All were relevant; all were powerful. Experiences that reflect and elucidate themes and points made in the analysis are included and are demarcated as “*a fieldwork vignette.*” Some with this particular demarcation may also be notes from participant observation. The inclusion of these vignettes is intended to reflect my place and experience in the field. They are included in the same structure in which they were written while I was in the field—short of a few edits and grammatical changes. I believe their incorporation adds insights that are both relevant are critical to the research.

## **Scholarly Contributions**

Very few studies have been directed toward studying female sexuality, or more specifically female sexual agency, in the Caribbean. Women largely comprise the center of this study, and it is a reflection of their voice and critique. Based on several months in the field, this ethnographic account of the female experience in St. Croix provides insight into the complex and at times contradictory nature of agency. Further, providers work daily to offer assistance and resources, education and support, to this community, to women, their voices, critiques, and concerns are also represented. Both of these considerations represent a unique contribution to social science literature, not only important for Caribbeanist scholarship, but also, given the island status as part of a U.S. territory, to understandings of women in the U.S. as well.

## **Chapter Four: The Public, the Body, & the Public Body**

### **Instituting Control**

Agency does not exist in isolation. It is both action and disposition within a particular context and under particular conditions. It requires at least a subtle awareness of the cultural and social circumstance and possible individual and/or collective responses. Agency is, even in its most docile state, a threat to power, to power structures, as it sheds some light on the web of power relations many work to hide. Through incremental and dynamic shifts, it has the capacity to challenge norms and change tradition. It, at times, can alter the cycle of power. Thus, it is in the interest of hegemony to suppress agency in its embodied and tangible forms. Female sexual agency, one form of agency, manifests in and on the body itself, and conversely, through control of the body female sexual agency is also controlled.

In St. Croix, the female body has several loci of control. Within systems of social power, points or mechanisms of control are long standing, strategically hidden, frequently invisible, and structured to appear neutral. There are times, however, through cultural and social interrogation that pieces of the system, critical parts of the structure of power, become more visible, allowing one to follow the breadcrumbs of power. In varying degrees, some loci can then be identified and analyzed. Often working in tandem, these centers serve to reinforce the performance and acceptance of behaviors and ideas that

minimize and extinguish agency. Two of these centers will be critically engaged throughout this analysis. The first, and arguably the most effective, is the female herself. If she can be conditioned or convinced to control her body, to act in ways that maintain the power structure, that reinforce her oppression, then the potential for agency has been uprooted and the other loci need only reinforce her conditioning. The second is what I am referring to as the social gaze. The female body—meaning her actions, dress, behavior, etc.—is constantly watched, and, particularly when it does not perform within certain social parameters, is frequently the subject of public discourse and critique. She is not the only individual charged with monitoring her body.

**The traditional and the “new age” woman: exploring the shift.** Before I begin an extended consideration of the social expectations for Crucian females and their bodies, in the interest of clarity, it is important to discuss the distinction participants made between traditional female behaviors and social expectations and more recent shifts in behaviors and expectations. Several participants talked about the way things were 15 to 40 years ago. Largely, the past was described as a time of relative monogamy and chastity, particularly on the part of the women. According to some participants, it represented a time when teen pregnancy was frowned upon and strict family values were maintained. As one participant described, women were “relatively pure and virginal.” A woman was primarily charged with caring for the needs of her partner and her children. Though some women still sought opportunities to work in the informal and formal labor market, largely they relied on men for financial support. Consequently, her needs,

financially and otherwise, at times went unmet as they were subject to the generosity of her partner.

The “traditional woman” was celebrated for upholding the values of monogamy and taking care of the family, but she dependent on her partner for economic assistance; she was trapped. Conversely, younger more modern women, or as one participant described them, “new age women,” while still to some extent expected to remain monogamous and uphold family values, are encouraged to become more financially autonomous, which is usually accomplished through educational and professional achievements. Further, even though the new age woman is still expected to be disciplined, exclusive, and conservative in her sexual praxis, younger women are described as more sexually promiscuous and prone to engaging in multiple and consecutive sexual partnerships with men. For some women, these relationships serve to enhance or solidify financial independence, and, at times become a proxy for educational and professional pursuits.

Women living in housing communities, especially those receiving TANF, represent an exception to the description of the new age woman. Though frequently described as sexually promiscuous and inclined to engage in multiple relationships, they were not described as educationally driven or disciplined; rather, they were described as dependent on governmental assistance and often unmotivated to improve their financial and social circumstances. However, I conducted several interviews with women living in public housing, who described their circumstances very differently. They talked frequently about the desire to move out of public housing, the challenges of receiving public assistance, and their desire to pursue an education. Their accounts of their own

experiences and goals directly counter much of public discourse, yet they remain the center of critique. One woman, during an informal interview, asserted that the women who have lived in housing communities for years—she suggested that consecutive generations of female-headed households live in these communities—own big screen TVs with cable and are content with that. According to her, they simply do not want to do any better. This disjuncture is extremely relevant to understanding the social context of sexual agency for young Crucian women and, thus will be explored more below. However, for now, I will focus on framing the larger social distinction between the traditional and new age woman.

To a large extent, the traditional and the new age woman sit at two ends of a continuum. The traditional woman, financially dependent and sexually restrained, is described in stark contrast to the new age woman, who is financially autonomous (or at least financially savvy) and sexually deviant. One is celebrated for upholding family values and the other for her professional and economic drive. Even women who work in the service industry, working in hotels, at restaurants, or in schools, are praised for their commitment to supporting their household by holding several jobs simultaneously. Similarly, one may be criticized for dependence on a male partner, often allowing him, sometimes passively, to engage in multiple relationships while another is criticized for at times exhibiting characteristics generally associated with men's sexual praxis, such as multiple and consecutive partnering. Interestingly enough, though the professional and sexual dispositions of the new age woman are understood as a shift from the older more conservative forms, she is still largely defined by her role in the household and by her relationship with her male partner. As this project focuses on the experiences of women

between adolescence and young adulthood, when women, their circumstance, and their behaviors are referred to, I am largely referencing the experiences of the new age woman, except where otherwise noted.

**Not as simple as “self-control”: the Crucian woman and her body.** In St. Croix, females are generally taught to understand and value their body for its production capacity—the production of maternal, emotional, and sexual labor. Certainly, women are encouraged to succeed in academics, and there is a move to increase the presence of women on the political and economic landscape. Nevertheless, women are still expected and encouraged to pursue motherhood and to secure and keep a partner, whether or not the partnership involves a formal or legal marriage. While progressing in the public sphere, a woman is still expected to maintain the traditional role in the private. Gabe, an 18-year-old college student, stated it this way: “Women are used to the traditional cook, clean. They have to do that, so, women here, they do both the new age woman and the traditional.” In the public sphere women are challenged to be academically savvy and, to some extent, economically independent, while maintaining the traditional role (i.e., providing domestic, sexual, and maternal labor) in the private. Women are heavily involved in the formal and informal economy. They work for and secure jobs at all levels from the cashier at a local fast food chain to the position of Commissioner of Health. Women, with the exception of women receiving TANF and living in housing communities, were always described as hard working and driven while operating in the public sphere. A local advocate for women’s rights, while speaking in general about women on the island, spoke to the discord between the public and private spheres.

I feel that in terms of generally looking at women here, the young women are very strong. They're capable. They seem to have ambition and drive. They're good mothers, and they love their children, but they make terrible choices when it comes to the men. I don't know if that's just because men are...I guess they're men like in any black community. Some of them are moving forward, and some of them are not. The young women seem to be very strong and seem to have a good head on their shoulders, but when it comes to the men, [they are] in trouble.

Women's accomplishments are socially acknowledged and celebrated—it is the custom to call a professional individual by her title: Nurse Tucker or Attorney Campbell. However, in general, womanhood is still defined by the private sphere. Ms. Mitchell, a local advocate for children and families, suggested, “there's a sense of pride in being a mother in the Caribbean... I think that we define ourselves as women, as being a wife or girlfriend or a mother.” While being encouraged to succeed in the public sphere, they are defined, and often define themselves, according to their efforts in the private. More than just a component of womanhood, women are defined by their willingness and ability to procreate and by their ability to secure and keep a male partner.

Women who challenge this social expectation, those who choose not to have children or who do not have children by a certain age, are critiqued and questioned. Ashanti, a young mother, expressed it this way, “So it's like, if you don't have a child by 25, they're like, ‘You don't have no children?’” Ms. Mitchell shared a similar sentiment: “It's almost like you are supposed to have children at a certain age and if you do not, it's

like, what in the world is wrong? And that just kind of shows the weight that's given to motherhood on the island.” Women’s reproductive production is both prescribed and socially regulated, as is their production of male pleasure—not simply sexual pleasure but also male comfort and dominance. One provider who had worked with women for a number of years asserted, “Women are taught from small [to] always put the man first, put his needs first. So if you are always putting him first and his needs first, then when do you come in? When you speak up, they say you are acting like the women from the states.” She is conditioned to understand her own needs as secondary at best, and both her voice and her agency are silenced. Not only does a man’s needs take precedence, socially men and relationships with men are understood as a commodity, something valuable, to be aggressively pursued.

Men are pursued, at times openly, even when they are married or are engaged in a long-term relationship. The perceived value of an individual male can be enhanced by his access to economic resources, but men in general are perceived as valuable and worth fighting for, figuratively and literally. Further, though men also pursue women, it is largely the responsibility of the woman to maintain the relationship through her sexual labor. When a relationship isn’t successful, the woman and her body (or rather her failure to produce sexual pleasure) are to blame. Mrs. Samuels stated it like this:

When men leave women here to go to another woman, the first thing out of their mouths is you can’t keep him because you are not pleasing him sexually. And they say that out loud, ‘I got what it takes and you don’t.’ The whole sexual piece: ‘it is my body that is keeping him here.’ I never hear them say, ‘I have a right to choose

whether I want to have sex with you or not.’

A woman’s sexuality, her body, is marked as a tool, not one directed toward securing her own physical gratification, but rather one directed toward maintaining and ensuring his. In fact, her sexual gratification is at best an afterthought, even for her. One provider shared this:

Women are still uncomfortable with their bodies and ashamed of their bodies. They had a talk show a year or two ago where this guy was talking about women and women being empowered to tell men that they are not sexually satisfied. The majority of the women who called in said that they would never tell their partner that they were not satisfied because they didn’t want to hurt his feelings or humiliate him.

She does not know her body and is uncomfortable with it. As it is not purposed for her gratification, she is unwilling or reluctant to pursue or even mention it, likely out of fear of losing her partner. Moreover, a woman is not only expected to produce pleasure for the male, but she is also expected to make sure he is unaware or unaffected by her lack of pleasure. Or, moreover, she is conditioned to understand and interpret his pleasure as her own.

While on one hand, women are publicly praised for their chastity or sexual exclusivity, having only one partner for an extended period of time, on the other they are critiqued, frequently by other women, for their lack of sexual prowess. Her body and her

ability to control it become a source of pride. She defines herself, and therefore manages her body accordingly, by her ability to procreate and attract and keep a partner, primarily the latter. Her self worth and value largely become tied to the performance of the body. A well-known health provider explained it poignantly:

I've worked with women who have expressed very clearly that they do not know their female anatomy outside of their clitoris and their vaginal opening, but they enjoy sex and they enjoy sex with different partners because of what it feels like and what it makes them feel, and that's their self-worth.

Thus women are convinced to understand their worth as directly correlated with their ability to control their bodies. A woman is given guides on how to perform in the public and private spheres, and she is expected to follow them. She is not only given social prescriptions, but she is also watched to ensure that she adheres to them.

**The private in the public: control and the social gaze.** Beyond control through the conditioning and performance of the body, and the understanding of related social guidelines, women are also monitored and directed by the public as they are constantly watched and critiqued. Much of what a woman does, outside of direct efforts on her part to act surreptitiously, occurs on a public stage, one, that I argue is structured to adjust behaviors that challenge social prescriptions through the use of public critique. The subject of the social gaze and the center of social discourse, women are pressured to act appropriately. Almost every woman who participated in the extended semi-structured

interviews addressed the ways in which they are watched and talked about. Ashanti, a young mother, asserted, “There are people always watching you and judging you.” Another young woman shared, “ Everybody knows [me]. I would like to be able to tell people about my life opposed to them already knowing...That’s why I watch the way I carry myself in public.” They know they are being watched, and, therefore, they monitor themselves. This is true for many aspects of a women’s or young girl’s life; however, her sexual praxis is arguably most heavily monitored and most frequently the subject of public discourse. Though males are at times watched, they are not monitored as closely. One provider, in discussing how the sexual behavior of young women is heavily monitored, explained, “notice that I keep saying girls, what the boys did was usually like an oversight... most of the time, it was the young ladies who were watched for their fertility engagements.”

Not only is she monitored but, largely, she is responsible for her and her partner’s sexual praxis and any sexual transgressions, even when she is the victim and not the perpetrator. As one local community worker asserted, “the community still protects the perpetrator. They are quick to say she lying, and she made it up and she is just trying to get him in trouble. We still have the... Have you ever heard of blame the victim? We have that here.” Even in instances where there is a clear imbalance in power, social prowess, economics, and age, women and young girls are still publicly blamed. While talking about relationships between young girls and older men, one provider noted that the young girl is still held responsible and blamed for the relationship, at least when it is socially acknowledged and critiqued, which is not always the case. Her activities, when they counter larger social parameters, must be kept secret while men are often held

unaccountable. Even acts of abuse committed against her, sexual and otherwise, are a reflection on her, and reporting them could place her at the center of public discord.

During one of my visits to Christiansted, I stopped in a small shop and initiated a conversation with an older woman behind the counter. After sharing with her that I had a young daughter who was on the island with me, she began to tell me about her daughters, who at this time were much older and married. She said that when they were younger, if they did anything they were not supposed to, she always knew about it, as they were known and watched by members in the community. Though she did not have any sons and therefore no gendered comparison can be made, her stories reinforced and enhanced my understandings of the social gaze, its power, its breadth, and a larger philosophical conflict. Though she, a young woman, is celebrated for her body and its production, she is watched to ensure that it only manifests in particular ways.

*A fieldwork vignette: a trip to the beach, a lesson on gender. Today, Amari and I decided to go to the beach. Most locals frequent the beach often. Today was a local holiday, so the beach was particularly full. We left for the beach a little after 5pm—we didn't want to get burned by the sun. When we got to the beach, it was full of people as I expected. There were cars lined up in rows on the land right outside of the beach area. Families were cooking and barbecuing. Kids were everywhere. I couldn't guess how many people were at this particular part of the beach, but there were a lot. After walking to find a part of the beach that was not taken up, Amari and I found a spot just past a group of about 10 kids playing at the edge of the water. The kids seemed to be between the ages of 8 and 12. There*

were a few more boys than girls, but all were playing together. When we walked up, I noticed that one of the little girls, with the help of a couple of the other children, was placing sand in a mound on her belly. It actually looked like she was shaping it to appear as if she was pregnant. I was kind of taken by it. I wasn't sure what to make of it. Maybe they were just making a mound on her belly to make it seem as if she had an excessive amount of weight. There were a number of other things that she could be imitating. Right? Then I looked next to her and noticed another little girl, who seemed to be about 10 or 11, a few years shy of physical development. She was wearing a bikini, and she was placing sand in the top to make it seem as if she had breasts. All I could say to myself was, "Wow! She is playing in a co-ed group of kids, and she is stuffing her top with sand to make breasts." I looked in the water, and about 10 feet away there were two adults floating and hugging. They weren't paying much attention. She just kept on stuffing her top. As I sat down not twenty feet away and began to watch Amari play in the water, I heard the adult male ask, "What dat supposed to be?" As soon as the little girl heard him, she lifted up her top to let the sand drop out. There was a long pause while the gentlemen, whom I assumed was related to the young girl, waited for an answer. Then another young girl yelled out, "Tittees!" The woman in the water laughed while the male kind of shook his head. There was no more imitating "tittees" after that point. However, shortly after, a little boy, who I assumed was related to the older male as well, stuffed the front of his pants with sand. He called out to the adult male to show him, but as he entered

*the water, the other young boys splashed him to make the sand fall out. Nothing was said to him.*

### **Social Gaze, Social Stigma, and Social Infections**

Beyond simply impacting female behavior and sexual praxis, being under the social gaze shapes women's health seeking behavior, even when they are simply attempting to access sexual health information. The criticisms of improper sexual praxis and lack of knowledge about sexual health in general, including sexually transmitted infections, buttress a thick and punitive social stigma surrounding issues related to sexual health. Reaya, a young student, describes how being known and being monitored can influence whether an individual pursues health information or STI testing.

