Women Lovin' Women: An Exploration of Identities, Belonging, and Communities in Urban and Rural Guyana

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, there has been a surge of LGBTQ human rights movement and activism in the Caribbean region. Guyana, located in South America, and woven into the anglophone Caribbean, is not outside of these shifts and changes occurring in the broader region. Despite the vast research on non-normative sexuality in the region, little is known about the perspective and experience of Guyanese women. This dissertation concerns itself with the sexual praxis, identities, and conceptualizations of LGBTQ 'rights' from the perspective of women who love women (WLW) and LBGQ women in Guyana. This work has three central aims: to investigate the ways in which the intersecting factors of race, class, gender, and space operate to construct and inform women's identity and positionality in urban Georgetown and rural Berbice; to examine the different manifestations of violence within a heteropatriarchal society; and to assess the impact of transnational LGBTQ rights on women's understanding of same-sex marriage and citizenship. To answer these questions, this study utilizes qualitative methods, namely in-depth interviews and participant observations with thirty-three Guyanese women in urban Georgetown and rural Berbice. An analysis of the interviews yields that the women's lives are deeply complicated by their racial, gender, class and spatial positions which, at times, reinforce and challenge our assumptions about their sexual identities, praxis, community and being 'out and proud' in urban and rural spaces. The interviews further reveal and depart from heteropatriarchal theorizations of violence and offer an affectual counterpoint to understanding violence. The final part of this study demonstrates the contradictions in experiences embedded within LGBTQ rights as human rights, particularly same-sex marriage and citizenship. Overall, this dissertation argues that there needs to be a sustained analysis and attentiveness to ways in which differences of race, class, sexuality, gender, and regional positionalities are embodied and shape the lives of WLW

and LGBQ women. This study adds nuances to our understandings of who WLW and LGBQ

women are in Guyana and simultaneously illuminates the structural socio-political and economic

context that impact lives.

feels irrelevant. You are my constant in this entire process, from our Coffee Culture days, STC meetups and random food adventures. Thank you for being making Scarborough more livable for me. Aliya Amarshi, you have made this process and life more humane. You have kept it real, offering me tough and necessary advice, even when I don't ask for it, but I expect nothing else. We have grown together and separate through the years, but I know one thing for sure, you will have wine for me, always. And finally, Suzanne Narain, without you in my corner none of this would have been possible. We have traversed many landscapes together, sometimes departing but always returning. We have gone through many fires together and continue to make life. Thank you for your love in this harsh world.

Finally, to my brother, Vishal, thank you for letting me stand on your shoulders while I do this work. Your Sunday cooking, sharing of space and silence has soothed my soul. You have re-made family for us. And to my mother, thank you for your silence.

"I could not simply myself"

--Agha Shahid Ali[1]

"Because we happen where we are not"

--Karuna Chandrashekar[2]

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[1] Agha Shahid Ali is a Kashmiri poet. He earned a PhD in English from Pennsylvania State University in 1984. Among his works include *Rooms Are Never Finished* (20012) and *The Country Without a Post Office* (1997).

[2] Karuna Chandrashekar is Ph.D. student in Social and Political Thought at York University, Toronto, ON. She is a poet, artist, and psychotherapist. Her work has been featured in *Rising Phoenix Review*, *Eunoia Review,* and *Sea Foam Magazine*.

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Introduction

In January 2016 after arranging for an interview over the phone, I met Sandra at her business in Georgetown. I was nervous as I had never met a participant at a private location, much less at their own private place of work. There were a few women and a child in the lobby when I walked in and having never met Sandra, I had to introduce myself and ask for her. She came out from the back room, said it was nice to meet me and offered me a cold drink as it was a blazing hot day in the city. I politely took the drink and was happy to be in the air-conditioned room. After a few moments, Sandra introduced me to one of the women as her sister-in-law and the child as her nephew. I couldn't quite gauge what her sister-in-law knew of Sandra and if she was aware that I was here to conduct an interview with her, so I said very little regarding myself. We made small talk for a few minutes. Her sister-in-law and nephew left and disclosed that they would be returning later in the evening. Sandra asked me to follow her to her office where we would chat for the rest of the afternoon. We talked about her early childhood, her teenage years, the first boy she ever dated, her marriage and divorce, and the violence she has also experienced. Describing the Guyanese context and recalling the moment she realized that she is attracted to women, Sandra said:

> We did not talk about sexuality or anything in this context. I did not know that I was who I am today [laughs] I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know not until I became an adult. I felt something for a woman but of course, I did not understand it and then because of our culture here in Guyana, we didn't see a lot of it or hear a lot about it as kids. I didn't know what it was that was happening to me or what I was feeling…I didn't understand it, and [long pause] when I, you know, of course, you grow up knowing that man is for woman and woman is for man, and so when you're old enough to think that this is a sexual feeling, I thought "omg, this is not a good thing…I thought this is a really bad thing so I, of course, tried to deny myself" …and I did for many years, try not to be …not to like women or feel anything for them but if it's who you are then there's no way you can do that successfully (Sandra, 30s, mixed race)

What does it mean to be attracted to other women? What does it mean for one woman to love another woman in the context of Guyana, where same-sex desire, attraction, and love are punished and regulated? What does it mean to grow up and live in a context that rarely talks about "it" as Sandra suggested? How does one navigate such a context and their own embodiment? What does it mean to be unable to deny yourself? How does the heteropatriarchal state, gaze, and structure shape and influence women's subjectivity and their relationship to other women? Are Western lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer identities and rights applicable to Guyana? If so, in what ways? How do Guyanese women narrate experiences of violence, claim identities and rights in the country? This dissertation attempts to answer some of these questions and tells a story that focuses exclusively on women who love women (WLW) in the contemporary moment in Guyana.

Located in South America and bordering the Atlantic Ocean, the post-colonial nation of Guyana has under a million people of different ethnic groups. Although located in South America, Guyana is considered to be part of the Anglophone Caribbean and Caribbean Community (CARICOM) due to its colonial history, economic, political, and social links to other countries in the region. Similar to other British post-colonial nations in the region, post-independence Guyana has retained its colonial laws concerning same-sex relations, particularly targeting men. At the current moment, there is a discussion in the region and in Guyana regarding gender equality, sex, sexual rights, and citizenship status of non-conforming individuals in the region. This is reflected in current debates, political conversations and public opinions in Guyana, where the focus is largely on decriminalizing the cross-dressing laws, and "buggery" or anal sex between men. Local organizations such as Guyana Trans United (GTU) and the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD) are creating a space to

redress some of the existing archaic colonial laws, and to have conversations concerning the high levels of violence and discrimination that gays, lesbians, trans, and bisexual (LGBTQ) people continue to be subjected to by the state and general public.

However, there are others such as different political parties and religious bodies, that hold considerable power and play influential roles in Guyana's reform process, especially on the subject of changing Guyana's constitutional laws regarding cross-dressing and "buggery". These groups largely advocate that homosexuality disrupts the moral and religious order of society, and to some degree is a symptom of psychiatric disorders. On the other hand, these same groups, attempting to position themselves as "modern", advocate tolerance and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people, but not constitutional reforms. To this end, one of their arguments is that Guyanese society is tolerant, accepting and open to sexual diversity, and consequently the existing laws do not need changing, and/or that the implementation of special laws offering legal protection is unnecessary and/or require further prolonged debates. Another argument is that homosexuality is a "choice" and requires no special protection by the state (Caribbean Development Research Services [CADRES], 2013). Words of tolerance, acceptance, and open-mindedness are substitutes for resisting political, cultural and legal changes, keeping intact different levels of violence—homophobia, rape, verbal and physical abuse, and intimate partner violence within same-sex relations.

In the public arena, discourses of violence are normalized, celebrated and upheld within different cultural productions, such as dancehall music calling for the killing of homosexual men and women, and chutney and soca music normalizing alcoholism and domestic and sexual violence between men and women. These particular cultural discourses are informative sites and spaces wherein gender, sexual, and racial dynamics are palpable, and where violence is learned,

re-enacted, and performed on a daily basis throughout Guyanese society. These combining discourses produce a climate where the heteropatriarchal state regulates gender and sexually non-conforming men and women differently depending on their respective locations and position in Guyanese society. Within these incongruent discourses, I center the voices and experiences of LGBQ women and WLW in Guyana, demonstrating the ways in which they negotiate a heteropatriarchal state that governs their lives.