A lot of people don't get tested or do that stuff here. It's a small island. It's a small community, and everybody knows everybody. I could go in and get tested for AIDS/HIV, chlamydia, and gonorrhea [and] the person behind there may know my face, or I could just walk in the hallway and somebody in my family or somebody who knows my family would be like, 'I saw \_\_\_\_'s daughter go into the STD clinic.' Some people may say it out of concern, and some people may say it just for being brace [rude or inclined to gossip].

Whether being monitored and discussed out of concern or malice, women are still reluctant to access services. One provider shared some of the challenges she faces trying to educate young women: "When people tell me they don't wanna come because they

don't want their family members to think that they have... they said, 'it's gonna look like, if we come over, that we have HIV. My man, my partner is going to be vexed,' and it created some serious tension.” The consequences of being associated with an STI, HIV/AIDS in particular, are severe. Individuals are open to public ridicule and may be ostracized. While a full consideration of the impact of media on sexual praxis and sexual health is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note the possible role of media in the social gaze and in sexual monitoring, particularly the monitoring of women. A provider noted that pictures of individuals thought to be HIV positive sometimes circulate around the island via text message, and described a situation when a young woman was depicted. Given the size of the community and the means of information transmission, it would not take long for most of the island, including many individuals who likely knew her, to access this message. Whether the information contained in the text was true or not is irrelevant; the implications and the consequences are severe.

Women are at times even reluctant to share information with those who are closest to them. One young lady shared that if she found out she had contracted an STI, she would not even tell her sister, out of concern she would be judged. Women are labeled, called names, and blamed because of their circumstance. Reaya, when explaining how the community would react, expressed it clearly, “She’s a slut. She’s a whore. She’s been messing around with like ten different men. That’s why it happened to her.” The implication is: if she were monogamous and practiced sexual restraint with regard to the number of partnerships, if she controlled her body accordingly, she would not have gotten infected. Thus, she deserves it, the disease, the ridicule, and the isolation. As one provider explained, “[the community will] isolate those people... like they don't exist.”

Very few options remain for women who find out, either through formal channels, a health provider, or through word of mouth, they contracted an STI. They can risk someone seeing them come out of the doctor's office or picking up a prescription from the local pharmacy, they can keep it to themselves, or they could try to access help by traveling to a neighboring island, most likely St. Thomas. Dr. Steele, a local healthcare provider, explains how the situation may manifest.

Those women, they don't feel like always going over into St. Thomas and telling all their business about who they had sex with. They [are] not sure where they itching from and... you understand. They don't wanna do that. So what ends up happening is their gonorrhoea flips into PID...[T]hat's a whole other component because of not just the stigma but more so the silence and the shame associated with any of these things.

She is effectively silenced and ashamed. Even if she is successful in covering up her experience, general social discourse continues to circulate that suggests that she is to blame. Somehow she is the reason she contracted an STI. One woman shared, "It's more horrible if you contract an STD than if you get pregnant." Essentially products of the same act, sexual intercourse, they have different social consequences and are understood differently on the social stage. One parallels with the prescriptions for womanhood, so, though somewhat critiqued when it occurs at a young age, it carries a certain level of social acceptance. The other marks her as nasty and sexually promiscuous. Health

personnel often exacerbate this problem, as they, at times, share patient's private health information with community and family members. One young student explains,

They have people who work with files, documents, stating who have this and who have that, and they will just spread the person's business out. That is not right. Well, thank you for giving me the heads up, but, still, that's wrong. If you could do that to that person, that is just showing me what you could do it to me. And that's why a lot of people don't like to go and get tested because people here are not professional at all.

Whether as a warning for potential sexual partners, a means to involve family, or a vehicle for gossip, health personnel play a critical role in filtering information onto the social stage. Besides the obvious community-level ethical issues tangled in this practice, it can also affect family relations. Ms. Washington, a woman's health advocate, explores some of the implications further: "Some issues have been because it's a small community. Family members within the clinic or the hospital setting or the medical setting have discussed a family member's situation, so by the time that individual got home, their issue was there and they met with basically a door in the face." The message is clear: when being monitored for your sexual praxis, if challenges arise, even those closest to you may shut you out or judge you. The consequences of the information regarding sexual health entering the social stage are severe. The stage is small, the information outlets are many, and the consequences are enormous.

**Sexual subjectivities.** “[Sex is] a metaphor of what is going on with young women down here.” I was struck when a local health care provider shared this statement during an interview. It is powerful for a number of reasons. It is striking, first and foremost, because sex is identified as the metaphor, not mothering or the pursuit of education or any of a myriad of other possibilities. Sex is the metaphor. It is also striking because of the transmission rates of certain STIs on the island, namely chlamydia and HIV (as discussed in Chapter 1), and the social implications of being associated with any STI. And it is most interesting because of the attempts, through conditioning and use of the social gaze, to control the female body. Most relevant though is the implication that if one can effectively explore and understand the realities surrounding sex and sexual behavior on the island, then one could gain insight into the plight and experiences of women and suggest that their sexual praxis is a reflection of their social circumstances.

Young women frequently begin engaging in sex at an early age. A young student who participated in the research talked about a young girl in her fourth or fifth grade class that had already begun to have sex with her male classmates. Though formally girls are not encouraged to have sex, unlike young boys (which we will explore this more below), there are social pressures and realities in place, which through manipulation, coercion, and exploitation, influence the onset of sexual intercourse. One provider stated, “On my watch, I have had at least 4 elementary students who have gotten pregnant.” These are pregnancies that she became aware of; there were likely pregnancies that were terminated by other means that had gone unreported.

School is not only a place to establish partnerships that may become sexual, but is also used as a place to engage in sexual behaviors. Dr. Steele asserted, “We still have

children that are making out and having full sexual engagements on school campuses from like elementary level up, not just public, private too, parochial too.” While doing research, I heard other very similar accounts of the same behaviors. On one of my trips downtown, I began a conversation at a restaurant with a man who had lived in St. Croix all his life. He was a local educator and shared that one day, while locking up a section of the school, he heard something. When he went to explore, he found two girls and five young boys having sex. The youngest was in the seventh grade. He added that teenagers often create films of each other having sex at school—school logos are often visible in the background—and that I could ask any local teenager and they would know how to get one. There is no need to search for X-rated films in the local video store or online. Technology makes it possible to film and distribute sexual acts easily.

As the anecdote suggests, boys are just as likely to engage in sexual activity at an early age. According to one former educator:

I used to have young boys, middle schoolers, 13 [or] 14, come to school and tell me, ‘Mrs., do you know what I do at Juvie? You know what I do at Carnival? I was workin up and wining behind this older woman, and she ain’t even do nothing. She ain’t even tell me move. She just let me ting dere.’ These boys here are losing their virginity at six, seven, or eight.

The age at which young boys begin to engage in sex is startling, but even more telling is how she describes the responses of older men. “Boys are having sex very early, before they are 10, 11, 12 years old, but that’s praised. It’s praised by the men in their lives who

themselves lost their virginity at such an age.” Though this is not an ethnography exploring the sexual praxis of young men, her comments point to distinct differences in the social ramifications for sexual behavior for boys and girls.

For young girls, sex does not always occur with young boys. In fact, it was repeatedly stated that young girls engage in sexual relationships with older boys and men. Girls as young as 13 or 14 begin engaging in sexual relationships with men who are 10, 15, or 20 years older. Several educators shared how older men would wait in their cars to pick up young girls being released from school. During an informal interview, one man described how a 29-year-old male impregnated his stepsister, who was 17. Their parents tried to press statutory rape charges, but in the territory once a girl is over the age of 16, only she can press charges. These relationships take many forms and are, at times, incestuous, a very taboo topic in the community. However, they are most often associated with transactional sex. Young girls use these relationships as a means of accessing commodities, such as clothes, shoes, and jewelry or for securing economic resources to help their families. At times, young girls engage in several relationships simultaneously. Dr. Steele, in talking about some conversations with young women, shared:

I listen to young women in particular under 18 that will tell me, ‘It’s about the dick, period. And as long as I please he, he and he, I’m gonna have this one help me with my school books, this one to help me with my nails, and this one for my hair, and this one to give me extra money for my mother ‘cause my mother can’t afford all the bills in her house.’ These are children that would share that.

The body is not only a source of pride, but using it enhances access to goods, economic and otherwise. Through engaging in sexual labor and producing pleasure for the male, a girl gains access to valued commodities. At times, these relationships are established and function without parental knowledge or acceptance. Other times, they are orchestrated or encouraged. Several providers discussed how some parents, mothers in particular, consent to these relationships because they benefit the household.

Though young women who reach the age of 18 are arguably adults and are thus in control of their sexual praxis and less vulnerable to manipulation, the pattern has been established. The performance of the body, primarily through sexual labor, is established as the key to accessing particular social goods, both emotional and economic. In many ways, women are not ignorant of the larger implications and tensions surrounding their behaviors; rather, they are fully aware of and reflect the social and emotional conflict within which their sexual praxis operates. One provider addresses how alcohol consumption plays into this pattern of behavior, “[There are] young women that feel that they should drink until they are completely zutted and then whoever lays on them, it’s fine.” Reaya, a young local woman, when asked how long a woman would wait before she engaged in sex with a male she met at a jam explained it poignantly:

I gotta laugh. It depend on how long you know the person or how much alcohol is in your system. I ain’t gwan lie. I see that happen to my friends. If the two a y’all like each other, then it is bound to happen at sometime. If it’s like the first date and the two y’all was drinking, drinking, drinking, then it gwan happen. It is what it is.

Both examples highlight ways in which alcohol consumption influences female sexual praxis. Decreases in sexual inhibition and shifts in decisions resulting from excess alcohol consumption are not novel; just watch any film in the *Girls Gone Wild* series. Nor are they unique to Caribbean or Crucian life. However, given both the pressures on females to control their body in particular ways and social guidelines that attach value to the performance of the body and securing a male partner, these examples are marked as particularly telling.

***A fieldwork vignette: being young and fertile, the researcher in the research.***

*One of my favorite past times while living on island was walking into downtown Frederiksted when the cruise ships arrived. During the summer months, cruise ships come about once every week or so. However, during the winter months, several ships would visit the island each week. This was always an exciting time to walk downtown. The street perpendicular to the harbor would be full of vendors selling all types of goods, from clothes to small purses made from the calabash tree. At times, performers that dressed as Moko Jumbies, local stilt walkers, would dance for tourists as they exited the dock. This particular day I stopped to visit a local vendor whom I would see and speak with occasionally. He was familiar with my research—we had discussed it several times before. This particular day he decided to take the conversation in a different direction. “You are very beautiful,” he shared, “You could get almost any man on the island you wanted.” Taken by his compliment, I said thank you, chatted for a bit longer, and*

*continued on. He had never spoken about the contributions I could make on island as a researcher or professor at the local university, yet he took the time to suggest that I could get almost any man on the island that I wanted. Though somewhat surprised by his comment, it was not the only time a brief conversation with a male would contribute to my research.*

*One day, while taking another walk downtown to head to one of my favorite local sandwich shops, I walked past an older male sitting outside of a local bar (it was about 3 or so in the afternoon). When I passed, he stopped me to share that in order to get his inheritance from his father, he needed to have a child. He then informed me that he was taking applications. I immediately told him that I was not interested in submitting an application. Then he responded by saying that I already passed the observation test, so I did not have to submit one. He offered to exchange contact information. I declined. This situation could be considered an anomaly, just the ranting of a crazy drunk guy outside of a bar. However, it is interesting because it was not unique. While I was living on island, several other males (usually older) asked me to have their children, the first time we met. A month prior, an older man—I would guess he was in his 60s—told me he already had an older daughter, about my age, and that he was looking for someone to give him a son. I basically told him I was flattered but uninterested.*

**Pregnancy, birth control, abortion, and stout.** Pregnancy, as a consequence, intended and unintended, of sexual praxis, is particularly interesting because it sits at the intersection of a number of social tensions. Even when it does not happen within

prescribed social parameters, it is an important defining factor in womanhood. As Gabe explains, “amongst your peers, it’s like, ‘oh she is an adult now. She has a kid. She has more responsibilities. That makes her an adult.’ It doesn’t matter if 18 is the correct definition of an adult. It’s like you had a kid and responsibility went up, so you are an adult.” Beyond serving as a marker of adulthood, particularly for younger girls, pregnancy something to be admired and celebrated. Gabe speaks to this issue by sharing some additional insight into the perspectives of some young girls:

‘She is going to look so cute with her stomach and that baby is going to look so cute. Have you seen the baby’s father?’ And it’s like forget the fact that she is sixteen, isn’t finished with school, and doesn’t have any skills or any money to take care of this kid she is about to have. She is going to look cute? It’s like, where are your heads?

For some young girls, pregnancy is something to be pursued and orchestrated, and, at times, they outwardly demonstrate their admiration for it. Sarah, a young student, when talking about young girls getting pregnant in high school, shared, “I know in public schools, for a while, it was like a trend...like girls would walk around with the baby shoes and stuff.” Though, at least for most parents and older adults, getting pregnant while in school was something to be avoided and not celebrated, some young girls see it as a desirable. The rationale given for young women’s pursuit of pregnancy varied. Some attributed it to wanting someone to care for and love them. Others suggested it is understood as a way to keep a particular male partner. And others suggested that some

young girls do it because it is popular and because, for some who have strong support systems to care for the baby, there are very few consequences.

However, there are also times when pregnancy is unintended and undesirable. In some ways pregnancy, or maternal production, conflicts with other goods women attempt to pursue: educational attainment, social freedom, and financial autonomy and independence. It should happen, just not too early. As Ashanti states, “You know, they’re young, and they just want to kind of live right now.” Pregnancy, at times, is understood as a barrier to personal pursuits. Some young women want to be immersed in the social scene, going to limes, a small very informal get together, or jams. Other women, like LaShae, expressed a desire to be self-sufficient, “We don’t always want to be dependent on de man dem.” Further, there are deep-seated emotional and familial conflicts that can arise when faced with an unintended pregnancy. A local advocate for women’s health shared a powerful and grounded perspective,

You watch some of these young sisters and they go on, they perform like they have the most positive self-esteem in the world. But in real life, when that make-up is off, when their nails have to get changed, and they're in the shower bathing from all of the different partners they've had, not sure who made them pregnant, so they therefore have to go and get an abortion or use 486, that comes from the same Dominican Republic that they whine about 'cause it's not even legal here...It's a tablet, progesterone, so it'll make it abort. But you can't get that unless you go to a physician...which usually they would use that if you're beyond three months. Dangerous procedure but these are the kinds of things that are going on.

We've got young ladies that are full term with babies and are still banding to hide it from their families. And having babies in bathrooms, with fathers they are not sure who the father is, but he look like... right! Because of their behavior.