LGBTQ Studies in Euro-North America and Caribbean Sexualities

Birthed in the 1970s, Euro-American discourses of gay and lesbian studies and queer studies often have as their starting point of analysis the white gay male subject whose sexual orientation, sexual identity, and practices became politicalized in order to access freedom, equality, and legal rights enabled through marriage laws (Alexander, 2005; Altman, 1996; Bulter, 1990; Weston, 1995). Locally and transnationally, the universal white gay identity is often the framework through which all racialized others, sexual subjectivities, practices, and desires are modeled, with the latter marked as regressive and in need of Western intervention enabled through a range of capitalistic policies (Alexander, 2005; Berlant, 2011; Duggan, 2003; Ferguson, 2004; Gopinath, 2005; Hennessy, 2009; Manalansan, 2003; Puar, 2012; Sedgwick, 1990). Queer of color scholarship has responded to this body of literature by challenging the explicit whiteness and privileging of 'white gay male subjectivity,' often at the expense of other types of non-normative bodies, sexualities and practices (Ahmed, 2004; 2005; 2010; Cvetkovich, 2003; Eng, 2010; Ferguson, 2004; Gopinath, 2005; Halberstam, 2005; Luibheid, 2008; Munoz, 1999; 2009; Patton & Sanchez-Eppler, 2000). Additionally, this body of work has detailed the numerous ways in which transnational capitalism— through the logic of tourism, human rights discourses, migration, diaspora, terrorism, legalization of same-sex marriage, to name a few has

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restructured and continues to produce different articulations of sexual identities, practices, human rights, kinship and family structures, and belonging to local and transnational spaces. Local practices and understandings of sexuality and sexual identities that are refashioned through transnational capitalistic discourse can become complicit in upholding Euro-American models of sexualities (Gopinath, 2005; Puar, 2012; Alexander, 2005). At other times, they may challenge these discourses or materialize into new formations of sexualities that have little or no resemblance to Euro-American paradigms (Gopinath, 2005; Munoz, 1999; Murray, 2012).

For instance, cautioning us against the normalization of gay rights within liberal democracies, Jasbir Puar (2007) has demonstrated the ways in which the inclusion of queer subjects into the U.S nationalistic landscape and their attendant gains with respect to democratic rights, economic mobility, and citizenship—homonationalism—was aided by the mobilization of queer sexuality to discipline and police racialized bodies. While queerness as both a discourse and a framework are often theorized as liberatory, transgressive, subversive, and freedom from heteronormative norms and practices, in this instance, according to Puar (2007) queer becomes regulatory, operating to mark the white queer as the ideal queer against racialized bodies as improper, perverse and/or inhabiting queerness in limited ways. Holding the tension between the liberatory and regulatory potential of queerness, I am hesitant to impose and apply Euro-American paradigms of sexualities to the Caribbean landscape, in particular, Guyana. Instead, throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate the ways in which queerness, queer of color theory, and other writings from a Euro-American context intersect with Caribbean sexualities and may or may not be applicable to Guyana.

Existing scholarship on same-sex relations in the Caribbean has examined a number of areas such as nationalism, violence, citizenship, and homophobia to name a few (Atluri, 2001;

Wahab, 2012; Alexander 1994; 2005; Smith, 2011, Wekker, 2006; Tinsley, 2012; Glave 2008, Gosine, 2009, Robinson, 2009; Murray, 2012). However, discussions of sexuality remain connected predominantly to men and masculinities. The hypervisibility of male homosexuality is often discussed within the context of HIV, homophobia, and violence in the public sphere of the Caribbean (Gosine, 2009; Padilla, 2007; Murray, 2009; Wahab, 2016). Barry Chevannes (2002) portrays the visibility of male heterosexuality and homosexuality in the public sphere as a natural phenomenon, that is male sexuality is "'seen', public; it belongs to the realm of the day. Women's sexuality is 'unseen' and 'private', belonging to the realm of the night" (2002, p. 489). The natural splitting of the public (read as belonging to both heterosexual and homosexual men) and private realm (read as belonging to heterosexual women) by Chevannes obscures the complex histories and heteronormative structures that have operated to place women's bodies and sexualities in the private space. Such an assumption and analysis also erase gender-segregated spaces or liminal spaces such as the yard culture and garden space offered by Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2010), or Matikor by Rosanne Kanhai (1999), that exist on the boundaries of private/public. When conversations of female sexuality enter into the public discussion, it is often in the context of heterosexism, nationalism, sex work, tourism, labour arrangements, cultural productions (Kempadoo, 2004; Peake & Trotz, 1999; Alexander, 1994; Mohammed, 2002; Kanhai, 1999; 2011; Mehta, 2004; Niranjana, 2006; Bahadur, 2013). Women who love women desires, relationships, claims to citizenship, and access to rights, among other issues, remain relatively invisible in the public imagination and in current theorizations of Caribbean women's sexualities.

Current literature, anthologies, and ethnographic and literary works have explored the multiple ways in which women often engage in a myriad of relations, both heteronormative and

homonormative across the Caribbean. Located between the global north and south, the Caribbean space has been forged between multiple histories of colonialism, patriarchies, nationalist movements, and violence. It is in this space that scholars such as J. Alexander (1994; 2005), Joan French and Michelle Cave (1995), Krystal Ghisyawan (2016), Gayatri Gopinath (2005), Kamala Kempadoo (2004), Rosamond S. King (2008; 2014), Angelique Nixon and Rosamond S. King (2012; 2017), Angelique Nixon (2016), Lauren Pragg (2012), Makeda Silvera (1991) Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2010), and Gloria Wekker (2006) have turned their attention to the ways in which women who engage in same-sex/gender relations resist hegemonic notions of heterosexuality for alternative social and living arrangements. For instance, the Caribbean space contains a range of ideas, vocabularies, and networks of non-normative sexualities, and more importantly, the specific conditions which gave rise to intimacy between same-sex women. These conditions are what makes the Caribbean both a space and a site of analysis different from the global north. Tinsley (2010) draws attention to a range of gender and sexual formations, identities, and practices that are indigenous to creole societies, which existed prior to the rise of queerness in the North American context (p. 242). Rosamund King (2014) also notes that the Creolized vernacular includes "zami"—used as either a verb or a noun—to refer to the intimacy between women, "man royal" to refer to women loving women in Jamaica, and Jamettes in Trinidad, and others such as "kambrada, ma divine, and cachapera" (p.101).

More extensive research on same-sex practices is documented in Suriname by Gloria Wekker (2006) who focuses on the sexual subjectivity and agency of working-class Afro-Surinamese women expressed in their practice of Mati work. Expressing critical agency, desire, and resistance to heteronormative arrangements, Mati work refers to a complex social, political, and sexual system, where women may or may not choose to be involved with other women. In this

case study, Mati work is understood within a framework of labour, that is women "do" Mati work which remains unattached to categories of sexual identities. Mati work, then, may involve women who may have children, establish a home, and may engage in sexual relations with men and women, either simultaneously or independently. Wekker challenges the reader to think of Mati work, grounded in the cosmology of Winti, not as an identity, such as, heterosexual and homosexual, but rather as a set of behaviours in which an individual is constructing sexual selfhood. Similarly, Natasha Tinsley (2010) examines tropes and metaphors in Caribbean women's writing to theorize same-sex desire between women. Central to Tinsley's line of analysis is her use of Jamaican writer Michelle Cliff's seminal question, "What would it mean for a woman to love another woman in the Caribbean?" (p. 5) reminding us of the centrality that location plays when discussing sexuality. For a woman to love another woman, she invokes the image of a cane cutter stealing sugar to illustrate the appropriation and transgression of social norms to narrate desire between women in the Caribbean. As Tinsley (2010) argues, plotting the sugar thiefing of Caribbean women who love women means opening discursive space for sexuality studies to engage in historically specific, previously unmapped erotic geographies, looking for what resistant sexualities mean outside the metropole and in the (cane) field (p. 3)

By reading various texts, she reimagines and reconstructs the colonial space of the Caribbean to map out historically invisible and silenced sexualities, bringing to light the complex ways in which women have loved each other. Both Wekker and Tinsley not only challenge North American and European conceptions of sexual identities, formations, and kinship structures, but remind us of the theoretical limitations of gay and lesbian studies, queerness, queer theory, and sexual identities, and that they are only one formation of non-normative sexuality and sexual

subjectivity, "and that listening to other languages, and others' historically specific sexual self-understanding, is crucial to broadening the field" (Tinsley, 2011, p. 6). By pointing to a wide range of sexual expressions such as Mati work, man royals, or zami, Tinsley (2010) argues, "when a woman loves a woman in the Caribbean, none of these words will mean the same as they do in the Global North (p. 15). Other theorizations have also focused on the works of Shani Mootoo (Mehta, 2004) and exploring the cultural space of Matikor as a potentially "queer" space for Indo-Caribbean women (Kanhai,1999; Pragg, 2012; Puar, 2009) and the artistic productions of Michelle Mohabeer (Atluri, 2009) and Shalini Seereeram's work (Nixon 2016). More recently, the work of Krystal Ghisyawan (2016) using the identity category of "same-sex women and same-sex loving" in Trinidad, describes the ways in which sexual practices, behaviours, and desires are experienced and embodied by women, which may be tied to romantic relationships, sexual relations, and friendships, rather than sexual identities (p. 13-14). Using a "mapping" method, Ghisyawan (2016) asked her participants, women who engage in same-sex relations, to draw maps of where they felt safe as same-sex loving women. Referring to this as "queer safe places" she demonstrates the ways in which safety and same-sex desires are negotiated across a range of spaces, both locally and transnationally, challenging our conception of the region as a homophobic space and intolerant of queer bodies (Ghisyawan, 2016).

While there is more recent attention and focus on same-sex women's relationships in the region, scholars have pointed to the ways in which heteropatriarchy, heteronormativity, and violence erases same-sex women's presence. King (2008) writes that "Women who choose extramarital sex and childbearing, non-monogamous relationships, non-nuclear family structures, or lesbianism have always been maligned by those in power" (p. 193). Those who transgress the gender codes, do not conform to heterosexuality, and sometimes the racial boundaries, are seen

as disruptive and threating to the dominant social order. Examining female sexuality and gender roles in Barbados, Charmaine Crawford (2012) claims that "lesbophobia" is a result of the heteronormative beliefs that simultaneously produce lesbian sexuality as a site of the male gaze and "raises concern because the heteropatriarchal order is doubly threatened – men do not have access to these women and lesbians might be sexual competition for men" (n.p). Through the combination of breaking gender and sexual roles, heteronormativity pathologizes same-sex female relations, marking such desires as deviant, dysfunctional, and dangerous, and through violence, men attempt to "reinforce male dominance and legitimize hetero-sex" (Crawford, 2012). Building on these texts, I include the narratives of LGBQ women and WLW experiences from Guyana, showing their particular experiences of race, class, gender, family, and violence as these factors intersect with the same-sex desires within location specific contexts.

Throughout this dissertation, then, I engage with scholarship from the region that theorizes Caribbean same-sex sexualities and practices, and literature cutting across different disciplines such as queer studies, queer of color scholarship, queer geography, migration, and feminist studies to illustrate moments of applicability, collusions, complicities, and resistance to current understandings of same-sex sexualities. This dissertation draws on these multiple discourses centering the voices and experiences of women who love women in Guyana, who are invisible within these perceptions of same-sex relations and desires in the country, and more broadly across the region. It returns the heteropatriarchal gaze by demonstrating the ways in which women who love women not only exist but actively resist, negotiate, and reassert themselves into a state that ignores and erases their presences. Situated within the overarching heteronormative state and institutions, this dissertation also interrogates the ways in which women are not only subjected to violence but also the ways in which they participate in enacting

violence against women. It further traces and examines the ways in which their social locations in an urban/rural dichotomy shape and inform their sexual identity, subjectivity, and place in the society, and the ways in which their erotic subjectivity reconfigures our ideas of sexual citizenship, inclusion and belonging in the state. The bold and defying act of daring to desire someone else, other women, is the subject of this dissertation, revealing women's initial decisions to be with men, and their violent relationships with men, other women, and the shared intimacy, desire and love they continue to experience on the Guyanese landscape.

A note on language

In designing my research project, I was confronted with the issue of how to "name" or what terminologies to use in accessing women who engaged in relationships with other women but did not claim a sexual identity or orientation, to participate in my project. I was aware that Guyana can be a highly violent space, both to myself and for my potential participants. The normalization of violence across Guyana made me hesitant to identify as a queer woman conducting research with women who love women. I knew that I had to be careful in selecting the language that I was using to describe not only myself, the work that I was seeking to conduct, but also that most of my potential participants may not identify under the acronym of LGBTQ due to fear of emotional, verbal, and physical violence by different segments of the population. If my research was going to be sent out on listservs and forwarded to individual women through word of mouth, individuals may suffer the risk of "outing" themselves or have their sexuality called into question by others. Consequently, I opted for a general language which targeted women and sought to learn about their sexual practices and involvement with human rights. Kempadoo (2009) notes that studies on same-sex relations in the Caribbean often:

note a flexibility in the name of these relations in the region…The range of terms represents, in turn, a great heterogeneity in the practices, desires, self-identification and external views of people who have sexual intercourse with, or who sexually desire, persons of the same sex or gender. In many of these studies, same-sex relations are not in the first instance claimed as an identity but rather as an activity, as people disclose information about their practice without identifying or viewing themselves as homosexual, queer, gay, lesbian, or transgender (p. 5). Paying attention to Kempadoo's point on the ways in which individuals express their sexuality: through varied behaviours and relations, and the differences between praxis versus identities, I frame my study as one in which I sought to learn about women's sexual practices, experiences, and involvement with human rights. The general framing of the research project enabled me to capture a range of understandings and practices of sexuality, as opposed to imposing an identity framework on my potential participants. My main concern was that if I attempted to recruit individuals who identify as "gay", "lesbian", "bisexual" "trans" or "queer" I would not be able to interview individuals who engage in same-sex/gender desires outside of these identity categories. In fact, the second largest category of sexual identification by my participants was "women who like/date/love women." The generality of the study allowed my participants to talk about their sexuality in often multiple and contradicting ways. For instance, one participant discussed being married to a man, but was having relationships with women, and did not identify as straight, bisexual and/or queer. How do we make sense of this narrative and through which framework do we read her sexuality which perhaps exceeds both heterosexual and homosexual paradigms? Throughout this dissertation, then, I used the categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual depending on how the women self-identified, and 'women-who-love women' to signify their behaviours, desires, attractions to other women as one form of relationship, or

sexual praxis (Kempadoo 2009), while not erasing their relationships either previously or currently to men. This dissertation highlights their sexual praxis in relationship to other women. All of the women in this dissertation identified as cis-gender women at the time, with sexual and romantic attraction towards other women.

While I approached my study from the framework of practice/praxis, in Berbice I was confronted with how to tell people about my project and how to reach out to potential participants. As I was discussing my project with a family friend, explaining how I was interested in talking to women who might be having relationships with other women, he interjected and said, he knew of a woman who a "wuk pon truck like a man." He began to tell me that she "a build house with them guys in the villages and she ah drink with them in the rum shop." At first, I was not sure as to why he was telling me this, or how this woman matched my research interests, but I realized that in him explaining to me what she does in terms of her occupation, i.e., doing jobs outside of her gender roles, are the ways in which "queerness" were understood in the village. It was the fact that she works with other men and drinks with them in the village rum shop—two domains that women traditionally do not step into—that helped understand her as gender and sexually non-conforming. He further went on to tell me that "she deh" with another woman. The word "deh" is a local way of referring to "there," as in "over deh." In this context, though, it is used to imply that a person might be having a romantic/sexual relationship with another person. I write of this example to illustrate the different ways in which what we call "queerness" might be routed and understood through other registers such as occupation, or of the ways in which local communities recognize same-sex relationship. In Berbice, even though the women that I interviewed identified as 'loving women' and LGB, there

could be a large number of women who do not use this language, but who "deh" with other women in different villages.