She lucidly connects the performance of the body to the social and internal conflict surrounding pregnancy. Many young women, who she asserts are confident only on the surface, face hard decisions after becoming pregnant, particularly when they engage in multiple partnerships. Some, out of fear of the community or their family finding out, attempt to hide their physical state, sometimes through binding. Some pursue formal and informal methods to terminate the pregnancy. Often women, those concerned about getting pregnant, take measures to help ensure that it does not happen: condom use, birth control, or pulling out. However, if these methods prove unsuccessful, other means are pursued. Abortion, according to the women, is often used as an option. To avoid the social stigma related to the practice, some women travel to St. Thomas or Puerto Rico. Women, who do not have the financial resources to have a formal, medically supervised, abortion, can use one of two folk methods.

Almost every women involved in the study said that drinking a Guinness stout, preferably a hot stout, is understood as a means to terminate an unwanted pregnancy as it “will flush you out.” Shiloe, a young mother, talked about the experience of one of her friends, “Yeah...I heard, if you drink stout when it’s hot, you will have an abortion. Stout is like beer. I didn’t know about it. When I first heard, one of my first friends in high school, her boyfriend told her to do it, and she did it and she woke up in blood.” Though one young woman questioned its effectiveness, all of them referenced it as a method to

end pregnancy. The second means is going to a Santo woman, a woman from the Dominican Republic, who will give them a pill that will force them to miscarry. Tammy provides some insight into the process, “They go to these Santo people to give them some pills, and they drink water, and it da come down like a regular period.” Despite the potential health risk that these two practices pose, they are still pursued. Even with the risk, they represent a better option than allowing the pregnancy, whatever the rationale.

### **Controlling the Body**

She is taught that her body must be controlled in a certain way, and she is watched to make sure she follows suit. She is led to believe that her body is a tool to be directed toward male sexual satisfaction and securing particular social goods. Her understanding of self is largely tied to the performance of her body. When she, or her partner, acts in ways that fall outside of the social parameters, she is held responsible. Even when she is in need of assistance, she is effectively silenced. Critiqued on the social stage, she serves as an example for other women, who are also being watched to make sure their body and their sexual praxis comply. However, just as there are social pressures that influence and regulate how a woman controls her body, women simultaneously seek to contest them. Women know that they are watched. They know that they are largely pressured into compliance, the consequence being social critique. However, like finding ways to regulate their own reproduction outside of the social gaze, they find ways to act.

## **Chapter Five: Gendered Dispositions & Relationships Positionalities**

### **Structuring Gender**

Webs of relations that operate within a social system are largely structured to reinforce and preserve the larger social framework. These relations, including social and gender norms, kinship arrangements, prescriptions for sexual praxis, and so on, are formed according to and are expected to reflect or mirror the basic structure of society. This holds true for gender norms and expectations. Essentially, in a society structured to promote and perpetuate male privilege, the extent to which women control access to the resources, social, economic, or otherwise, that reflect and constitute privilege will likely be limited.

Gender guidelines are incorporated and apparent in the structure of Crucian society, which regulates how women are expected and conditioned to act and the places they are expected to occupy, both physically and figuratively. For the purposes of this analysis, three social manifestations of structured and structure-reinforcing gender norms will be explored: the regulation of social space, gendered dispositions, and gender relations, particularly considering the role of economics. All intersecting and mutually reinforcing, these prescriptions for gendered behavior speak to the context of agency and the relationship between the constitution of power and the constitution of agency in St. Croix.

**Gendered space.** Very early in the research, I noticed a clear difference in how men and women informally socialize publicly—at social events like limes or jams both young men and women participate and are represented; however, in day-to-day informal settings, there is a distinct difference. The use of physical social space reflects several key gender expectations. Just as her progress and drive in professional spaces and her maternal, sexual, and domestic labor in private spaces define a woman, the spaces that she occupies and in which she socializes are similarly organized. Driving around the island day in and day out, I rarely if ever saw groups of women informally socializing in public spaces. However, it was extremely common to see men sitting under a tree, at a shanty (a local bus pickup), or in a parking lot, particularly one in downtown Christiansted, just sitting and socializing, doing what is sometimes locally described as liming. I began to notice this pattern during phase 1 of the research process, so I decided to incorporate it into the extended semi-structured interviews with women. Their responses were poignant and elucidating.

When asked about the difference between men's and women's public socializing, Reaya replied:

Cause that's the turf. That's where the guy's hang out. That's their spot. That's like a woman-free zone. A woman could pass by, hail them up, sit down, crack a little joke, and she'll be, 'Ok all you, I have to go' and that's that. It's just pass by you see women there. You would never really see a woman sit down and hang out there around men under a tree or wherever a lot of men das be. Why? Because

men mostly talk about cars, women, sex, drugs, guns, a typical man, sports, basketball. You wouldn't really see a woman around there unless she trying to find out if all you see her cousin or something like that, or she just telling them hi, crack a joke, and she going. She bump into a friend. She ain't staying long. Now, if you do see a woman around there, I'll be blunt, she is either a crackhead or an alcoholic. Cause all they do around there is smoke and drink.

She clearly points out that these spaces, places where “a lot of men das be,” are for men and their socialization. These places are not intended for women, at least not for an extended period of time. Women are only permitted to briefly stop and chat or possibly inquire about the whereabouts of a family member; this is understood as a woman-free zone. Interestingly enough, if a woman frequents these spaces or stays too long, she is assumed to have an alcohol or chemical dependency; she is pathological. A socially acceptable woman understands that she cannot stay in these places too long as the topics discussed are obviously inappropriate or unsuitable for women. Women acknowledge that some illicit activities occur in these spaces; as Sarah notes, “most of the guys who are under the trees are not really up to any good.” They also reference the lack of job opportunities and social activities for young men as a rationale for their numbers in these spaces. Maya provides a succinct overview of the occupational and employment situations of men who use these spaces:

See, it's a funny thing because it's two fold honestly. You have your fishermen, and they get up way earlier than you and I do. When they are out there fishing and

they are finished fishing, we are waking up. So those kind of guys, their living and their work hours are different. Then you have those who are self-employed. They can go to work when they want to. According to need, they can go to work. Then you have those who just drink and don't have nowhere to go. Drinking is their job. Where they get the money to do it is a different story.

Her comment, very much in line with my own observations, suggests that these spaces are occupied by all kinds of men, regardless of their age or level of participation in the formal labor market. These places are places for men. Together, both Maya's and Reaya's comments frame the space that men occupy, the types of activities that occur in these spaces, the economic circumstances of the men that occupy these spaces, and the fact that these spaces are designated for men only. However, what has yet to be addressed is where women are, or in what spaces they socialize. Maybe women do not socialize with men at the fish market or in a parking lot; however, it is possible that they gather in other public places. Karen, a young student, clearly establishes an understanding of the stark contrast in the gendered use of social space:

Yeah. Sometimes you might see a woman involved over there... maybe, but, mostly, its men. They just find some spot to hangout at. If it has shade and there is no police, that is where they hang out. There is a public parking lot in Christiansted. There is a tree right by the gate. Some guys will just go there and hangout... There are some guys who are in the parking lot washing cars. Whereas, females, we just find something to do. Do your hair or something. Or

work? For some reason, most of the women here work, so during the day it's not like really much to do. On the weekends, it is just shopping and running errands. Doing what women do.

Women stay home, maybe doing their hair, or they are at work. They do "what women do." A woman's space is either at work or at home. While at home, she is maintaining her body through beauty rituals, like doing her hair, or being responsible by taking care of her children; while at work, she is ensuring that her household is in order. When she does socialize publicly, it most often occurs in more formal and organized spaces: at a community event, at Sunny Isle, or at church. She is responsible and conservative in her socialization; he is, at times, escaping and ignoring responsibility in his. This distinction surfaced over and over again throughout the interviews with women. One young woman provides a more personal example.

There is this area, the fish market in Frederiksted, the guys live there. Every time I pass there, I get angry because there is no way in hell you are going to be in a relationship with me and you are sitting under a fish market with a bunch of men when you could be out working. Those are the ones who are shacking up with their girlfriends. The girlfriend is either at work or she is at home, and they are probably getting some kind of government assistance. It is like do something. My cousin, his girlfriend works at the medical office and goes to school full time, and he is there all day.

While she works and goes to school full time, he relaxes at the fish market all day. She is marked and understood as responsible and driven, effectively balancing a full course load and working. Her partner, irresponsible and unemployed, is just shacking up with her, living on and benefiting from her hard work. Conversely, these men do not only partner with hard-working, driven women, they are also in relationships with women receiving governmental assistance, who are also described as occupying only private space. Thus, the men both directly and indirectly benefit from the assistance allocated for her and her children. He is marked as having far greater freedom and being far less responsible. The use of physical social space and the social tropes regarding the lack of male responsibility also correspond with socially constructed behavioral attributes and characteristics associated with men and women.

**Gendered dispositions: two types of women and three types of men.** The physical social spaces that women and men are expected and understood to occupy parallel the attributes associated with each gender. As discussed in the previous chapter, women—specifically the “modern woman”—are described as relatively academically and economically savvy. More educationally and professionally ambitious than her predecessor, the modern woman works hard to secure the economic resources needed to care for her family. Even when she does not attain an advanced degree, she, makes sure her family has what it needs, at times balancing several jobs. The exception is the woman receiving governmental assistance. Though she, like the modern woman, is described as more sexually liberal or promiscuous than the traditional woman, unlike the modern women she is not described as being academically or professionally progressive. She sits

back and receives governmental assistance, is lazy, and has little or no desire to change her circumstances. She, even more than the modern woman, engages in consecutive and frequent sexual partnerships with many men and is likely more tolerant of multi-partnering on the part of men. She has multiple children, at times having four or five before reaching her late twenties, has low-self esteem, and likely comes from an abusive, mentally and physically, female-headed household. As one provider, who has worked in the community for many years, asserts,

They are a hot mess! Wow! I don't want to sound bad about women, but I think that from my experience they are a hot mess. They [have] low-self esteem. They don't have it together. [They are] young mothers. Majority of these women that come in here that are in that age bracket, they are in the system, they are not working. They are just home...they waiting for the next fix, which is, they depend on the first of the month or the fifteenth, which ever their welfare check comes out on. They are in the projects. So you know that's a topic that... I am trying to say it without sounding so bad about them. I think that after talking to them, some of them, you realize that they are very promiscuous. A lot of them have... they know that the person they are messing with or sleeping with [has] two or three women, and it is like they don't care...there are females that [have] two, three, four children, and they are not past thirty.

I must note that the women I spoke to from the housing communities did not reflect this stereotype. They spoke of wanting to move out of public housing; in fact one woman had

moved away to live with some family in the United States for a while, but had to return. They spoke of problems with receiving public assistance, the lack of privacy and all of the regulations, working to provide as much as possible for their families, even while hoping or trying to go to school. One woman, for example, adamantly asserted that she would go without before her sons would. A comment from LaShae provides some insight:

Like right now, I going through a little financial situation. I da tell people, I didn't have the best in life when I was growing up. I have two kids; I have a boy and a girl. I struggling wit dem now, but I don't intend to be struggling with dem all my life. I don't intend to be on de food stamp all my life. I don't intend to be collecting from the government all my life. I want to be able to stand firm for my kids...How I look at it is like dey own we until we can stand on our firm feet. Das how it is. De own us until we can stand on our own feet.

While my small sample may not be representative, it does suggest that the social discourse that marks all these women as lazy may be somewhat myopic. At the same time let me share, in one housing community, a local community worker wanted me to talk with a 30-year-old woman who had ten children. When she told the woman that I was interested in speaking with her, the young woman, who was unemployed, stated that my incentive was not enough and requested more. She wanted two or three gift cards. There are likely a number of potential reasons for her response—not the least of which may have included having absolutely no desire to participate in the research. However, I got

the sense that she was more interested in maximizing the opportunity. Nonetheless, regardless of whether or not the stereotype was accurate, it is clearly an important trope in local social discourse.

Men were also divided into social categories, but the implications of the categories were quite different. The categories for women were used to explain the pathological and idle behavior of women receiving public assistance. However, the categories for men were used to explain the male/female relationship dynamics that operated on the island. Men were generally spoken of in three groups. The first was men who were either in jail, and thus unable to maintain a relationship, or were willingly and habitually unemployed. It is assumed they often get involved in gangs or local feuds between communities on island, other types of illicit activities, and, at times, end up dead—the homicide rate for young men in the U.S. Virgin Islands is one of the highest in the country. The second group is men on the down low or “dl”. They secretly prefer relationships with other men and are thus unavailable to or unsuitable for local women. The last are men who have good jobs, whether self-employed or not. These men are particularly valuable, as they are the only men available to local women. One provider’s comment provides insight into an additional and relevant layer of complexity: “And so what’s left of the men with the good job? Ok, three-quarters are married, but you have a tall load of available women, what are they gonna do?” Essentially, there is an imbalance. The number of available women far exceeds the number of suitable, available men. Men are thus understood as a commodity, and women pursue them.

*A fieldwork vignette: three types of men. On Friday, I was recruiting for the project. In between recruiting women, I began having a conversation with a young man who worked at the facility. Most of what we discussed was intellectual, relating to the plight of the black community and mental liberation, or something to that effect. Throughout the conversation, women who worked at the facility would come over to get his attention or pull him away. In fact, one of the female employees passed by and said, “Well y’all are having a long conversation.” It was completely platonic—nothing more than engaging on a scholarly level. I was taken by her comment but continued to engage. Soon, he left, came back, and said, “I really want you to understand what is going on. Local women are very protective over local men, and they don’t want them to talk to anyone who is not local.” Maybe part of it is having an extended dialogue, but I would guess it is definitely more related to exploring the opportunity for a relationship. I am sure no one knew what we were talking about. He continued on by saying that one third of local men are thuggish, another third are on the “dl”, down low, and the last third they are protective over because they are the only decent men. They like Crucian men to date Crucian women. He asked me if I understood. I said yes.*

### **Multi-partnering on the Big Island**

Multi-partnering has long been a theme in Caribbean scholarship on gender and family structure. Similarly, it emerged very early in this research. In its more socially accepted and visible forms, it functions to reinforce male dominance and gender

hierarchies, as it grants permission for heterosexual males to engage in intimate and sexual relationships with multiple women simultaneously. In its more discursive forms, it allows heterosexual women—and, though beyond the scope of this study, arguably bisexual men and women—through the management of concurrent partnerships, to negotiate and access social, emotional, monetary, and material resources. The results and discussion presented below offer insight into the diversity and complexity of this particular type of sexual praxis in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**Social discourse surrounding male multi-partnering.** After living on the island for less than two months, on my way home from picking up my daughter from school, I heard an exchange on the radio that reinforced my understanding of the entrenched and socially recognized nature of heterosexual male multi-partnering on the island. I immediately pulled over and recorded a portion of the segment as accurately as possible.

Radio DJ: If you a side-ting and you see your man walkin around with his main-ting, act accordingly.

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Radio DJ: If a main-ting ain't cooking and cleaning and she just taking his check, he ain't no "G".

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Female Caller: Teach dem the difference between a main-ting and a side-ting because the side-ting wan hot up the place. The meaning of a side-ting is to be on de side.

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Radio DJ: Not fair to be up and down the place wit the side-ting and neglect the wifey.

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Radio DJ: Thou shalt not neglect the wifey. You hav fe balance it.

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Male Caller: Gal wine pon gal...

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Radio DJ: Let me balance it for you. Thou shalt not go to a jam and wine pon de same sex. That is an abomination.

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Female Caller: I agree with what the last caller say. When you see a gal wine pon a gal, it just look weird.

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Female Caller: I love to be a side-ting. You wan know why cause da truth is the man treat the side-ting better than the main-ting.