Research Objectives

My dissertation seeks to interrogate how various heteronormative bodies and institutions such as the male gaze, the media, the legal system, and political parties participate in, produce, and shape our understandings of gender, sexuality, and citizenship, especially as it applies to same-sex women's subjectivity and relations in Guyana. It investigates the linkages between heteronormative structures and the manifestations of violence in Guyana, emphasizing the experiences of violence that WLW and LGBQ women's experience on a daily basis. Another significant aim of this project is to develop and map out an account of LGBQ women and WLW sexuality as it intersects with race, gender, class, religion, migration, and space, demonstrating how women's social locations and positionality are essential in their construction of their sexual subjectivity and need to be considered in sexual rights debates and LGBTQ human rights movements in the country and the wider region. More broadly, this dissertation seeks to offer a different representation of Guyanese women outside of the historical archetypes of womanhood, carving out space within theory and practice to show the ways in which WLW are present, visible, and are enacting a politics of resistance to survive.

Research Questions

This dissertation grounds itself in a set of interrelated questions, starting with the overarching question:

1. How does heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity, embedded in social, political, and cultural institutions, shape and influence the lives of women who love women and LGBQ women in Guyana?

a.   How do race, gender, sexuality, class, and spatial differences operate to structure the lives of LGBQ women and WLW in Guyana? How do these differences inform their sexual identity and subjectivity in urban and rural spaces?

b.   Are there different types and manifestations of violence within a heteropatriarchal state and culture? If so, what are they? How do LGBQ women and WLW negotiate the culture of violence in Guyana?

c.   How does the transnational flow of "sexual rights" impact and shape women's understanding of same-sex marriage, citizenship, and activism in Guyana?

d.   What is the role of erotic subjectivity in supporting, challenging, and resisting the dominant discourse of heteropatriarchy, violence, sexual rights, identities, and citizenship?

e.   How does erotic subjectivity offer us a space to understand WLW sexual agency and the making of spaces of love and belonging against violent structures?

Thesis Statement

Taking an intersectional analysis, this dissertation locates LGBQ women and WLW within the heteronormative and heteropatriarchal context of Guyana. I argue that there needs to be a sustained attentiveness to the ways in which women who love women express their sexuality in urban and rural spaces and that regardless of how women identify, they experience varying degrees of violence by existing in a heteropatriarchal state. I further argue that regional differences, race, and class influence and differentiate women's experiences of LGBQ identities, citizenship, activism, and civil rights. Paying attention to the location-specific sites of Georgetown and Berbice in Guyana provides a space for interrogating the cultural nuances of claiming and embodying intersecting identities, navigating a culture of violence, and tracing small acts of LGBQ women and WLW resistance.

In examining urban/rural differences, this dissertation demonstrates the ways in which race, class, gender, and space function to shape and mold women's praxis and sexual identities, while simultaneously showing how their identities shift across geographical locations. The intersecting registers also operate to determine the ways in which LGBQ women and WLW, whether in urban Georgetown or rural Berbice are integrated into their communities, are visible/invisible, out and proud, accessing queer spaces, and forging alternative ways of belonging. In chapter three of this dissertation, for instance, I argue that working-class women in rural Berbice who were previously married and have children are incorporated into their family structures and villages through alternative categories of belonging. Rural middle-class women, although their class status enables them to live a comfortable and secure life in their village, still aspire to create a life elsewhere. Additionally, the urban/rural dichotomy is critical in the women's imagined perception of each other; what the urban and rural space means, how it oppresses or liberates their counterparts in their sexual exploration, also shapes their own positionality and sexual subjectivity. It is in this imagined freedom that each group of women in Georgetown and Berbice constructs particular narratives of themselves and their possibilities. Importantly, it is in their resistance to dominant LGBTQ discourses of 'coming out' and being 'out and proud', which offers us a different picture of their lives in the context of Guyana, that the importance of this dissertation lies. Some of their resistance to the heteropatriarchal state lies in their experiences and negotiations of violence. Cutting across both regions, I center the multiple experiences of violence that my participants have experienced and continue to endure. I argue for a broader conceptualization of violence to be considered as an affective force, illustrating the different types of violence that LGBQ women and WLW experience and enact. To this end, the women are both survivors and participants of violence as I demonstrate in chapter five.

The women's experience of violence is intimately connected to a broader culture of human rights. In chapter six, grounded in a heteropatriarchal culture, where women are second-class citizens, this dissertation explores the ways in which LGBQ women and WLW understand sexual citizenship, same-sex marriage laws, and LGBTQ rights. Paying keen attention to class, race, and space, I map out the ways in which these categories are interpreted and experienced by middle- and working-class women in Georgetown and Berbice. I suggest that urban and rural women participate in a transnational queer discourse of LGBTQ rights, information, and media content based on their regional location and class realities. The idea of the erotic, which feminist and queer scholars in the region have explored, is also central to this chapter. Turning to working-class women's experience and lives in Berbice, I demonstrate the power of the erotic as embodied by working-class women across racial differences in their acts of resistance to the racialized heteropatriarchal state. The erotic is an important compass guiding working-class women as they navigate the intersecting factors of violence, their sexual praxis, and subjectivities. These racial, class, gender, and geographical positionalities further make visible what kinds of activism, public engagement, and political endeavours LGBQ women and WLW participate in across both regions. These vectors enable the women in each location to imagine and seek rights that sometimes parallel Western LGBTQ human rights discourses, and at other times contest these movements and conceptualizations of 'rights.' In the conclusion, I return to an intersectional analysis to suggest that sexual identities of LGBQ, WLW as a praxis, and access to LGBTQ citizenship, rights and activism are influenced by race, class, age and urban/ rural spaces. I argue that violence is an affect which heteropatriarchy is a manifestation of and that both men and women are enactors and victims of violence in Guyana.

Theoretical Frameworks

Writing on the politics of passion, Wekker (2006) notes that "…sexuality in a particular setting is something that people shape collectively on the basis of the cultural archives and changing political and economic circumstances…politics acknowledges that power is negotiated both in cross-sex and same-sex relationships, that there is a politics to passion" (p. 67). In this dissertation, I examine LGBQ women and WLW sexuality, sexual experiences, practices, and desires as they intersect with the theories and concepts of (1), race, gender, and class differences in shaping their lives in urban Georgetown and rural Berbice; (2) violence (3) erotic subjectivities and sexual citizenship, showing that within a context of heteropatriarchal dominance, women also collectively negotiate, shape and contest the sexual domain based on their subjective positioning. Who and how these women choose to love or desire, are acts of resistance, moments of compromise and struggle, against a culture of violence, gender inequalities, and increasing poverty. This dissertation situates itself within the three registers of violence, 'race, gender, and class differences,'and sexual citizenship and erotic subjectivities, which serve as the basis for the rest of the chapters.

Sexuality, Race, Class, and Gender in the Caribbean and Guyana

Caribbean feminist scholars have noted the ways in which gender, class, and social stratification, tied to race, particularly skin color and phenotype, have structured Caribbean societies (Reddock 1988; Kempadoo 2003; Peake & Trotz 1999), with each social determinant having multiple social, economic, and political implications on women's lives. In the Caribbean region, race is often the basis through which group boundaries are established and reconstituted (Reddock, 1998, p. 66). Race is generally understood through physical characteristics of "phenotype, physical features, and area of origin", whereas ethnicity refers to characteristics

such as religion and other cultural practices (Reddock, 2007, p. 2). In addition, ethnicity can also refer to an element is seen as belonging to a group and/or a contribution that a group has made to the nation (Williams, 1991). In Guyana, ethnicity is understood as the vehicle that persons of different racial stock and cultural background use to conceptualize their contribution to the development of a sociocultural order that is more than the sum of its ethnic parts. On the other hand, meanings attributed to ethnic differentiation allow groups to justify gaining from society by pointing out what they have given to the society. On the other hand, these meanings encourage a sense of "ownership" through which the cultural context of Guyanese society and different aspects of its economic structure are claimed by particular groups. Cultural products such as religions, cuisines, rituals, and economic roles are conceived as "belonging" to one ethnic segment or another—either by reference to a historical link to a national origin outside Guyana or to a predominance of one's involvement in a role or in the use of an item in Guyana (Williams, 1991, p. 176). Ethnic differences such as religion, cultural practices, types of food, etc. are often seen as racial differences (Peake & Trotz, 1999; Danns, 2014). Although race and ethnicity are used interchangeably in Guyana and the Caribbean, Reddock writes that "these differences are seen as distinctive and used to signify difference in relation to other collectivities" (2007, p. 3).

In Guyana, these assumed ethnic/racial differences are further complicated by racial identities. The women within my study embody multiple indigenous identities, often identifying as mixed race, "dougla", "buffiannda," or what Raghunandan (2012) has referred to as "hyphenated identities." These identities emerge within and are further intertwined with their location in space and place. In urban Georgetown, the majority of the women, with the exception of three, identified as mixed race. In Berbice, though, the identity of 'Indo-Guyanese' is at the

forefront, where out of the ten women, seven identified as Indo-Guyanese, emphasizing their

Indian and Guyanese identities. The region of Berbice, in comparison to urban Georgetown, is

generally perceived to be an Indian enclave, given its ethnic/racial make-up along with its labour

scheme. The space of Berbice is inscribed with racialized, gendered and labour ideologies, where

the place is symbolically imagined as a space of what Peake and Trotz (1999) refer to as

"'Indianness.'" Similar to the collapsing of race/ethnicity, sex and gender are rarely seen as two

distinct formations in the Caribbean, with "women hav[ing] gendered identities, men are sexed"

(Lewis, 2003, p. 3), although this is starting to change (Wekker, 2005; Lewis, 2003; Kempadoo,

2009; Mohammed, 2003).

Writing on the sex/gender binary and what is meant by 'gender' and 'sexuality' in the

region, Kempadoo (2009) writes that,

> sexual practices and arrangements are held to be operational around a gender binary that
> firmly attaches the biological to the social, and where heterosexuality is seen as the only
> form of legitimate sexuality. The collapse of sex and gender in everyday and academic
> discourse often elides the existence of persons whose social identities, sexual practices or
> physical bodies do not adhere or conform to these categories. Caribbean sexuality then
> regularly appears as rigidly heterosexual and intolerant of sexual difference. Sex folds
> into gender, and masculinity and femininity are viewed as complements to each other:
> two parts of a whole. Moreover, heterosexual gender identities are rigidly defined (p. 9).

The fixity of biological sex to traditional gender roles results in the normalization of

heterosexuality, which leaves very little room for non-conforming bodies and sexualities to be

visible, make political, social, and economic claims, and simply exist in the region without fear

of violence. This has led scholars, activists, and artists to take an intersectional approach in

examining the ways in which same-sex identities, subjectivities, desires, and relations intersect

with race, class, gender, citizenship, and nationalism within the region (Alexander 1994; 2005;

Atluri, 2001; Ghisyawan, 2016; Gosine, 2006; Glave, 2008; King, 2014; Murray, 2012; Nixon,

2015; Robinson, 2008; 2009; Smith, 2011; Tinsley, 2010; Wahab, 2012; Wekker, 2006).

Regarding same-sex women and violence, Rosamond King (2014) offers us the paradigm of invisibility for women who desire women, arguing that the connections between patriarchy, sexism, and heteronormativity erases women's desire for other women, and when these systems cannot do so, women are met with violence as a means to silence their sexual expressions. This violence is reflected in Charmaine Crawford's (2012) writing on Barbados and "lesbophobia" in which she has analyzed the deliberate ways in which "lesbophobia" is manifested through a myriad of sites: patriarchy and heterosexism which operate to order women's bodies and sexuality; compulsory heterosexual gender norms which are also reinforced by the legal system; the delegitimizing of lesbian sex; and espousing beliefs of lesbianism as pathological and dirty. In spite of these overarching structures of heteropatriarchy, heterosexism, homophobia and violence, for example, Ghisyawan (2016) in her ethnographic work, demonstrates the ways in which same-sex loving women in Trinidad negotiate and engage with everyday geographical spaces such as home, online sites, religious spaces, and places in nature, to find different degrees of safety and freedom (p. 137-138). Put differently, by asking her participants to draw maps of where they feel "safe" as same-sex women, Ghisyawan's work (2016) shows how space-making challenges our assumptions about the heteronormativity of spaces, the identities produced and embodied within said spaces, and how same-sex desires also transform these places of belonging. Building on these works, my work in Guyana locates LGBQ women and WLW within the structures of heteropatriarchy, heterosexism, and violence to analyze the experiences of violence, claims to human rights and citizenship, and the enactment of their desire for other women.

Women's racial/ethnic and sexual identities are also forged in relation to their class status. Guyana is a multi-racial/ethnic country with a corresponding class and color-coded system (Peake & Trotz, 1999; Danns, 2014). Class is directly connected to colonial structures, where the white colonial planter class was at the top of the social order, followed by a "Portuguese entrepreneurial class" and "colored mulatto mixed race bureaucratic class, and Chinese in "commercial" sectors (Danns, 2014, p. 68). The bulk of Afro-Guyanese formed the urban class in the city, offering "skilled labour" and moving gradually into sectors of "teaching" and other "civil services", whereas Indo-Guyanese, largely tied to plantations, formed a "rural peasantry" (Danns, 2014, p. 68). In the moments leading up to Guyana's independence, some Afro and Indo-Guyanese formed the new middle-upper class bourgeoisie in the urban center (Rodney, 1981). In rural Berbice, although emerging from a working-class history of plantations (Danns, 2014), a significant number of Indo-Guyanese have ascended the social hierarchy through their class status, regardless of skin color. This has led the region to have significant economic, political, and cultural influence during election periods. Class formations in Guyana continue to change, depending on which political party is in power, the opening up of Guyana's market to neoliberal agendas, increasing privatization by transnational corporations, and ongoing racial/ethnic tensions. This becomes evident in Chapter Four on Berbice.

Given these ongoing fluctuations, I draw on sociologist Rosemary Crompton's (2008) distinction between class and social stratifications. She argues that "class" is a multifaceted concept with a range of meanings (p. 15). Outlining three different meanings of class, she notes that class is "prestige, status, culture or "lifestyles", [class] structured[s] social and economic inequality (related to the possession of economic and power resources, [and] 'classes' [can] [be] actual or potential social and political actors" (2008, p. 15). Stratification, on the other hand, is a

"hierarchical positioning in the social order, at both macro-and micro-levels…" (2008, p. 8). One's position in the social order, though, is contingent upon race, gender, age, religious affiliation, and behavioural norms (Compton, 2008, p. 8). Taking "class" beyond the narrow confines of occupational groups with material/economic rewards, Compton (2008) argues that it is not a universal concept. The meanings, values, rewards, and punishment ascribed to the category, its symbolism, and the ways in which people understand and relate to the category itself, depends on the context. In this dissertation, I borrow from Compton's outline of class and stratification, demonstrating consistently the ways in which class and stratification intersect with race, gender, and sexuality to shape the lives of LGBQ women and WLW in Georgetown and Berbice.

In my study, in urban Georgetown, for example, twenty-one out of twenty-five women identified as middle class, mostly owning their own business and working in private and/or public sectors of the economy. In Berbice, however, participants had difficulty naming their class status. When they were asked to describe their class backgrounds, three tensions emerged from middle-class participants. Firstly, participants used the language of "we okay", "we have money," or "we comfortable" to discuss their class background. When probed a bit further regarding what does "we okay" mean to them, they were uneasy in identifying with a class structure. With the exception of one participant who went on to say, "middle class," two middle-class women positioned and identified themselves as "working class," despite having access to land, multiple properties, and financial stability. Even though they use the language of "working class," throughout this dissertation, I suggest that these women cannot be categorized as "working class." I read their economic and social status as one aligning with middle-upper class values. In my perspective, these women embody middle-upper class given their varied

professions of teachers, doctors, business owners, bankers, and lawyers. Thirdly, if we pay heed to Compton's suggestion of "class" as both economic possession and status, three participants'—Mina, Veronica, and Natasha—class stratification is articulated through the values, meanings and social status that are conferred to their professions, along with their parents. For instance, their parents work in "respectable" positions such as teaching, medicine, finance, and were religious figures in the community. Consequently, there is a disjuncture between their "working class" identification, their economic status, and the ways in which these women understand their class identities in Berbice.