(a brief snippet of music is played)

Radio DJ: If you gonna be a side-ting, be the best side-ting you can be.

This segment took place on one of the most popular radio stations in the Virgin Islands, and it was conducted by one of the most popular radio DJs in the territory. Its importance lies not only in its content but also in the social stage upon which it took place. Radio is an extremely important form of social communication in the Virgin Islands, and it is

readily accessible to the general public. Even the most popular DJs frequently recognize people's voices when they call into the stations. Daily, DJs "big up" (celebrate and acknowledge publicly) local restaurants and small businesses. Local events heavily shape the content discussed and explored: from politics and religion to parties, death, and school violence. One participant described how when she was working at a local elementary school, a radio DJ mixed up the location of an incident of school violence and many parents came to her school looking for their children. Radio is very much at the pulse of Crucian life. Though a full textual analysis of this particular exchange is beyond the scope of this project, a brief consideration effectively sets the stage for understanding some of the social and cultural dynamics of multi-partnering in the Virgin Islands.

This radio dialogue is extremely telling for a number of reasons. First, it obviously centered on multi-partnering and makes clear whose sexual praxis is most socially privileged, those of the heterosexual male. He is not only entitled to engage in multiple relationships, but his ability to manage them is a reflection of his masculinity and manhood. Female multi-partnering was not even mentioned, marking it invalid and almost invisible, and homosexuality, or non-sexual behaviors that can be interpreted as mimicking homosexuality, is quickly marked as "an abomination." Secondly, some of the (male) DJ's comments are structured after biblical commandments, "Thou shalt not...", thereby, asserting not only his authority on the matter but also the social relevance and validity of the message. His recommendations and assertions for female behaviors suggest that it is the female's responsibility to reinforce and validate the male's dominance. For the "wifey," though it is the man's responsibility to care for her financially, it is her responsibility to provide domestic labor, and I would argue by

implication sexual and emotional labor as well. The DJ argues that her needs, social and financial, must be taken into consideration before those of the “side-ting.” Thus the social expectations for the relationship hierarchy are validated: male, wifey, side-ting. As the side-ting, your responsibility is simple; you must know your place, and you are at your best when you accomplish and demonstrate it. Just as telling are the comments of the female callers. The first encourages the DJ not only to distinguish between a side-ting and a wifey, but also to outline the side-ting’s place, as she is marked as volatile and uncontrollable—always trying to “hot up the place.” The last female caller adds to the complexity of multi-partnering, asserting that she enjoys being the side-ting because she receives the most attention from the male. This marks the position of side-ting as not only desirable for some but advantageous, as men obviously engage in the acts that the DJ is critiquing, more specifically, being “up and down the place wit the side ting and neglect[ing] the wifey.”

Just as multi-partnering has long been recorded on other Caribbean islands and countries, it has also persisted in the U.S. Virgin Islands. One respondent asserted, “we know in the Caribbean... [there] was always some type of polygamous or what people call extended family, outside children.” However, the current forms, according to some participants, are a far cry from more stable forms of multi-partnering engaged in by previous generation. More recent forms of multi-partnering were characterized as unstable, relatively short lived, and involving several different partners, sometimes up to three or four. In the past, a male may have had a wife and also an “outside” partner with whom he has been involved for 10 or 15 years. One participant shared, “I was reading the obituaries some time ago and a gentleman died. In the obituary it had that he was

survived by his wife and listed her name and the girlfriend and then the girlfriend's name was listed as well.” When this type of union is presented in public discourse, only three relationship positionalities are acknowledged: the male, the wifey, and the side-ting (as in the radio exchange above) though the socially accepted number of outside partners is not completely clear. The male often had children with both his wife and his outside women; however, although the father frequently acknowledged outside children, they did not always receive all of the benefits given to the children of the wife or main partner.

Now women in general, speaking in very broad general terms, we saw more issues where it came to older women. The men have the property in their name. [The women] don't have access to money. If he doesn't give them money, and you'd see it in the DV [domestic violence] court, she goes in and she complains that he don't give her any money and she never worked, so she's at home and has nothing except what few dollars he may throw at her if he wants to. Or he spends his money on his outside women in order to...here, they acknowledge outside children, so that's not so much of an issue in terms of that's my child, but to give the support, they would rather work a undercover job, where they don't have to give the support, then pay the support.

The wife—in this case the traditional woman—who lives at home and is completely dependent on the male for her economic survival, is almost trapped. She has no property in her name, and because she was required to stay home, she has no job and no source of income. Thus, she is not only expected to accept the male's multi-partnering, but is also

expected to accept his regulation of the financial resources, which are directed toward maintaining his outside women—interestingly, exhibiting the behaviors that the radio DJ critiques. The wife stays at home and therefore receives the resources he brings into and invests in the house and likely any children he may have at home; however, his energy, time, and discretionary resources are directed elsewhere. The side-ting, the recipient of some of his discretionary resources, his energy, and his time, cannot access the environment he has created at home, is ranked last on the hierarchy, and her offspring may be claimed but are not likely to be fully supported. Clearly, male multi-partnering is structured, and has successfully reinforced male gendered dominance. However, today, women are not necessarily understood to be neutral bystanders, and male multi-partnering is more often contested. It is understood to have an impact and, it can evoke a response.

*A fieldwork vignette: “Wen dey gone wit your husband dey gone wit everything.” A woman, dressed in a long bright pink shirt-dress, walked over and greeted one of the women seated. Other than the color of her dress she looked quite disheveled. When she walked, she would drag her feet, and her mouth was slightly gaped open. She had a blank stare. When she greeted the woman sitting down, the other woman complimented her, “You look nice. I like the color of your dress”. The disheveled woman just looked, shrugged her shoulders, and walked away. “She is a bright girl you know,” the woman said speaking to another woman sitting next to her, “She use to be a teacher. She turned that way after her friend took her man. She found them in the bed together.” The woman sitting next*

*to her shook her head replied, “A husband is a powerful ting. Wen dey gone wit your husband dey gone wit everything.”*

*This exchange was interesting because it was not the first time I heard this story line. There is a woman who walks the main road almost every day. I remember when I got here, I was taken by how beautiful she was. She had an even mahogany brown complexion. She had high cheekbones and a very structured face and physical frame. Every day she walked, and every day she had a different outfit. The outfits were obviously home made, but they were very creative. Once, I saw her walking with a veil tied over her face. The fabric from the veil matched the fabric that she used to wrap around her body to make a dress. I always wondered about her. I wondered what her story was. A few months after moving here, I expressed my admiration for her beauty and attire to someone who had lived on the island for many years. He said that she was homeless and lived in an abandoned house not too far from where I lived. He said he thought she was schizophrenic, and that she often talked of people trying to get her. Based on some conversations with her, he guessed that she not only participated in sex work at times to get money, but that she had been sexually violated by some men on the island, likely because of her condition. When I asked another local person, they acknowledged her current condition and said that she also had children. They expressed that she was not always this way. Sometime ago, someone had taken her man from her, and she was devastated. The theme of both stories is clear. Losing your partner, or rather having your partner stolen by another woman, was enough to make you lose everything, including your mind.*

Whether or not the either of the stories is true is of little consequence. Rather, it is the circulation of such stories that is most important. The circulation of both stories, to some extent, reflects large social beliefs regarding male/female relationships as it implies social validation and exchange. Losing your man to another women can be and has been devastating for women. This is distinct from the dynamics of side-ting a wifey. Though women who find out that their partner has another female partner or other women may experience some frustration and may express discontent, she has not lost him completely. He still wants her. Her body, her self-worth still remains intact, if only slightly. In either case, it is the woman who is responsible; it is the woman who suffers, as it is her responsibility to secure and manage the relationship.

**Male multi-partnering: a woman's concern.** When asked, “What do young women on the island worry about most?” the responses from almost all of the women were eerily similar. Largely, women worry about their male partners being pursued by and engaging in intimate relationships with other women. Even the young women, who asserted that they would not accept their partner engaging in a concurrent relationship with another woman, mentioned it as a primary concern for most women on the island. Maya, a mother of three asserts, “a lot of the concern surrounds ‘woman stealin my husband’ or my husband being unfaithful. That is a big problem here. Married women are concerned about their husbands stepping out, and other women making a play for their husbands.” Though some participants also mentioned women's concern for their children or their looks, almost all of the women interviewed talked about women's concern

regarding their partner's fidelity and other women's pursuits of their partners. "Ok. I'm a be honest wit you. Like me, I fo my child fada. Because here, it is when man go out. They always have a tendency... you know woman always gwan talk; they gwan always talk. Even if they know that de der with someone, they gwan always talk, and you know man de ain't no punk, so you know de gwan always talk." Here, a young mother shares her personal perspective. It not only reflects the assumption that multi-partnering is an essential pillar in manhood or masculinity by asserting that "man de ain't no punk...de gwan always talk", and not only does she present it as an inevitable part of society, but she also suggests that he is largely responding to the advancements of other women. During my interview with Ashanti, I asked, " Do you think that men are almost expected to have relationships with multiple women?" She responded, "Yeah, because a lot of times, if you're not, you ain't in things." Men are expected to engage in multiple relationships, and they are expected to accept the advancements of young women. There is a social pressure to exhibit what is often understood as a biological predisposition and what others understand as a historical fact.

When you date back to Africa, men have more than one wife. As long as it is ok with the first wife, he could have more than one wife, which I think that men are entitled to, I don't want to say cheat, but to me men are entitled to have more than one wife as long as it's good with the main one... It's already installed in them that they gonna have more than one because time dates back to it.

According to this participant, male multi-partnering is a reflection and product of history. She continued on to suggest that notions of the superiority of monogamy were based on European ideals and are not and should not be a measuring stick for the experience of black people. Black men cannot be with only one woman. When expected to, they cheat. She asserts, “there is not one man or one boy, none of them, that could ever stand and tell me that they have never cheated on a girl.” This sentiment was reiterated over and over again throughout the research; it was understood as simply a natural part of being a man. Tammy posits, “All man da cheat. Even if dey talking to somebody all dem da cheat.” As a woman, one must simply accept and acknowledge that.

Although women acknowledge the prevalence of male multi-partnering on island, their responses to it vary. The women interviewed reported that growing up in an environment where male multi-partnering is socially acceptable, some young women continue to accept the practice, though at times passively and with some discomfort, as it is seen as a better option than either losing the one they love or being alone. In contrast, rather than stay completely complacent and silent, some women verbally challenge their partners’ outside relationships—and sometimes get into physical altercations with the women with whom their partner is involved—but continue to stay. Crystal, while commenting on the frequency of the practice, explains: “I see a lot of situations where a man is with more than one woman. Most of the time women know, and I guess, because they are so in love, they just accept it. I guess that’s what they understand because that is what they saw growing up. Then there are some that are always having it out, but then she still stays with him and he still stays around her.” Some women are fully aware of their partners’ outside relationships, and accept or challenge it to varying degrees—some

women are even familiar with the woman, or women, their partner is involved with. However, in other instances the woman is at times willingly ignorant of the situation and/or any details associated with it as acknowledgement may negatively impact her self-worth. Speaking to the range of responses, Shiloe contends, “Women kind of let their man do what he wants. Some people don’t care because he is coming home to me. Some people ignore [it] because they don’t want to feel like their self-worth has gone down.” Falling in sync with the DJ’s perspective above, some women imply that it’s okay as long as he takes care of his family at home first, essentially, as long as he respects the relationship hierarchy. As one young lady shares, “Really and truly, if you supposed to be in a relationship wit a gal, you supposed to deal wit home first and den you go out dere and you deal wit anything after. It’s always home first and outside after.” No matter how she chooses to respond—regardless of whether she chooses to ignore it, embrace it, or challenge it—it is clear that women understand it as part of their reality, and women who deny the possibility are sadly mistaken.

A lot of [women] think that, ‘okay. I have dis boyfriend. He will neva leave me.’ He see anoda woman out dere and he tink ... please he goin and he gettin she but he stay supporting you or whatever. Young ladies need to understand that man is going to be man. Man cannot stay wit one woman. Dey have to explore, and that’s why we have so much HIV/STDs out here because man exploring. And den they have some woman dat have dis stupid mentality dat, ‘Anything man could do I could do.’ I don’t get dat theory, and it don’t fall for me. Cause I find, dat’s a bunch of nonsense. [LaShae]

Sexual exploration through multi-partnering is understood as part of being a man. He is given the social space to be liberal in his sexual praxis while she is expected to be conservative in hers. The message is clear: as a woman, you are not to expect monogamy, as man “cannot stay with one woman,” and you are not to respond to his multi-partnering by engaging in it yourself— well at least not publicly.

**Operating under the surface: female multi-partnering.** Scholars acknowledge the existence of female multi-partnering in the Caribbean as early as the 1960s (Clarke 1966); however, participants described it as relatively recent in St. Croix. According to them, in the past women were expected to be, and most were understood to be, monogamous and sexually conservative. Recently, they suggest, it has become more and more common. Though LaShae’s comment, above, suggests that female multi-partnering is a response to male multi-partnering, the data suggest that it functions and operates in ways sharply distinct from the socially acceptable form. It is not necessarily directed toward procreation, and it is not tied to asserting female dominance. It is distinct from the position of side-ting, though side-tings can be in several relationships at the same time. In fact they may also be in a relationship where they are understood to be a wifey. Additionally, female-multi-partnering may include “dealin”—a casual relationship that likely involves sex, with one or more males. This relationship type is also distinct from the positions of side-ting and wifey. Scholarship addressing the practice in the Caribbean presents it as a means for women to manipulate, secure, and arrange economic resources and goods for themselves and their families; however, I contend that the goods, or

resources, women access or exploit, through engaging in multi-partnering are not only economic they are also emotional and social. Female multi-partnering is acknowledged, yet not performed in the public sphere, as that would leave the female open to social critique. Interestingly, it is considered by many respondents to be a relatively new phenomenon, and it is directly connected to the increasing acceptance of promiscuity. One provider asserted, “It went from being relatively pure and virginal to it being acceptable for them in 2010. It's not odd for a young girl to live with a boy for a few months and then have another partner a few months later and have another partner a few months later. It's definitely not uncommon. Sexual promiscuity has taken a different place.” This quote, reflecting more of the sexual praxis understood as serial monogamy, begins to highlight how instability in female partnering, whether the partners are concurrent or consecutive, is seen not only as a shift but as deviant. Females and their sexual behaviors are monitored closely, a ready and common target for the social gaze.

In contrast, men's behavior goes unexplored and frequently un-critiqued. Ashanti offers a very straightforward summation. If a woman had multiple partners, people in the community would say, “She's nasty or she's a slut or she's just, you know, she's not you know...it's OK for a man to do that, but it's not OK for a woman to do it.” If caught, she is not only open to social critique but might also be vulnerable to physical violence. One participant explained, “It seems to be more expected for the men. Whereas the women, if they did it, it would have to be on the down-low, in secret, because women have been killed and murdered here by boyfriends or spouses because of the stepping out business.” Women balancing relationships with more than one male partner must manage and

negotiate their praxis in the shadows and, in most contexts must deny engaging in it, as the social consequences are severe.

Despite the possibility of social defamation and critique and despite the possibility of becoming victim to physical violence, women continue to engage covertly in the practice. And through its practice, they continue to gain access to and negotiate the emotional, social, and monetary goods and resources it produces. The goods derived from each relationship differ. Both providers and women, when providing scenarios or examples of female multi-partnering, suggested that women utilize different relationships to satisfy different needs and desires, including maintaining a relationship with the men they love. One provider shared the story of a young woman who came in for medical counseling and who subsequently disclosed that she had several male partners: “She was like she has one for this purpose, economic reasons, one for this, one for that, and she had one she truly love but can’t provide all of the things that she needed. So she had to do what she had to do.” Through the management of concurrent relationships with several male partners, she secured the resources she needed to get her economic and emotional needs met. Penelope adds to this by sharing a more personal example: “I know of one girl, she has like three different men, one for sex, one for money, and one for love...she can’t get just one person to give that to her.” Again, the young woman in this example uses multi-partnering as a means of meeting her needs emotionally, economically, and sexually. Even women who had stable and well respected jobs working as bank tellers or paralegals were reported to use multi-partnering to pay bills, get their hair done, or to get attention for other partners as they were not getting attention from their partner at home.