This dissertation utilizes these particular understandings of race, gender, class, and sexuality, and positions Guyana as a multiethnic society, illustrating how these multiple and fragmented identities operate in the lives LGBQ women and WLW. While the women's lives are shaped by these dominant ideas, throughout this dissertation I also show the ways in which they negotiate, contest, and sometimes undermine these categories through their sexual identities, practices, and erotic desire.

Violence

Valerie Youssef (2010) argues that violence in most Caribbean nations is a "way of life" as it is profoundly ingrained within the culture itself (see Chapter 1 for an in-depth discussion of violence in the region). How and where did this "way of life" come from? What conditions continue to sustain this "way of life?" In his seminal work Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon (1963) writes that colonial societies, a Manichean world, are deeply structured between settler and native, where colonial rule is maintained through violence. The settler is the "bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native" (Fanon, 1963, p. 38). For Fanon, violence is not only structural in the geographic, social, economic, and political layout, it is also

intertwined in the colonizeds' psychological experience (1963). The colonizer projects and marks the colonized subject as lacking Western values and rationality, that is, the colonized subject becomes "dehumanized" by colonialism and it "turns him into an animal" (Fanon, 1963, p. 42). While he advocates for violence as a "cleansing force" and a means through which colonized subjects can create a new identity, Fanon does not suggest that all native intellectuals behave this way, but rather the impacts of colonialism enable such conditions and behaviours (1963, p. 94). Fanon (1963) also warns that some "native intellect" desires the colonizer's place (p. 44-45). In other words, the native intellectual or bourgeois is "permeated by colonialism and its ways of thinking" and no longer desires to "co-exist" with other natives (p. 45), and hence during and after the period of decolonization, "the Manicheism which governed colonial society is preserved intact…" (p. 50). Thus, according to Fanon (1963), some of the structures of colonial societies and the violence used in the colonial context is also reproduced within post-colonial nations.

This has led historian Bridget Brereton (2010) to argue that Caribbean nations were forged in violence, which has at its origin the genocide of indigenous peoples, the advent of slavery, and the subsequent replacement of slavery with indentured immigration (p.13). These historical conditions gave rise to what Brereton calls a "culture of violence" where violence is a pervasive feature and a normalized characteristic of most Caribbean nations. Building on Brereton's argument, Youssef and Morgan's (2010) work is helpful here, for they identify four distinct features to help us understand how culture is constituted. They define culture as a "shared patterns of living, or day-to-day living interactions; the primary way in which a society adapts/changes, the ways in which one group is able to distinguish themselves from members of another group; and it is a system of collectively held values" (Youssef & Morgan 2010, p. 2).

Violence, when incorporated within the framework of culture as suggested by Youssef and Morgan, allows us to decipher the ways in which violence is a normal part of daily interactions in the Caribbean because of the history of colonialism. Violence is a shared characteristic among people that cuts across racial, class, and sexual formations. It is often used to meditate or end conflict, although problematically seen as either putting an end to the problem or facilitating change. Violence is also used to physically and symbolically demarcate communal boundaries (Mohapatra, 1995; Peake and Trotz, 1999), and as a value system assigns meanings, rewards, and punishes both oppressor and oppressed (Youssef & Morgan, 2010, p. 2). If violence is a normal feature of Caribbean culture, then Youssef & Morgan (2010) make a compelling argument that we cannot understand contemporary episodes of violence in Caribbean societies and facilitate change, unless we recognize the colonial and neo-colonial structures that continue to fuel the experiences of violence.

The overall heteropatriarchal culture is one such structure left intact by former colonial power that continues this cycle of violence, against other men, women, children, LGBTQ people, sex workers, and other marginalized individuals across the region. The violence is transmitted and dispersed through different versions of racialized heteropatriarchal masculinity in the Caribbean, or, as Mohammed (2002, p. 11) notes, "competing patriarchies" that are largely state actors (Lazarus-Black, 2003; Alexander, 2005; Morgan & Youssef, 2006), and through the quotidian socialization of boys and youths into performing hegemonic masculinity (Lewis, 2007; Chevannes, 2001). The intersection of masculinity, race, sexuality, economy, and the shifts in traditional gender roles enabled by neoliberal markets produce a complex continuum of violence on the Caribbean landscape (Lewis, 2007; Plummer & Geofroy, 2010; Crichlow et al., 2014). These structures continue to produce and sustain a hegemonic Caribbean masculinity, where

violence is sanctioned and seen as a "resource to gain economic power and control, and as a mechanism to establish and maintain control over women, children and non-conforming males" (Henderson, 2014, p. 278). This dissertation seeks to demonstrate the ways in which non-conforming bodies, particularly women who do not fit into Caribbean understandings of masculinities and femininities, are met with violence, both physical and verbal, from the state and the public.

Violence against women enacted by men is an essential part of maintaining patriarchal power. However, this framework does not account for or explain why women enact violence against other women. And what exactly constitutes violence? What does the term imply, refer to, and how is it used to capture a wide range of experiences? Is patriarchy one mechanism that structures violence? Could it be that patriarchy is only one name of the violence? Could there be different ways in which violence is structured and produced? Kempadoo (2009) draws our attention to this issue, that works on violence in the Caribbean have offered little explanations about the different meanings of violence (p. 3, emphasis mine). As outlined above, Fanon sees violence as a necessary liberating force through which a colonized subject can refashion their subjectivity and find "freedom" (1963, p. 96) from the conditions of colonialism. And while he advocates for violence as a liberating cathartic force, he also documents the negative effects of violence, both structurally and psychologically. For instance, psychosomatic disorders, mental health problems, and trauma within colonized subjects are also sustained and exacerbated by the structures of colonialism (Fanon, 1963, 289-291)

Building on Fanon's notion of violence as a force that is both positive and negative, my aim, then, is to offer a reconceptualization on the meanings of violence, and how through such a reconceiving of violence we can critique the ontological assumptions in place about the

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meanings of violence. Taking a post-modern approach to violence, I draw from Fanon's idea of violence as a force and Graham Matthews and Sam Goodman's (2013) definition of violence as "fluid rather than fixed…it is more productive to conceive of violence as a mutable category, which is preventable through considerations of social, cultural, and political contexts" (p.3). I start from the premise that violence, as a category of analysis and as an experience, is permutable and malleable. I argue that we conceive of violence as an intensity or force in which the body has the capacity to act or be acted upon. Writing on power and violence, Johanna Oksala (2012) notes that "capacity…refers to a force that we exert over things, our ability to modify, use, consume, or destroy them. Violence is thus clearly a capacity in this sense, it is a force we exert over bodies and things, and it must therefore be demarcated from power" (p. 74). Expanding the narrowly confined understandings of violence (largely physical) to focus on violence as a force is a conceptual move I make throughout this dissertation. Conceiving of violence more broadly as a force, an intensity, that is permeable, and fluid opens a discursive space, where we can start thinking about the various ways in which different individuals' access, participate in, uphold, and exercise violence. Violence does not exist in isolation or in a vacuum, but rather it is filtered and fashioned in multiple ways, with patriarchy being one such mechanism through which violence is organized and produced. It is sustained, fashioned, enacted, and attached to bodies in multiple and intersecting ways. Conceptualizing violence as an affectual category allows us to start analyzing the ways in which violence is multifaceted, occurs in often subtle ways, and is deeply relational and complex. Where violence becomes more grounded is in the experience and meaning when it is attached to and preserved in a broader political, economic, and social context than that in which it occurs (Oksala, 2012), such as in Guyana where the rest of this dissertation unfolds. If violence is an intensity or force that circulates, then we are all solicited to witness,

participate in, and have various affective responses to violence, albeit in different ways. Consequently, Fanon suggests that there are multiple ways of reading and understanding violence, such as a deployment to rid ourselves of that which is oppressive, or violence can also be a site of empowerment to resist oppressions. This dissertation mobilizes this conceptual framework of violence as an intensity or force, with both positive and negative effects, to analyze the violence against women and between women in my study. I highlight the context of violence against and between LGBQ women and WLW to show the ways in which the culture of violence plays a critical role in structuring their choices, decisions, and overall lives. Against this context, I interrogate and argue that we need to critically engage with the different types of violence that women experience in Guyana, shifting our focus to analyze intimate partner violence within same-sex relationships, a discourse largely undertheorized within scholarly literature and in the overall culture of the Caribbean.

Transnational Sexual Citizenship and Rights

Traditionally, citizenship has been used to describe the "rights and responsibilities" of an individual within a nation, to signify one's political, civil, and social rights, and to define the ways in which an individual belongs in the nation (Richardson, 2018, p. 9-10). But as David Bell and Jon Bennie (2000) write, "all citizenship is sexual citizenship, in that the foundational tenets of being a citizen are all inflected by sexualities." (p. 10). In other words, the category of citizenship, both the citizen and the practices of citizenship, are imbued with sexuality and other social meanings. The category of citizenship is premised on a subject who is a heterosexual male and has access to both public and private spaces (Alexander, 1994; 2005; Bell & Bennie, 2000; Richardson, 2018). In the Caribbean, this has meant that other bodies such as women, children, LGBTQ subjects, sex workers, and other minorities are often excluded from the category of

citizenship on different bases (Alexander, 1999; Kempadoo, 2004; Robinson, 2000; Smith, 2011; Tambiah, 2009). Scholars have written on women's secondary position within discourses of citizenship in Caribbean society. For instance, in the Caribbean, writing on the law and women's secondary status within the law, Tracy Robinson (2000) notes that, the result is that women, while not excluded from citizenship, are not conceived in the law in the first instance as citizens, but as dependents of men, with de facto management of the family and responsibility for maintenance of family values…Second-class citizenship describes not only the hierarchy between men and women but also the hierarchy of roles for women: in one case, women are second to men as citizens, and in the other, citizenship is perceived as secondary for women (p. 19). In Guyana, Linda Peake (1993) has argued similarly that despite legislative and constitutional changes carried out by People's National Congress (PNC) in the 1980s, such as prohibiting sex discrimination in employment and education, these policies affected "women not as individuals qua women, but as wives as mothers" (p. 120-122). The law, far from seemingly neutral, also operates to designate other bodies as a subordinated group of noncitizens, socializing some back into heterosexuality, offering protection to some, and criminalizing others (Alexander, 2005; Kempadoo, 2004). LGBTQ individuals in Guyana and the broader Caribbean are often viewed as threatening the moral fabric of the nation, engaging in non-procreative sex, and subject to criminalization and violence under existing laws. The lack of legal protection means that LGBTQ subjects face high levels of discrimination and violence in employment, health care, education, and lack of access to other civil and political rights. Although the contours of citizenship are shifting, the term is underpinned by ideas of heteronormativity, heterosexuality, appropriate notions of sex, labour, gender roles, class ideologies, and the ways in which children are imagined or not within discourses of citizenship.

The term has expanded to examine different formations of citizenship such as "intimate citizenship" (Plummer, 2003), "ecological citizenship," and "consumer citizenship" (Richardson, 2018, p. 8). The term 'sexual citizenship ' is used to refer to the coalescing of sexuality and citizenship, where citizenship is a "key site of heteronormativity and the ways in which different models of citizenship are informed by heteronormative assumptions that reproduce sexual inequalities and privileges" (Richardson, 2018, p. 2). The term 'sexual citizenship' attempts to critique and re-emphasize how the 'sexual' intersects with the citizen, the local/national, and the global from the perspective and positioning of other marginalized bodies. (Richardson, 2018, p. 18-19).

A major concern with the term 'sexual citizenship' is the ways in which the category is no longer operationalized within national boundaries, that is traditional conceptualizations of sexual citizenship emphasize the rights of a subject within a national context. What is the connection between 'rights' and sexual citizenship? If there is no singular or linear definition of sexual citizenship, can rights also be universal? What does 'rights' mean? Within this model of sexual citizenship, Dianne Richardson (2000) outlines three sub-sections of 'sexual rights': conduct-based rights, identity-based rights, and relationship-based rights. Here, conduct-based rights are defined as rights of individuals who seek to practice their sexuality in various relationships. For instance, individuals might argue that their sexuality is innate/natural and seek recognition to participate in various sexual acts, both in a public and private setting (Richardson, 2000, p. 108-109). Starting in the late 1960s, identity-based rights emerged as a way to discuss one's sexual identity rather than sexual practice "as the basis for inclusion or exclusion from the category of citizenship" (Richardson, 2000, p. 116). Identity-based rights emphasize individuals' right to self-determination and realize one's sexual identity. According to Richardson (2000), the right to

self-realization is also linked to defining citizenship as a type of consumerism. In this model of consumer-citizenship, individuals' identities are reconfigured as rights of citizens as consumers, where "identities and lifestyles [are] expressed through purchasing goods, commodities, and services in both the public and private sector" (Richardson, 2000, p. 122). The last category of sexual rights, relationship-based rights, reflects the right to consent in sexual relationships, the right to choose one's sexual partner, and the right to have one's sexual relationship validated and recognized by social institutions, for instance, the right to marry and access the benefits from the institution of marriage (Richardson, 2000). Increasingly the flow of information, ideas (such as human rights discourses), and people have radically transformed how we understand citizenship, and how it is practiced, performed, and embodied (Bell& Binnie, 2000; Alexander, 2005; Richardson, 2018; Puar, 2007). Sexual citizenship, then, offers a critique and reformulation of not only the local state practices of citizenship, but also considers transnational spaces such as global cities, urban/rural divides, public/private dichotomies, migration, international legislations, pressures and movements, and their impact on sexual citizenship. Transnational sexual citizenship broadly refers to the ways in which citizenship is constituted and continuously reconfigured at both the national and global level (Richardson, 2018; Alexander, 2005).

These three categories of sexual rights are also more broadly attached to international and universal ideas of 'humans rights.' Murray (2006) writing on human rights and sexual rights in Barbados outlines three distinct categories of how "rights" are constituted: (a) the "demand for political and legal equality for all citizens of the state" (p. 270); b) as "special rights," that are a "demand by a particular minority group to be granted protected status or to be treated in some special way that will prove prejudicial to be the majority" (p. 270); and c) as a demand for legal/political equality tied to more universal articulations of human rights as "natural" and

"innate" rights (p. 270). Removing cross dressing and buggery laws in Guyana would be an instance of Murray's first explanation. The second formulation offered by Murray (2006) can be seen in numerous editorial commentators in Guyana's newspapers who argue against legalizing same-sex marriage on the grounds of morality and religion. In other words, they believe that sanctioning same-sex marriage will erode traditional and religious family structures. Local organizations such as SASOD in Guyana and in Trinidad (Ghisyawan, 2016), are advocating for rights tied to Murray's third formulation of rights as a demand for equality as human beings connected to more universal ideas of sexual rights as human rights.

I return to Richardson's ideas of sexual rights and Murray's third articulation of rights to examine the differentiated ways in which middle and working-class women enter into debates of sexual rights in Guyana. Drawing on these insights, in chapter six, I argued that the desire for 'sexual rights' as LGBT subjects is largely a middle-class phenomenon, desired by mixed-race and Indo-Guyanese women across both urban Georgetown and rural Berbice. Working-class women, on the other hand, I argue, are not invested in sexual rights in the same ways as middle-class mixed-race and Indo-Guyanese women. For working-class women, I argue that 'erotic subjectivity' is a counterpoint to sexual citizenship and the idea of rights as they have already created a community that is not dependant on the state.