**Side-ting's, wifey's, and the "Side-ting vs. Wifey Party."** In either position opposite her male partner, as a wifey or a side-ting, particularly when only the male is engaging in multi-partnering, a woman is expected to know her position and perform accordingly. If she resides in his home, even if not legally married to her partner, she is still considered his wifey, and is thus entitled to the resources he invests in the home. Her children receive his name, and in theory she is supposed to receive preference. Before he takes care of his outside relationships, emotionally and financially, he is expected to respond to her needs. When out in public, her position is to be respected by any other female partners, side-tings, he may have. She is at times aware that the relationship is not based on mutual exclusivity. However, she is convinced that infidelity is to some extent inevitable and that failure to accept it, though not always without a fight, might result in losing her partner, a potentially socially and emotionally devastating situation as her womanhood is attached to her ability to keep and maintain her relationship. She seeks, through emotional, domestic, and sexual labor, to protect a relationship that she understands as always being threatened as another female is likely vying for her partner's attention, his resources, and his energy. The other, the side-ting, is understood as the beneficiary of at least some of his discretionary resources. Frequently ten or more years younger than her male partner, she, primarily through sexual labor and procreation, secures his attention. Her children are often acknowledged but are not entitled to all of the benefits given to the wifey's. Though her position is not as socially prestigious, she accepts it and sometimes uses it as a means to usurp the wifey's position and benefits. She is expected to acquiesce and remain silent when she sees her partner in public with his wifey; however, she is at times aggressive and bold, making her position and its

advantages known. Her position is not secure, and like the wifey, she seeks to protect her place from other women desiring her partner's attention and resources. Though the wifey may not always know about the side-ting, the side-ting always knows her position or at least is made aware of it relatively early in the relationship. When both know about the other, they are at times described as amiable adversaries and at times as clear rivals.

This tension between both positions has a very clear position in social discourse and likely served as part of the inspiration for the Side-ting vs. Wifey Party that took place on island in early July 2010. Although I never saw any fliers for the party, it was heavily advertised on the radio. For the party, women were prompted to dress according to their position in the relationship. Wifey's were expected to wear a particular color; side-ting's were expected to wear another color; and women who were both a wifey and a side-ting were asked to wear a third color. The days preceding the party were filled with phone calls from female callers to the radio station—calls that were broadcast on air—inquiring about what colors women were supposed to wear. The day of the party, there was a beach jam held by a local radio station at a beach near downtown Frederiksted. At the jam, I began a conversation with a young mother, likely in her early thirties, who had lived on the island all of her life. We talked about my research and the differences between living in the States and living on island, and then we began talking about events for the night. It was the fourth of July, and there were several large parties planned. I brought up the Side-ting vs. Wifey Party, and asked her thoughts. I wondered if she thought women would really show up in the colors advertised on the radio. She quickly asserted that there would likely be several women who wore the color corresponding with

their position, even with the knowledge that their partner's wifey or side-ting may be there, and responded, "Crucian women are bold. There is going to be drama."

Though the boldness of the women in attendance is intriguing and though the performance of their position through active participation is telling, the popularity of the party—and the sheer fact that it took place and was heavily advertised on the radio—speaks to the place of male multi-partnering on the social stage. It is not only part of culture, it is also something to be celebrated and embraced by men, wifeys, and side-tings alike. It is a celebration of his dominance, and her compliance through her labor.

**Female Competition.** Under this social tension, lies a very real and palpable air of female competition that circulates on island. Men, with or without large amounts of discretionary funds, are valuable, and women compete for their energies and attention regardless of the men's relationship status. When tensions around multi-partnering arise, the other female is to blame, and any acts of physical aggression are usually directed toward her. Quotes from two local providers, a doctor and a local women's health advocate, provide clear and direct insight.

They are still very competitive with other women. They have no problem with sharing guys knowing that he has other girlfriends. Actually, they go after the other females before they go after the guys. [Women's Health Advocate]

Young men can just stand, and the girls will go after them. It's not like before where a young lady would await the pursuits of a young man. They don't wait no

more. They go for what they want, whether he's with somebody or not. [Local Doctor]

Securing a man is the prize, and it is worth pursuing even when the cost is high. As one provider notes, “As far as they're concerned, I like he, he like me, and I go off of that and it's done. Whether or not they find out after they've just crawl out the bed that his girlfriend was downstairs banging on door, breaking the glass to her car is irrelevant.” They understand the tension and the stakes, and women are often willing to actively engage. Securing and maintaining a relationship with a male partner are central to meeting the social requirements for womanhood and are intimately connected to the performance of her sexual praxis. She must perform, and she must perform well. Failure to perform provides space for another woman to take your place. When speaking of the pressures for local young women to use her sexual praxis to maintain a relationship, a local provider asserted, “I personally don't think that women feel empowered to say no to sexual advances from their partners. I don't think they feel empowered to do that. I think they feel if they don't have sex with them, the other woman is going to get him. It is all about who wins, who concurs. If I give out more, I can take him.” When a woman is unsuccessful, when her efforts directed toward maintaining her relationship fail, when another women secures the energies of her partner, men are not held accountable. One provider shared, “We see fights all the time or arguments, public arguments between two women about a gentleman, and he's nowhere in the picture.” He is not responsible; multi-partnering and infidelity are in his nature. It is the responsibility of the other woman to know her place, to respect the relationship. Even women in their mid-twenties were

described as often engaging in public altercations, at times physical. Commenting on this a young mother shares, “It’s just crazy because a lot of the women, I will even say from like 25 to like 30 and beyond even sometimes, they’re grown women and they’re like fighting, like basically fighting.” Though securing a male partner is desirable despite his economic resources, the benefits and the social dynamics surrounding securing a partner are heightened when the male is a “Hess Man.” Hess men work at, or contract for, the local oil refinery. They have one of the more prestigious and higher paying jobs on the island. Therefore, they are that much more appealing.

**On Hess Men.** If men are understood as a commodity, then their value increases exponentially when they are a Hess Man. On the island, there are several large companies who employ locals, primarily men, and pay them very high wages, as compared to the average wage on the island as a whole. Hess men work at the oil refinery; however, given the refinery’s history on the island and the local association between men with large amounts of discretionary money and the factory, men with wealth are at times generally addressed under the term Hess Men. This term will be used to represent all men who are understood to have extra money to offer women; however, they may hold one of several locally prestigious positions. They may work at the local oil refinery, Hovensa, the local electric company, WAPA, the local internet/cable company, Innovative, or one of the local rum distilleries, Diagio or Cruzan Rum. They may also work as local firefighters or hold other well paying government jobs. They have lots of discretionary funds and are thus able to secure the most valuable and highly sought after material goods: cars, clothes, jewelry, etc. Tammy offers a brief description, “Dey da drive the baddest ride.

Dey always going to flash a heap a money in front of your face. Dem dat don't even work for hovensa, they da work for a contractor, every Thursday they getting paid probably like \$900 or whatever." Even the men that don't work directly for the companies, but rather work for local contractors, make good money. Though some women maintain long term, stable, monogamous relationships with Hess Men, they are largely described as prone to having multiple women, even while maintaining a relationship with a wifey. They have money to spend, and they often, though not always, spend it on their women. As one local provider describes,

On island they are the ones that spend a lot of money. A lot of females feel like messin wit a Hess Man. They have money. Economic reasons...it's not about nothing but economic reasons. They are known to have money. We had a song back in the days 'Hess Man give away money.' Hess Men give away money like water from then until now. Hess Men are just big rollers. Spendin the money on the woman them make them feel good but then at the same time two and three and four woman.

When you are a Hess Man, not only are you a commodity, to some extent you no longer have to put forth much effort to attract women. It is as simple as wearing your uniform, or for some men their overalls. As Reaya asserts, "A Hess Man has the easiest job ever in attracting women. All he have to do is wear his overalls and they know... That is that. Women just want to come. It's true." Women understand that securing a relationship or at the very least the interest of a Hess Man can make them the beneficiaries of his economic

resources. If you catch him and secure him through sexual labor, he may pay for your apartment, your food, your clothes, or your trips to the hair stylist or nail shop. According to Dr. Steele “Hess Men, to some of these young ladies, [are] like the knight and shining armor, ‘I don't got to worry about car, apartment, food, clothes, nothing, and all I have to do is give myself, fine.’” Women of several different age groups, though high school and college-aged women were discussed most frequently, pursue these men.

### **Situating Economics: The Pursuit of Commodities and the Performance of the Body**

Beyond the performance of individual females, there is to some extent a social expectation that marks the performance of the female body, through sexual labor, as a condition of receiving monetary and material goods from male suitors or partners, even when she accepts his economic assistance without the intention of having sex. This is not to say that women are not critiqued to some extent for pursuing relationships solely based on the potential economic benefits, but rather women who secure relationships with Hess Men, or men that offer some financial support, are to some extent expected to provide sexual labor. They must understand the expectations of the courtship. If he gives you money, it should not only be your desire but you are obligated to perform. For many women, as one provider noted, “money is tied in to what happens with their bodies.” It should be and is offered in exchange for particular goods. If she is interested in accruing particular social, economic, and global goods and seeks to access them by securing a relationship with a male partner, she must perform. The option is no longer hers; her performance is an expectation. In an interview a local provider shared a telling example. She asserted that in 2008 a local woman accused a Hess Man of rape, and the provider

happened to know someone who was intimately involved in the case. After the trial, her acquaintance discussed the trial openly. Briefly put, the acquaintance shared that the woman had received a car and a house, and the male was taking care of her bills. He expected sex, of course, and she should not have been upset or surprised. Essentially, the acquaintance asserted, that's how things go, thereby implying the woman's right to control her body was negated by her acceptance of the material goods he provided. In this instance the woman did not want to have sex with the male. In her mind accepting his financial assistance did not grant him sexual access. However, when she tried to hold him accountable by charging him with rape, she was marked as the villain. The message was made clear: her acceptance of his financial assistance negated her ability to control her body. He was privileged. He was entitled.

However, although some women do seek out relationships because of their economic potential, not all women make this a primary motivation, even those who acknowledge struggling financially. During our interview, LaShae asserted, "I don't be lettin no man support me. Support your kids. Let me struggle." She acknowledges that her partner's support helps her take care of her children; however, she also acknowledges that what he has to offer is by no means in excess. She continued on,

Where we young women are goin wrong is we're into the money. Not me! If you can provide for me and your kids, me and you could go a long way. To heck wit da money ... a lot of dese girls dey tend to deal wit dese men for dey money or for dere cars. Cause don't get me wrong dey drivin all the baddest a car. Really and truly it ridiculous to be wit somebody for money or to be wit dem for what

dey can do you. And a lot of dem Hess Men are not faithful. Dey just like the fireman dem or da policeman.

Finding a man who is willing to offer what he can is better in her mind than pursuing a man who has a lot to offer financially, since this, according to LaShae, increases the likelihood that he will be unfaithful. Other women in the study also expressed a similar sentiment. They simply want a partner who is willing to take care of his responsibility, not necessarily one that lavishes them with expensive gifts. While we spoke, Tammy provided an example from her personal life. Her second child's father was purchasing some clothing for her children online, even the son that wasn't biologically his. While looking at items, he asked her what she would want for herself. She quickly responded by asserting that she didn't want anything and was satisfied with taking herself to a local store to find something inexpensive. After her response, he challenged her about her unwillingness to treat herself, and she replied, "Don't worry about me worry about the children dem...I'll be okay simple as that." She was appreciative of his willingness to care for the children, but declined the gifts he offered her. Though they have been in a relationship for several years, she insists on, and is proud of, her financial independence. Building on this position, she discusses the problems with getting in a relationship based solely on monetary gain and the benefits of securing a relationship with someone who can't offer as much financial assistance as readily.

Money can't buy love, and some people don't see dat. Some man got money and will love a woman or whatever and don't want to really care for them because all

it is about is money ...You ain really got to worry about de broke one dem (laugh)...Dey will try to give you whateva you want ... Like me, my birthday it just gone. He was supposed to go wit me to get a tattoo. He was like, 'Me ain have no money.' I was like, 'Safe.' I say das ok cause I da know how he and money stand.

She acknowledges his efforts to give her what she wants and accepts when he cannot, as men who can provide access to goods too easily don't really care for the women they are with. Both Tammy and LaShae admitted to receiving some kind of assistance from their partner, in the form money or goods for their children; however, they both clearly state that money is not and should not be the driving force in a relationship. Relationships based on money are unreliable and unstable. They would prefer a man who is responsible. Though their experience does not eliminate the relevance of economics to relationships, they do suggest that there are other story lines, discourses, and lines of reasoning that are not based on economics. Relationships are valuable, even without excessive economic benefit.

**Importance of relationships: more than economics.** As Tammy's and LaShae's comments above indicate, some women do not maintain, secure, or pursue relationships based on potential monetary gain. The social and personal value of a relationship far exceeds any monetary benefits. To exemplify this, a young woman shared an exchange she heard over the radio.

So, this lady, she called and she's like, 'Well, my husband is watching porn, and I just feel like he's cheating on me.' So, the other lady call in and she's like, 'Well, you should just be happy that your husband is home.' I just feel like that was the stupidest thing I ever heard because like, him being home is not doing anything. He's just there, you know, and I think that's what a lot of women in St. Croix want. They just want their men to be home.

And indeed, for many women just the presence of a man is valuable. Beyond the possibility of infidelity and beyond his media interests that may make her uncomfortable and suspicious, she should simply be happy that he is home. A provider who works with women in a local housing community told me that the women she works with date men who don't have jobs and who during the day do little more than sit under a shanty. She asserted that there are some women who go for men who have money, but that there are other women who just desire to be in a relationship, and will put up with a great deal to maintain it. In these relationships, women are often the breadwinner or the primary source of economic support. The male is just there. Women labor to maintain the relationship without expectations of economic support. As Shiloe asserts, "I think women bend over backwards to make the relationship work, more so than a man would. Women are thinking I am scared to be alone before I find somebody else. I know what I have right now, so I am going to do what ever I can to keep him." Having a man at home is better than the possibility of finding, or not finding, someone else, even in situations of abuse. One provider shares insight: "It's not so easy you know because people do stick with the evil that they know, why, because it's a comfort. Yeah, I know you gonna hit me,

but at least I know when, I know how, I know how bad, I don't know what I going to find out there." Women's lives and experiences are complex, as are their reasons and motives for maintaining and securing a relationship. Simply having a relationship is key. As Sarah asserts, "Some women just want to be in a relationship for money. Some just want to be in a relationship for children, but some people just stay in a relationship 'cause they truly love that person or they just want to be with that person." But ultimately she notes, "Most women feel like they need to be in a relationship."

### **Structuring Gender, Structuring Relationships**

She is expected to be responsible, in life and in sex. She is taught to understand his sexual praxis as a reflection of his natural propensity. He is allowed the social space to be loose and liberated, in life and in sex. She must accept this. Even though she likely experiences some discomfort when he engages in mutli-partnerships, she was aware, at least to some extent, of its inevitability. Further, he is not to be held responsible for her discomfort; the other woman is. The other woman is the competition. She seeks what another has work so hard to secure, whether for emotional, social, or financial reasons. Nonetheless, she is expected to know her place. She is expected to remain faithful and monogamous. At times, she does not. Concerned with securing her own self-defined needs, she works surreptitiously to attain and manage several relationships, all directed toward different needs. Her actions are not intended to directly undermine the privileging of his sexual praxis, though arguably it does; rather, she is most interested in pursuing her own goals and aims. Again, she is not always passive; she is not always submissive; she contests; she acts.

## **Chapter Six: Between Practice and Constraint**

### **Agency and Context**

Crucian women are constrained. Like women around the world, they live in a context that is structured to support and enhance male privilege. The roles they are expected to play in the public and private realms reinforce their subjugation. Their context has been shaped, is being shaped, to maintain a gender hierarchy. When they openly defy gendered norms, particularly with regard to their sexual praxis, they are publically ridiculed. However, despite social critique and regardless of many social constraints, they find ways and spaces to act.

Dominance functions on the macro and micro levels. Just as it is present in the very order and structure of society—in policy, economics, history, and the like—it is also ever present in everyday interpersonal relations. Many local realities serve as evidence of a woman's social position. At the macro-level, she and her family are most heavily represented amongst the poor. She has fewer opportunities to be placed in a high level position in the private sector—the average pay for women on island is less than \$20,000 per year (Kids Count 2009). She is unequally represented in government and frequently ignored or marginalized in local policy decisions. At the micro-level, she is largely expected to perform well in the public sphere, and she is monitored closely, particularly compared to her male counterpart, to ensure that she does. She is told to offer her partner

her sexual, domestic, and emotional labor without anticipation of equal reciprocation. She is to accept male multi-partnering and to decry women who might engage in similar behaviors. She is held responsible for her and her partner's sexual acts, including their transgressions, while he is largely held unaccountable. She is expected to be monogamous. She is expected to be responsible. This is her context. This is her reality.

Just as Ortner (1996) argues that there are contradictions inherent in agency, I argue, domination is to some extent riddled with contradictions as well, lending to its incomplete nature and arguably linked to any ambivalence women may have toward enacting agency or questioning dominance. While on one hand Crucian women are understood as strong, vocal, and assertive—the history of the queens is a central and powerful social trope—on the other hand, they are at times depicted as victims in a relentless gender hierarchy, particularly as it functions in the private domain. A woman is savvy in public and problematically submissive in private, at least as it relates directly to her partner. In both realms, she is ranked second though in one she receives more liberties than in the other. While his hyper-sexuality and procreative inclinations are marked as natural and normal, hers are regulated. Moreover, securing his energy is part of how she is conditioned to understand her womanhood. She is expected and moved to defend his attention as others simultaneously seek to secure it. She is familiar with the ratio. He is limited; thus, he is a commodity. She depends on his presence to access economic and social goods. She needs him. She must fight for him. After securing his energy, she is responsible for managing the relationship. If it goes wrong, she and her body are to blame. This is just a glimpse of the web of relations and ideologies, structures

and realities, with which she must engage. There are many strategies in place that seek to stifle her sexual agency, even as she in various ways attempts to constitute it.

**Operating in the cracks.** She is not free, but she is not completely bound. She acts. From challenging or openly critiquing women who attempt to usurp her partner's attention and energy to securing several partners in order to secretly pursue her own needs and desires, she responds to her context. Most acts occur in the private realm, guarding her against public critique. This largely operates along a fine line. Whereas acts that do not effectively challenge male dominance may occur on the public stage, acts that serve to disrupt the cycle of male dominance are largely relegated to the private.

All women do not openly accept their partner's outside relationships, and, at times, women respond by challenging and confronting the other women with whom their partners engage—the male is most frequently held unaccountable. Other women are her opponents; they seek what she has worked to secure. Women understand their role and often proclaim it. The “Side-ting vs. Wifey Party” exemplifies this point well. Her participation, which calls her to denote her status by dressing in a particular color, occurs on the public stage and directly challenges other women attached to the same partner, regardless of their position. However, her performance serves to bolster male domination and privilege male sexual praxis. While openly challenging other women, she openly embraces her role. She wore her colors boldly; she embraced her status; she shifted the dynamic to reflect her power; she was not passive; she pursued what was valuable to her. She engages with intention though she ultimately serves to reinforce her own subjugation. Further, neither the structure of the event or the participation of the women

call men into account. They are simply silent observers. A similar point can be made for the case of the young woman engaged in an extra-marital relationship with the local Senator, who, during the course of their relationship, was accused of committing an act of domestic violence against her. While the case was still being considered in court, she continued to receive media attention for openly assaulting another of the Senator's young mistresses. Her act, by directing her response toward the woman rather than their shared partner, served to mark his multi-partnering efforts as valid. These acts, as they in some ways challenge social prescriptions for appropriate female behavior, are critiqued accordingly. All too common, these acts do not serve to effectively challenge male dominance and, thus, can more frequently occur on the public stage.

Other acts, more specifically female multi-partnering and self-regulated reproduction, which more directly challenge male dominance, must occur in the shadows, in the more private spaces less obvious to the social gaze. Before proceeding, it is important to note several key points addressed earlier: 1) all acts are not directed toward challenging the large system of dominance—this fact does not marginalize their significance, 2) acts are riddled with contradictions—while challenging some constructs, they may endanger women in other ways, and 3) acts develop and take on new meaning through praxis. We will begin by considering female multi-partnering.

Crucian women, like their male counterparts, sometimes secure multiple partnerships—not as a way of bolstering their femininity, as male multi-partnering is directly tied to understandings of masculinity, but rather out of a desire to meet their own complex and diverse needs. Even women who hold highly respected, relatively well paying jobs engage in this practice. Women do not engage in multi-partnering in direct

response to the multi-partnering efforts of men. Operating in ways distinctly different from men, women engage in this practice in a more covert and furtive manner. Though at times a particular relationship may be based on its economic potential, women also engage in relationships based on love and sex. Her sexual labor plays a part in all relationships. In relationships based on money, she uses it in exchange for economic and material goods. For those based on sex, it is used in reciprocation. And for those based on love, it is offered as one of several types of labor a woman is expected to offer in the private domain. She understands her body as a tool, and its use is tied to her understanding of self. She is intimately familiar with the social critique surrounding it, yet she continues to engage in this praxis despite its taboo nature. Though female multi-partnering is not employed as a direct response to male multi-partnering, it still serves to challenge male dominance. According to social conventions, men's sexuality, and thus their multi-partnering efforts, is linked directly to biology. He is naturally sexually promiscuous and therefore engages in various, simultaneous sexual liaisons. She is not understood to have his sexual appetite or need for multiple partnerships. Female multi-partnering sits in stark contrast. Managing several relationships may serve to curb her need for economic support from one single source. Further, her sexual pursuits with numerous male partners undermine notions of male virility and sexual dominance, implying that he is not enough and likely ill-equipped to handle all her needs, sexual and otherwise. Functioning very differently than female multi-partnering, I argue, women's direct efforts to control their reproduction, in unique and subtle ways, also serves to destabilize and counter male privilege.

More specifically, in instances when a woman personally seeks ways to regulate the number of children she has, she undercuts male privilege. In cases when mothers or women force young girls to have an abortion and in cases when a female is pushed by her partner to pursue this option based on his own interests, the act may not reflect her desire and thus may fit more appropriately into discussions of constraint and control. Depending on the number of times she pursues a particular method and the health risks of the method itself, her efforts can be understood as dangerous and may incite unanticipated and undesirable consequences—this is of course exponentially enhanced when she moves without medical supervision. However, health risks are not always tied to the plausibility, power, or frequency of intended, purposed, self-directed acts—there are many examples of individuals and communities placing their physical health on the line in pursuit of what is understood as a noteworthy and important goal. Examples include hunger strikes, non-violent marches during the civil rights movement, or, to tap into a more local example, the labor riots of the 1870's. Women cited a number of reasons why they may want to limit the number of children they conceive or to control when they become pregnant. When more formal contraceptive methods fail or when women confront an unexpected pregnancy, they may pursue a number of abortive options: seek a formal, medically supervised abortion; take a Santo pill; or drink a Guinness Stout. Each method is accompanied by its own risks, both social and physical, but each allows her to try to control her reproduction, even though the effectiveness of the local remedies is questionable. Her choice may be based out of a desire to continue to pursue her education, experience a degree of social freedom and flexibility, or work towards economic stability for herself and her children. Nonetheless, it is a reflection of her

desire. This practice challenges male dominance in subtle and more direct ways. By limiting the number of children she has, she also impacts the number of children he can claim—this is important, as masculinity in the Caribbean is often tied to men’s procreative efforts (Smith 1956; Sobo 1993; Chevannes 2002). She may also lessen her economic dependency on her male partner. However, more directly, she is able to pursue her own interests, desires, and goals as she sees fit. Each act described above provides insight into her context and the strategies she employs to pursue her own needs, goals, and aims, some of which include increasing the amount of economic capital and material goods at her discretion and some of which do not.

**Placing Economics in Perspective.** Literature exploring, directly and indirectly, black female sexuality in the Caribbean has continued to emphasize, and possibly overemphasize, the relationship between sexual praxis and economics. Essentially, a woman’s sexual praxis is described as always, or at least primarily, directed toward securing economic resources and material goods from her male partners, sometimes achieved through procreation. Whether her sexual praxis is directed toward securing clothes, shoes, and other commodities (as in Curtis 2009) or whether it is directed toward her and her family’s survival through securing goods necessary for the maintenance of the household, food, shelter, etc., it is almost always described as directed toward an economic end. Kempadoo (2009) also addresses this trend in Caribbean sexuality studies. Though I do not argue against the relevance of the pursuit of economics in considerations of female sexual praxis—I would argue this is not unique to the Caribbean and is very easily found in both affluent and poor communities around the globe—I do assert that it

represents only part of a very complex reality and reflects only a narrow piece of the complex context within which black females in the Caribbean engage in and perform their sexual praxis.

In St. Croix, male/female relationships are understood, in most cases, to have an economic component. Women at times use their relationships with men to supplement their income or to provide needed or desired goods for themselves or their households. However, there are a number of other realities that effectively broaden and challenge long held notions that suggest a relatively unidirectional economic exchange. First, even men who are not gainfully employed, which includes men who lime under shanties and at fish markets during the day, represent valuable and secure relationships with local women. Women were the ones who were reported as hard working, sometimes managing two or more jobs to take care of their households even while their male partners remained unemployed. Like the woman who called into the radio station, some women are just satisfied to have a male partner who stays home—at least then she can be assured that he is not engaged in relationships with other women. Further, securing a relationship with a male is connected to understandings of womanhood, whether or not the male is contributing financially to her household. Second, and arguably most important, women cited many reasons for engaging in a relationship. One woman shared that she developed a relationship with her partner because he offered support and comfort when a close family member had been murdered. Another asserted that her partner, an older gentlemen who she had been with for a number of years, was encouraging and pushed her to attend and finish school; they began dating when she was in high school. These are two of several stories that were offered during the research. I contend that there are likely many

more. They too contribute to understandings of female sexual praxis and thus must be considered. An approach that centers almost exclusively on economics misses and distorts women's complex reality.

Over-simplistic, primarily economic views of female sexuality and sexual praxis reinforce stereotypes of the hyper-sexualized, exotic black female body, its uses and motives, and effectively serve to increase marginalization rather than understanding. In fact, a woman's sexual praxis is as diverse and complex as her life and directed toward a number of ends, including but not limited to economics. As scholars, we must consider the implications of our work to ensure that it is in fact representative. We must report the mundane along with the provocative, thereby providing valid insight into women's reality and its complexity.

### **Applying Anthropology: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Application**

Establishing an understanding of female sexual agency can contribute to the development of more effective and nuanced health interventions, health policy, and economic policy—although it is not limited to those social sectors—and can inform and frame STI rates among women, explorations of health access, and domestic and sexual violence investigations. Understanding female sexual agency not only enhances the formal information available for shaping a program or intervention, it also establishes a guide for identifying where women enact agency or pursue specific desires. Agency most frequently occurs in unstructured places; it occurs in ideological and real hegemonic fissures. As this is where it occurs, this is also where it must be met and nurtured.

At the end of the overwhelming majority of my semi-structured interviews, I allowed providers and women to talk about the strategies they believe should be employed to challenge gender inequality on a larger level. The need for education was reiterated over and over again. I believe in the power and capacity of people on the ground—those who engage and respond to the social context everyday—to identify their own needs and solutions. My inclinations are secondary at best. Fortunately, based on my research and theoretical leanings, I also agree that education is the key. This of course includes increasing opportunities for women to pursue and receive a formal education—as the education of a mother is directly connected to the overall health of her family. However, it also includes a move toward a more critical education, one that centers on groups questioning and critiquing the social tenets of society. This education is essential, and like agency, must take place in the cracks. Some organizations on island already employ similar approaches; however, collaboration and an increase in funding can enhance their efforts. After exploring a critical education and its possible manifestations on the island, I will return to addressing the specific organizations and conclude this section by proposing other practical policy changes that, when paired with a critical education, can begin to respond to some of the challenges and needs women described and identified during the research.

With or without facilitating a more organized and directed critique of the social structure, women will continue to act. As Giddens (1979) notes, action is a fundamental component of social structure, and as Sewell (1992) argues, agency is a fundamental part of the human experience. However, as these acts are private and conducted in relative secrecy, no momentum or grounded collaboration can occur. As an applied

anthropologist, I am fascinated by and moved to understand and situate agency and its manifestations; however, I am equally concerned with developing strategies for continued change, ultimately resulting in greater equality. The distinction lies in observing versus facilitating social change—the later implies an incorporation of the first, since in order to facilitate one must understand. Though most practice theorists, Ortner included, do not move toward facilitation, practice theory as developed by Giddens, and more specifically subaltern practice theory, leaves space for nurturing and facilitating change.

Taking direction from Gramsci, both Giddens and Ortner contend that hegemonies are partial and that oppressed groups have at least some level of insight into their oppression. Simply put, these partially knowing, partially dominated groups find ways and spaces to act. Taking their assessments a bit further, I contend finding and interrogating the fissures in systems of domination can provide greater insight into their actions, their agency. If these cracks are nurtured, if action within them begins to build momentum, if individual dispositions become collective critique, shifts can occur. Critical pedagogy, most associated with Freire (1970), provides the approach for what happens in an “education situated in the cracks.”

Critical pedagogy, based on the destabilization of the traditional, unidirectional teacher-student relationship, evokes a critical examination and critique of the social context and positions it in relation to individuals’ on-the-ground problems and experiences. It encourages individuals to reflect on inequality and challenge it through praxis. Thus, building on individuals’ partial knowledge of the social context and their oppression, a critical education sheds light on the intricate web of relations in which they

are embedded. This increase in awareness is a necessary precursor to social change that is pursued by the oppressed. It too challenges domination: “indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in ‘changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them’; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated” (Freire 1970:60).

In St. Croix, specifically in response to gender inequality and male domination, women must be encouraged to come together and exchange insight and critique. They are most familiar with their context and their experiences, and they must direct the shift. Further, a broader consideration of the details of oppression would also encourage an equal consideration of the possible outcomes of particular types of praxis. Female sexual agency and sexual praxis must be situated, critiqued, and understood within larger struggles for female agency. If a woman cannot access the resources needed to care for her household, if she is also understood as dependent, if she is marginalized outside of sexual relations, then her sexual agency will always be compromised. Therefore, the critical education and social critique must be holistic in nature. The framework for supporting a critical pedagogy for women is already in place on island.

Per Anhk, Inc., whose mission is outlined as “promoting culture, healing, arts, technology, [and] spirituality,” has existed on island for over 20 years. Using a holistic approach, it works tirelessly to improve the lives of local Crucians. A number of programs are aimed directly at improving the experience of women and young girls on island, including NU WOMAN Rising, which is designed to incorporate holistic approaches to health and wellness with HIV prevention, and LIVE UP (Living Inspired As Virtuous Edified & United Princesses), which, also employing a holistic approach,

offers culturally based awareness and education services for young girls. Given this organization's commitment to and history in the community and given the work it currently does, incorporating the tenets of critical pedagogy could enhance its important work. Further, to improve their penetration into the community and to increase the number of resources available to them, all organizations on the island directed toward empowering and assisting local women should collaborate in promoting these efforts. These two programs, as listed on a local flyer, already partner with a number of important local organizations including VICARE, the local police department, and Legal Services of the VI. However, other organizations directed toward advocating for women should partner. These partnerships could enhance all of their efforts and work toward all of their stated missions.

The holistic approach is central. As stated above, women cannot fully cultivate their sexual agency, if women's circumstances and equality are not placed at the center and considered and responded to by women. This organization, by strategically and directly incorporating critical pedagogy, would contribute to this process. Beyond a move toward facilitating and nurturing social reflection and critique, I also assert that several practical policy shifts would serve to support women as they work to negotiate resources and access to resources.

Throughout the research, individuals discussed several issues women encounter when attempting to access healthcare. However, one emerged as salient—the social gaze, particularly as it occurs with healthcare workers, who at times share client information. Several women indicated that they are reluctant to access services out of concern that their personal information maybe shared. I believe simple health policy changes could

respond to this specific challenge. First, healthcare centers, both government-run and private, should implement policies that require healthcare workers to maintain patient privacy or face termination, and such policies should be advertised in clinic waiting rooms so that patients may feel more comfortable. During training or continuing education efforts, health organizations could introduce the new policy and require employees to sign a form that outlines the consequences if it is violated. Given the current economic climate in St. Croix, losing one's job may be incentive enough to respect patient privacy; however, to further ensure that patient privacy will be maintained, legislation should be passed by the local senate that would make leaking patient information criminal. It is in the best interest of the local government to take up these concerns. Leaking patient information impacts more than the individual and arguably compromises the health of the entire community, as it can deter individuals from seeking treatment and therefore could possibly buttress disease transmission.

In addition to introducing policy that would help prevent the sharing of patient information, I also suggest that an organization rearrangement could further support the effort to ensure patient privacy. Even in circumstances where healthcare workers respect the client's privacy, if other community members see a woman accessing a clinic, particularly the STI clinic ran by the Department of Health, her personal information, more specifically their use of a services offered at the facility, might still be shared. Though providers, to a large extent, cannot control the patients who access their services, something can still be done to lessen the possibility that community members share information. Instead of having an office in the Department of Health that deals solely with STIs, the office should be reorganized and renamed. It could simply be called the

Center for Women's Health—there could also be a Center for Men's Health. This simple name change disassociates the office with STIs. Further, if women are required to access this office for all types of services, it would be hard to distinguish why a particular woman would be accessing the office and, therefore, help to keep her information and experience private. In addition to these changes, I believe two other changes would also serve to protect and support young women and girls.

In my first chapter, I referenced a local statute that essentially marks 16 as the age of consent and limits the age difference between partners to 5 years. This statute should be amended such that the age of consent remains 16, while partners should be no more than two years older. Beyond a simple change in the statute, violators should be aggressively pursued and prosecuted. Young women, and men, should be able to pursue their education and other teenage concerns with out worrying about the pursuits of older individuals. Though this is introduced through the local government, the schools could introduce a policy that supports this legislation and further protects their students. Several providers indicated that older men would park their cars and wait to pick up young girls being released from school, mainly from high school. School officials could introduce a policy that prevents anyone other than a family member, who has been registered in the front office, from picking up young girls and young men. This may not eliminate the problem, but it can serve as a deterrent. To facilitate compliance, a number of school employees could help with dismissal to make sure that the policy is followed. All of the recommendations offered above are practical and relatively simple. They represent small changes that would serve to protect women and young girls as they work to access health

and educational resources, and when paired with a critical education, they become even more powerful.

### **Future Research and Writing**

This exploration focused on contextualizing female sexual agency and its constraints, and while it effectively contributed to the body of literature exploring female sexual agency in the Caribbean, both by exploring a new context and moving past considerations of economics, there is still more research and writing to be done. Using subaltern practice theory as an explanatory framework, particularly in the analysis presented in Chapter 4, in my research the body is presented and understood as a site for the constitution of control and the manifestation of agency. This consideration is primarily situated within an exploration of female sexual agency. I maintain that the use of practice theory is most fitting, given the project's focus on exploring and theorizing notions of agency; however, other frameworks and scholarly considerations could also prove very insightful, particularly ones centered on theorizing relationships between the body and power relations. Lock and Sheper-Hughes (1996) offer a very provocative discussion of the "three bodies"—the individual body, the embodied self; the social body, the use of the body as a symbol for nature, cultural, and society; and the body politic, the regulation, surveillance, and the control of individual bodies. Each represents ways in which the body is understood and functions in society, and each is extremely relevant in its own right. However, I am most intrigued by the ways in which they intersect and, arguably, collide. Following, a discussion of the three bodies, Lock and Sheper-Hughes, move to discuss "bodily praxis," which they define as "someone living out and reacting

to his or her assigned place in the social order” (1996:65). Women are aware of the social body; they are aware of attempts to regulate their own bodies. The authors speak explicitly to this reality: “the experiences of women in connection with menstruation, childbirth, and menopause and the variety of ways in which they either embrace, equivocate about, or downright reject dominant ideologies in connection with these life-cycle events provide other telling examples of the dynamic, contested relationship between the three bodies”(1996:65). This specifically reflects the findings presented in this study, most readily the ways in which women sought to control the number of children to whom they gave birth. In the future I would like to use this framework as the foundation for an academic article describing the three bodies as they exist in St. Croix and exploring the ways these bodies intersect and collide. In addition to producing an article, if given the opportunity, I would also like to develop and conduct several more research projects in the territory.

With the proper resources, there are a number of projects I would like to pursue. An enhancement to the current study would involve exploring the manifestations, frequency, and social tenets of domestic violence on the island. Women and providers alike spoke of the frequency of the practice. The most public cases circulate heavily in social exchanges in the public media. A thorough exploration of domestic violence in the territory would not only contribute to understandings of female sexual agency, but would also offer a much needed contribution for understanding women’s health in general. Further, there are organizations on the island that both respond to and track domestic violence cases. They would be great resources and a directed exploration may help their

work, even if only by offering ethnographic documentation for the breadth and passion of their work. Another important consideration centers more on media.

Throughout the research, it became evident that locally guided media, including texts messages and videos, impacted and reflected notions of sexuality and sexual praxis on island, particularly among adolescents. This stands in contrast to Curtis's consideration of imported X-rated films in Nevis. It is important to understand the ease with which individuals create and distribute local, sexualized media and its relation to understandings of global media flows and the local regulation, monitoring, and exploitation of sex through locally directed informal media. Another possible study, related to the one previously mentioned, would involve working with teenagers at the local high schools. One health practitioner on the island suggested that STI rates among this population were startling. The resulting study would explore the ways in which local teenagers engage, pursue, and understand sexual behavior. They would be able to identify the discourse, images, and influences most salient to their realities.

## **Conclusion**

By situating sexual agency in relation to social structure, this project highlights the tensions and constraints women negotiate, and it speaks to the ways in which they respond and act. Focusing on the regulation of the body, the ordering of social space, and the structuring of gender and gendered relations in heterosexual relationships, it speaks to the complexity of women's lives and thereby contributes to Leo-Rhynie's (1997) call for multiple realities. Further, this project offers several important intellectual contributions to anthropological scholarship and social science scholarship in general, in increasing the

amount of literature available concerning the USVI, and providing a broader social and cultural framework from which to view and understand female sexual agency in the Caribbean. This work moves beyond framing female sexual agency as tied to economic concerns (Kempadoo 2009)—an approach that contributes to the re-marginalization of women in the Caribbean—and provides a more detailed and complex picture of female sexuality in that region.

## **Chapter Seven: Afterword**

### **Facing an Economic Blow**

After being on the island for 45 years, the Hovensa L.L.C. announced it will be shutting its St. Croix refinery, citing more than \$1.3 billion in losses, primarily related to a decrease in demand for refined oil products, increased competition in the global market, and facility inefficiencies (Hovensa website). Formally closing in mid-February 2012, this will have a devastating impact on the local economy and on the lives of many. Though the facility will continue to remain open as an oil storage terminal, only 100 remain employed. A stark contrast to the company's standing as the territory's largest private employer, more than 2,000 employees and more than 1,000 contractors will be dismissed. This reduction was the latest blow to the territory, which had already, a result of large budget deficits and increasing debit, laid off 500 workers in January 2012.

The news of the refinery's closing created major anxiety—and rightfully so. Hovensa employees received some of the highest and most competitive wages on the economically-pressed island. With more than one-third of the population receiving food stamps, poverty levels were startling even prior to the closing; they will be further exacerbated. Soon after the announcement, local officials began searching for strategies to respond to the impending crisis—all employees will receive pay for 90 days following the closing—and have begun the process of pursuing federal aid. Right now, the state of

the territory and its residents, particularly the residents of St. Croix, remains in limbo, and the outlook is grim. Few reports have surfaced since the announcements. As lawmakers work to respond to this challenge, one can only hope that a viable, workable solution is found.

## Works Cited

Agar, Michael

1996 *The Professional Stranger : An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*. San Diego: Academic Press.

Ahearn, Laura M.

2001 Language and Agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30:109-137.

American Anthropological Association (AAA) Code of Ethics

1998 Code of Ethics for the American Anthropological Association.

<http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>, accessed February 20, 2012.

Angrosino, Michael V.

2005 *Projects in Ethnographic Research*. Long Grove: Waveland.

Archer, Margaret S.

1982 Morphogenesis Versus Structuration. *British Journal of Sociology* 33(4):453-480.

Barriteau, Eudine

2003 *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.

Barrow, Christine

1998 *Family in the Caribbean: Themes and Perspectives*. Princeton: Marcus Wiener.

Bernard, H. Russell

1994 *Research Methods in Anthropology : Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Bertaux, Daniel

1981 From the Life-history Approach to the Transformation of Sociological Practice. *In Biography and Society: The Life-history Approach in the Social Sciences*. Daniel Bertaux, ed. Pp. 29-45. London: Sage.

Besson, Jean

1993 Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women. *In Women and Change in the Caribbean*. Janet H. Momsen, ed. Pp. 15-37. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bird, S. Elizabeth

2010 The Anthropology of News and Journalism: Why Now? *In The Anthropology of News & Journalism: Global Perspectives*. S. Elizabeth Bird, ed. Pp. 1-18. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bough, James and Roy Macridis, eds.

1970 Virgin Islands, America's Caribbean Outpost: The Evolution of Self Government. Wakefield: Williams.

Bourdieu, Pierre

1977 Outline of a Theory of Practice. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boyer, Williams

1983 America's Virgin Islands: A History of Human Rights and Wrongs. Durham: Carolina Academic.

Centers for Disease Control

2009a Sexually Transmitted Diseases Surveillance.

<http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats09/chlamydia.htm>, accessed February 20, 2012.

2009b Sexually Transmitted Diseases Surveillance.

<http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats09/gonorrhea.htm>, accessed February 20, 2012.

Chevannes, Barry

2002 Gender and Adult Sexuality. *In Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*. Patricia Mohammed, ed. Pp. 486-494. Mona: University of the West Indies Press.

CIA World Fact Book

2009 U.S. Virgin Islands. <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/VQ.html>, accessed June 20, 2009.

2010 U.S. Virgin Islands. <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/VQ.html>, accessed January 16, 2012.

Clarke, Edith

1966 *My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Family in Three Selected Communities in Jamaica*. 2nd edition. London: Allen & Unwin.

Creque, Darwin D.

1968 *The U.S. Virgins and the Eastern Caribbean*. Philadelphia: Whitmore

Crosby, Richard A., Ralph J. DiClemente, Gina M. Wingood, Laura F. Salaza, S Rose et al

2008 *Sexual Agency Versus Relational Factors: A Study of Condom use Antecedents among High-Risk Young African-American Women*. *Sexual Health* 5(1):41-47.

Curtis, Debra

2009 *Pleasures and Perils: Girls' Sexuality in a Caribbean Consumer Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Dann, Graham

1987 *The Barbadian Male: Sexual Attitudes and Practice*. Kingston: Macmillan Caribbean.

Dixon-Mueller, Ruth

1993 *The Sexuality Connection in Reproductive Health*. *Studies in Family Planning* 24(5):269-282.

Dookhan, Isaac

1994[1974] *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*. Kingston: Canoe Press.

Ellis, Pat, ed.

1986 *Women of the Caribbean*. London: Zed Books.

Foucault, Michel and Colin Gordon

1981 *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-197*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Freire, Paulo

1970 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Myra Bergman Ramos, trans. New York: Herder and Herder.

Giddens, Anthony

1979 *Central Problems in Social Theory : Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gose, Peter

1988 Labor and the Materiality of the Sign: Beyond Dualist Theories of Culture. *Dialectical Anthropology* 13(2):90-124.

Guest, Greg, Arwen Bunce, and Laura Johnson

2006 How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. *Field Methods* 18(1):59-82.

Henriques, Fernando

1953 *Family and Colour in Jamaica*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.

Hovensa L.L.C.

2012 Hovensa Announces Closure of St. Croix Refinery. <http://www.hovensa.com/>, accessed February 17, 2012.

Jensen, Peter

1998 *From Serfdom to Fireburn and Strike: The History of Black Labor in the Danish West Indies, 1848-1916*. Christensted: Antilles.

Jick, Todd D.

1979 Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Triangulation in Action. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24(4):602-611.

Kempadoo, Kamala

2009 Caribbean Sexuality: Mapping the Field. *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* (3):1-24.

2004 *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor*. New York: Routledge.

2003 Sexuality in the Caribbean: Theory and Research (with an emphasis on the Anglophone Caribbean). *Social and Economic Studies* 52(3):59-88.

1996 Prostitution, Marginality, and Empowerment: Caribbean Women in the Sex Trade. *Beyond Law* 5(14):69-84

Kids Count Data Book

2009 *Our Children Now! How Do We Compare? US Virgin Islands Kids Count Data Book*. US Virgin Islands: Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands.

Kumar, Alok and Valmay Bent

2003 Characteristics of HIV-Infected Childbearing Women in Barbados. *Revista Panamericana De Salud Pública* 13:1.

Leo-Rhynie, Elsa

1997 Gender and Health. *In Gender: A Caribbean Multi-disciplinary Perspective*. Elsa Leo Rhynie, Barbara Bailey, and Christine Barrow, eds. Pp. 240-242. Kingston: Ian Randle.

Lewis, Gordon

1972 *The Virgin Islands: A Caribbean Lilliput*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Lewis, Linden, ed.

2003 *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Lutz, Catherine and Donald Nonini

1999 The Economies of Violence and the Violence of Economies. *In Anthropological Theory Today*. Henrietta Moore, ed. Pp. 73-113. Cambridge: Polity Press.

MacCormack, Carol and Alizon Draper

1987 Social and Cognitive Aspects of Female Sexuality in Jamaica. *In The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*. Pat Caplan, ed. Pp. 143-165. London: Tavistock Publications.

Martinez-Alier, Verena

1974 *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society*. London: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Moore, Henrietta, ed.

1999 *Anthropological Theory at the Turn of the Century*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Morse, Janice

1994 Designing Funded Qualitative Research. *In Handbook for Qualitative Research*. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, eds. Pp. 220-235. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Nelson, Agatha, Patricia Todman, and Merrill Singer

2007 The Risks of Paradise: Project Rare and the Fight Against AIDS in the U.S. Virgin Islands. *In When Communities Assess their AIDS Epidemics: Results of*

- Rapid Assessment of HIV/AIDS in Eleven U.S. Cities. Benjamin P Bowser, Ernest Quimby, and Merrill Singer, eds. Pp. 163-176. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Nevarro, Tamisha  
2010 Virgin Capital: Foreign Investment and Local Stratification in the US Virgin Islands. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Duke University.
- Oliver, M. Cynthia  
2009 Queen of the Virgins: Pageantry and Black Womanhood in the Caribbean. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Olwig, Karen Fog  
1985 Cultural Adaptation and Resistance on St. John: Three Centuries of Afro-Caribbean Life. Gainesville: University of Florida Press.
- Ortner, Sherry B.  
2006 Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject. Durham: Duke University Press.  
1996 Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Gender. Boston: Beacon Press.  
1989 High religion : A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism. Princeton: Princeton University Press.  
1984 Theory in Anthropology since the 1960s. Comparative Studies in Society and History 26:126.
- Palada, Manuel C., Jean M. Mitchell, Brian N. Becker, and PKR Nair  
2003 The Integrations of Medicinal Plants and Culinary Herbs in Afroforestry Systems for the Caribbean: A Study in the U.S. Virgin Islands.  
[http://www.botany.hawaii.edu/bot644/Palada\\_et\\_al\\_2005.pdf](http://www.botany.hawaii.edu/bot644/Palada_et_al_2005.pdf), accessed July 20, 2009.
- Pons, Franks M.  
2007 History of the Caribbean: Plantations, Trade, and War in the Atlantic World. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers.
- Reddock, Rhoda, eds  
2004 Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses. Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.

Roopnarine, Lomarsh

2011 St. Croix's Secession Movement in the United States Virgin Islands: Sentimental or Serious. *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies* 36(1):43-66.

Sahlins, Marshall

1981 *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities : Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Sewell, William H., Jr.

1992 *A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation*. *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1):1-29.

Sharpe, Jenny and Samantha Pinto

2006 *The Sweetest Taboo: Studies of Caribbean Sexualities A Review Essay*. *Signs* 32(1):247.

Smith, Raymond T

1956 *The Negro Family in British Guiana*. London: Routledge & Paul.

Sobo, EJ.

1993 *One Blood: The Jamaican Body*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

St. Croix Avis

2010 Senator Pleads Not Guilty to Gun, Assault Charges. March 26.

2010 VI Primary Election Results. September 12-13.

2010 STT Senator Goes on Trial. September 21.

2010 Lawyers Question Accuser. September 22.

2010 Donastrog Not Guilty. September 24.

St. John Source

2011 Homicide Data 2011. January 2.

<http://stjohnsource.com/content/news/police/2012/01/02/homicide-data-2011>, accessed, January 12, 2012.

2010 Homocides 2010.

<http://stjohnsource.com/content/news/police/2010/11/11/homicides-2010>, accessed January 27, 2012.

Surratt, Hilary L.

2007 Sex Work in the Caribbean Basin: Patterns of Substance Use and HIV Risk Among Migrant Sex Workers in the US Virgin Islands. *AIDS Care* 19(10):1274-1282.

Surratt, Hilary L. and James A Inciardi

2005 Developing an HIV Intervention for Indigent Women Substance Abusers in the United States Virgin Islands. *Journal of Urban Health* 82(4):iv74-iv83.

Surratt, HL, JA Inciardi, JC Weaver, and VM Falú

2005 Emerging Linkages between Substance Abuse and HIV Infection in St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. *AIDS Care* 17(4):26-35.

Trouillot, MR

1992 The Caribbean Region: An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21(1):19.

US Census Bureau

2011 US Census Bureau Releases 2010 Census Population Counts for the U.S. Virgin Islands. <http://2010.census.gov/news/releases/operations/cb11-cn180.html>, accessed February 20, 2012.

2010 US Census Bureau 2010: A Description of the 2010 Census Operations and Data Products of the Island Areas, and How They Compare to the 50 States and the District of Columbia.

<http://www.doi.gov/oia/Firstpginfo/igiaPDF/1a.%20Census%202010%20Data%20Products%20on%20the%20Territories.pdf>, accessed April 5, 2012.

2003 Virgin Islands: 2000. <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/phc-4-vi.pdf>, accessed April 5, 2012.

US Department of Health and Human Services Website

N.d. Disproportionate Hospital Share (DHS).

<http://www.hhs.gov/recovery/cms/dsh.html>, accessed January 10, 2012.

USVI Chamber of Commerce

N.d. USVI Chamber of Commerce. [http://www.usvichamber.com/doing\\_business.htm](http://www.usvichamber.com/doing_business.htm), accessed June 26, 2009.

USVI Department of Health

2010 HIV Surveillance Report. <http://www.healthvi.com/programs/communicable-disease/std-hiv-tb/documents/2010-hiv-surveillance%20report.pdf>, accessed January 7, 2012.

USVI Department of Labor

2011 The Top 25 Largest Private Employers in the Virgin Islands 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2011. [https://vidol.virtuallmi.com/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/uploads/The%20Top%2025%20Largest%20Employers%20-%20County%202011\\_1.pdf](https://vidol.virtuallmi.com/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/uploads/The%20Top%2025%20Largest%20Employers%20-%20County%202011_1.pdf), accessed February 2, 2012.

USVI Population and Housing Profile

2000 Population and Housing Profile. <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2002/usvistatelevel.pdf>, accessed June 6, 2009.

USVI Statistical Digest

2000 Statistical Digest.  
<http://www.uvi.edu/sites/uvi/Documents/ECC/SRI/2000%20Statistical%20Digest.pdf>, accessed June 6, 2009.

Virgin Islands Daily News

2012 48 Virgin Islanders Were Victims of Homicides in 2011. January 12.  
<http://virginislandsdailynews.com/news/48-virgin-islanders-were-victims-of-homicides-in-2011-1.1252998#axzz1n8yMBTJ5>, accessed January 12, 2012.

2010 Donastrog Found Not Guilty. September 24.  
<http://virginislandsdailynews.com/news/donastorg-found-not-guilty-1.1028958#axzz1n1rismta>, accessed February 16, 2012.

2010 VI Police Commissioner Addresses Domestic Violence. October 4.  
<http://virginislandsdailynews.com/op-ed/v-i-police-commissioner-addresses-domestic-violence-1.1043185#axzz1n1rismta>, accessed January 27, 2012.

Whitehead, Tony L.

1978 Residence, Kinship, and Mating as Survival Strategies: A West Indian Example. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 40(4, Black Families):817-828.

Whitehead, Tony L. and Mary E. Conaway, eds

1986 *Self, Sex, and Gender in Cross-Cultural Fieldwork*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

Willocks, Harold

1995 *The Umbilical Cord: The History of the United States Virgin Islands from Pre-Columbian Era to the Present*. Christiansted: Willocks.

Wilson, Peter J.

1969 Reputation and Respectability: A Suggestion for Caribbean Ethnology. *Man* 4(1):70-84.

Women's Coalition St. Croix

N.d. Information Guide for Victims of Domestic Violence in the Virgin Islands.

[http://www.lawhelp.org/documents/37651wcsc\\_dv\\_info\\_guide\\_eng.pdf?stateabbrev=/VI/](http://www.lawhelp.org/documents/37651wcsc_dv_info_guide_eng.pdf?stateabbrev=/VI/), accessed January 17, 2012.

World Health Organization.

N.d. Sexual Health. <http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexualhealth.html>, accessed May 5.

Wojcicki, Janet M. and Josephine Malala

2001 Condom use, Power and HIV/AIDS Risk: Sex-Workers Bargain for Survival in Hillbrow/Joubert Park/Berea, Johannesburg. *Social Science Medicine* 53(1):99-121.

Wood, Jill, Phyllis Mansfield, and Patricia Koch

2007 Negotiating Sexual Agency: Postmenopausal Women's Meaning and Experience of Sexual Desire. *Qualitative Health Research* 17(2):189-200.

Yelvington, Kevin A

1996a Caribbean. In *The Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. A Barnard and J Spencer eds. Pp. 86-90. London: Routledge.

1996b Flirting in the Factory. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(2):313.

1995 *Producing Power : Ethnicity, Gender, and Class in a Caribbean Workplace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

## **Appendices**

## **Appendix One: Women Interview Protocol**

### General Information

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived in STX? Tell me what it was like growing up here.
3. Do you have any other family members who live in STX?
4. Do you like living in STX? Benefits? Drawbacks?
5. Are you currently employed? If so, where do you work?
6. Do you have any children?
7. Do you plan on having more?

### Personal Background and Context

8. What do people do for fun here? Is it different for men and women?
9. Tell me a little bit about yourself. What do you do for fun? Tell me about it.
10. Do you go to church? Tell me about the church you go to. (Denomination, size, time attended, other family and friends who attend)
11. What kinds of music do you listen to? Who is your favorite artist and why?

### Women General

12. What do you think are the things that young women worry about most?
13. Do young women have access to the resources that they need to care for or better themselves or their family?
14. How would you rate the education system here?
15. What about job opportunities?
16. What kinds of things do women do to make sure their needs get met?

### Male/Female Relationships & Partner Selection

17. Tell me about dating here in St Croix.
  - a. What is a man's role in a relationship?
  - b. What is a woman's role?
  - c. Is this how it is?
18. Do you feel that men or women have more power in a relationship?
19. Can you tell me about "Hess" men?
20. Are you currently in a relationship? If so, tell me about the person you are dating. If not, tell me about the last person you dated?
21. Where did you meet?
22. Who approached whom first?
23. What did you like about this person?
24. What kinds of things did you do for fun?
25. Did your friends and family members approve of you dating this person? Why or why not?
26. How do you make decisions about whom you decided to date? What kinds of qualities do you like in a partner?
27. Do you think other women approach relationships similar to the way you do?

28. What do you think motivates most young women to get into a relationship?
29. Are there many relationships between people of the same gender?
30. How long would a woman wait before she has sex with a new partner?
31. Is this how it should be?
32. Do you think men and women talk about sex before it happens? What do they or should they discuss?
33. Would a woman feel comfortable going after a guy? What about initiating sex?
34. I was reading some statistics about the rate of STIs in the territory? Are you familiar with them? What do you think is happening?
35. Do couples use protection? If so, what kind—and would be more likely to bring it? Would a woman feel comfortable bringing her own protection?

#### Traditional Sex Discourses

36. While I write them down them, name all of the sexual acts that you are familiar with (whether or not you engage in them). Can you explain to me what they are?
37. How did you learn about the various sex acts?
38. Are there groups of people who engage in some of the acts but not others?
39. Are there any acts that have become more popular more recently? If so, how do you think people heard of these acts?
40. Are there any acts that you think are wrong? Why or why not?
41. Are there any acts that you like that your partners may not? Who determines if you engage in them or not? Why?

#### Healthcare & Access

42. If a woman felt like she contracted a STD. What is the first thing she would do?
43. Who would she talk to about it?
44. Would she try to treat it on her own? Would she go to the clinic?
45. Is it easy to access a clinic or get care here? For the insured and the uninsured?
46. Where do people normally go first if they feel they have contracted something?
47. Where do women normally get their information about safe sex? Are these places effective at providing good and relevant information?
48. What safe sex campaigns are you aware of? What do you think about them?
  - a. LiveUp or VICARE?
49. Which STIs do you feel are the biggest concern in your community?
50. Is there a particular group who is to blame?
51. Do people normally protect themselves against these infections? If they don't, how should they?
52. If a woman got sick, what are some reasons why she may not go to the clinic?
53. Is there a stigma related to contracting certain infections?
54. Do people normally want to get tested? Why or why not?
55. Which doctor do you go to for most of your health care needs? How did you find out about this doctor?
56. Do you like the doctors on the island?

#### Pregnancy/abortion

57. What do women do to avoid getting pregnant?

58. Why would a woman avoid getting pregnant?
59. If a woman has an unwanted pregnancy what do you think she would do?
60. If she decided to get rid of the baby and people found out, what do you think they would say?

Wrap up

61. Are there aspects of health or health care that you feel need to be improved?  
Explain.
62. Is there anything else you think I should know?

## **Appendix Two: Provider Interview Protocol**

### General Information

1. How long have you lived in STX?
2. If you are not a native, why did you move here?

### Context

3. What kinds of health care services do you offer to the community?
4. What do you think are the most pressing health issues that Virgin Islanders face?
5. Can you tell me a little about the STI rates in the territory?
6. Is there a stigma attached to particular STIs?
7. Does this influence whether or not individuals get tested?
8. What factors influence the rates of STIs?
9. Are there certain groups or populations that are most a risk? If so, why?
10. Are men and women equally at risk?
11. If they are not, why is one group more vulnerable than the other?

### Access

12. If a woman wanted to access health services, what kinds of factors might prevent her from doing so? (Insurance -Medicaid, family, partner, self-treatment, community)
13. At what point would a woman go to a doctor if she felt sick? Would this change if she thought it were an STI?
14. What if she wanted to get more information about safe sex? Would she have any difficulties?
15. Do women here actively seek out sexual health information?
16. Where do they get their information?
17. Do women frequently get tested for STIs?
18. If a woman wants to practice safe sex, are there things that might prevent her from doing so?
19. How are the needs and experiences of younger women different from the needs and experiences of older women?

### Male/Female relationships

20. Generally speaking, do male/female relationships affect safe sex? If so, how?
21. Can you tell me about “Hess” men? What age group does this affect most?

### Policy

22. What policies have helped women to gain access to health care?
23. Are there any policies that have hindered this?
24. What could be done by policy makers and/or the government to help you provide services and help women access services?

Wrap up

25. Are there other things that influence how women access sexual health services?
26. Is there anything else I should know?

### Appendix Three: Women Interview Demographic Table

Table 2: Women's Semi-Structured Interview Participant Demographic Information Sheet

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Years in STX</b>	<b># of Children</b>	<b>Student</b>
Participant 1	25	Unemployed	24	3	No
Participant 2	23	Cashier	23	2	No
Participant 3	34	Unemployed	13	3	No
Participant 4	19	Cashier	14	0	Yes
Participant 5	24	Unemployed	24	2	No
Participant 6	21	Cashier	21	1	Yes
Participant 7	19	Unemployed	19	0	Yes
Participant 8	18	Unemployed	18	0	Yes
Participant 9	18	Unemployed	18	0	Yes
Participant 10	19	Waiter	14	0	Yes
Participant 11	21	Unemployed	19	1	No
Participant 12	33	Assistant	21	1	No

#### Appendix Four: Provider Interview Demographic Table

Table 3: Provider’s Semi-Structured Interview Participant Demographic Information Sheet

<b>Provider #</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Years in STX</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Provider 1	Community Health Advocate (NGO)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 2	Health Counseling & Testing (NGO)	Greater than 10 years	Male
Provider 3	Medical Practitioner (NGO)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 4	Community Health Advocate (Gov’t)	Less than 10 years	Male
Provider 5	Medical Practitioner (Gov’t)	Less than 10 years	Female
Provider 6	Women’s Health Advocate (NGO)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 7	Women’s Health Advocate (NGO)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 8	Maternal & Child Health Worker (Gov’t)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 9	Maternal & Child Health Worker (Gov’t)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 10	Maternal & Child Health Worker (Gov’t)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 11	Medical Practitioner (NGO)	Less than 10 years	Female
Provider 12	Child & Family Health Advocate (Gov’t)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 13	Child & Family Health Advocate (Gov’t)	Greater than 10 years	Female
Provider 14	Child & Family Health Advocate (Gov’t)	Greater than 10 years	Male