Erotic Subjectivity

While I draw from the aforementioned theoretical framing of transnational sexual citizenship, within my analysis of citizenship and same-sex marriage, I also employ erotic subjectivity as a means to theorize the ways in which LGBQ women and WLW resist some of the state practices of citizenship and forge alternative ways of belonging within the state. Increasingly, scholars across the region have employed varying formations of Audre Lorde's

(1984) analytic framework of the erotic power, such as Jacqui Alexander's (2005) erotic

autonomy, Jafari Allen's (2012) erotic subjectivity, and Mimi Sheller's (2012) erotic agency,

demonstrating how resistances to neocolonial structures and ideological inequalities can be

enacted through bodily practices. For instance, Sheller's (2012) erotic agency refers to the ways

in which "one deploys the body's sexual and erotic potential in a context of constrained freedom,

social inequality, and state regulation of deviance" (p. 9). Contesting traditional models of

freedom and citizenship, Sheller (2012) examines the multiple ways in which marginalized

former-colonial subjects, who were excluded from citizenship in the post-slavery and indentured

contexts, used their bodies, or "inter-embodiments" to enact freedom and make political claims

(p. 17). Erotic agency is central to Sheller's theorizing of embodied freedom. It is through erotic

agency that embodied freedom is made possible within the context of structural violence, racial,

gender, and sexual inequalities. Erotic agency also refers to bodily performances that contest the

power and gaze of others, including performative practices such as music, dance, and worship (p.

17) that threaten to undo the "moral orders, legal systems, and state practices, both national and

transnational" (Sheller, 2012. p. 27). The erotic open up a discursive space for examining how

citizenship is embodied and performed by women on the Caribbean landscape. Erotic

subjectivity is currently a site and space from which women not only derive pleasure but

crucially a site to reimagine their engagement with legal citizenship.

Building on these insights, this dissertation maps out the ways in which working-class women

in Berbice, Guyana, embody a type of erotic subjectivity that contests and calls into question

legal definitions of citizenship. Using the category of 'erotic subjectivity/agency,' I trace the

ways in which women deploy their agency outside of the boundaries of normative

heterosexuality and state definitions of citizenship, to enact a politics of resistance against state

constraints. This is not to suggest that middle-class mixed-race and Indo-Guyanese women do not have erotic subjectivity, rather it might be expressed differently.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter one of this dissertation begins by tracing the ways in which Guyana has been forged through colonialism. Taking the lens of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity, the chapter reviews key periods in Guyana's history to show the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect, producing particular ideas regarding same-sex relations. Drawing from scholarly works in Guyana and across the Caribbean region, this chapter provides an overview of the existing literature to show how dominant understandings of gender, race, class, and sexuality have shaped, and continue to be influential on our conceptualizations of women who love women. It outlines Guyana's current laws such as the cross-dressing clause in the Sexual Offences Act and the buggery laws of the Criminal law (Offences) Act. It also draws from research produced in North America—for instance, works on queer people in rural spaces and theorizing of violence within same-sex intimate partnerships— to aid in my discussion of how urban/rural differences matter in the production of women's sexual desires, agency, and subjectivity.

Chapter two, the methodology, is divided into two broad sections. The first outlines the epistemological ideas guiding the research, grounding this project in the interdisciplinary fields of Caribbean feminist thought, Queer theory, Geography, and Gender and Women's studies. It details the methods and procedures used in the overall data collection, outlining my positioning as an "insider/outsider." In the second section, I turn towards my own personal experiences of trauma in the fieldwork process. I highlight the ways in which resonances of violence are

manifested during the fieldwork process and the ways in which trauma can be informative, productive, and generative in the research process.

Chapters three and four are closely tied together. In these two chapters, centering the women's location in urban Georgetown and rural Berbice, I trace the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality inform and shape their sexual identities and subjectivities. Taking up the "meteronormative" discourse in urban Georgetown and rural Berbice, the discussion reveals the ways in which the women, depending on their race, class, and sexual positioning, reinforce, resist, or challenge the assumption that rural spaces are intolerant of gender and sexually non-conforming individuals. The chapters further examine the ways in which women negotiate the invisibility/visibility paradigm embedded within the LGBT discourse and offer a discussion of the alternative ways in which women, depending on their social locations, are integrated into their communities.

In chapter five, Violence, taking violence to be an affectual energy, a force, I argue that there are different types of violence that women have experienced in Guyana. It examines multiple experiences of violence such as rape, racialized/sexualized violence, intimate partner abuse within same-sex relations, and psychological manifestations of violence. The analyses offered in this chapter suggest that violence cannot be conceptualized only within patriarchal and heteronormative frameworks, as women's experiences extend beyond these dominant frameworks of violence. In this chapter, I argue that while feminist conceptualizations of gender-based violence are critical in the region, they miss the more nuanced ways in which violence is manifested and experienced in the lives of women, especially within same-sex relationships. To this extent, the discourses of violence reproduce a heteronormative basis for theorizing and explaining gender-based violence. These discourses also fail to consider, for

example, how violence is racialized and sexualized, as I show throughout this dissertation. Following Fanon's theorizing of violence as an affectual force, I move beyond these frameworks to argue that Caribbean feminist scholars and queer theorists need to critically engage with the production and experience of violence beyond its current heterosexist and heteronormative underpinnings.

In chapter six, I examine the discourse of "sexual rights" as human rights in Guyana and the different ways in which women, both in Georgetown and Berbice, interpret and understand these ideas. Focusing on same-sex marriage and sexual citizenship, this discussion illustrates how women engage with and participate in these ideas, despite the illegality of same-sex relations and marriage. Taking "erotic subjectivity" as the central category of analysis, the chapter looks at the ways in which women challenge heteronormative laws, violence, and the overall heteropatriarchal culture as LGBQ women and WLW.

The final chapter brings together key findings from my study and presents a tentative conclusion. Summarizing my findings in each chapter, this dissertation advances that we as scholars, students, and activists conducting work in Guyana, must emphasize and take an intersectional analysis in our respective projects.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALIZING RACE, GENDER, CLASS AND SEXUALITY IN GUYANA

The current literature on same-sex relations, especially in relationship to women in Guyana, is non-existent, but across the Anglophone Caribbean there is a proliferation of research on same-sex identities, relationships, and subjectivities. In this literature review, I draw on existing literature from Guyana and the Anglophone Caribbean, as well as material from North America to discuss LGBTQ and WLW experiences of violence, subjectivities, identities, and positionality in the country. How do heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy shape the state and influence the lives of LGBTQ and WLW in Guyana?

In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) details the ways in which the twin processes of heterosexuality and patriarchy were mobilized by the postcolonial state of Bahamas to consolidate itself as a heterosexual state, and at the same time, the state is a site of instability (p. 23). Referring to this process as heteropatriarchy, Alexander (2005) discusses the multiple sites in which the heteropatriarchal state constitutes itself, often violently, through the judicial systems, religious domains, marriage laws, and through the quotidian interactions between subjects of the state. Within post-colonial nations, this has meant that some bodies, particularly gays, lesbians, sex workers, and unwed mothers were seen as bodies of difference, against whom the state and heterosexual citizens can construct themselves as legitimate subjects (Alexander, 1994). This has meant that states were able to "sexualise[d] and rank[ed] into a class of good, loyal, reproducing, heterosexual citizens, and a subordinated, marginalised class of noncitizens who, by virtue of choice and perversion, choose not to do so" (Alexander, 2005, p. 46). Kempadoo (2009) also notes that

> heteropatriarchy signals a distinction and a relatedness between the ways in which
> sexuality and gender are socially, legally, and politically organized…[it] denote[s] a

structuring principle in Caribbean societies that privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates feminine sexuality, normalizing relations of power that are intolerant of and oppressive towards sexual desires and practices that are outside of or oppose the dominant sexual and gender regimes. This structuring principle privileges men's experiences, definitions, and perceptions of sexuality whereby not only are appreciations of female (hetero)sexuality obscured, but homoeroticism and same-gender sexual relations are denied legitimacy (p. 9)

The structure of heteropatriarchy has manifested itself across different institutions such as in religion, the legal system, family structures, legislations, health care, education, and in societal norms, beliefs, and attitudes towards same-sex relations and gender non-conforming bodies. This has meant that heterosexuality in the region appears as ahistorical and natural, while operating to erase and deny non-normative sexualities and genders. This, for example, is reflected in King's (2014) discussion where she argues that same-sex women's "visibility" is actively erased by heteronormative structures and pressures within Caribbean societies. This active erasure by state structures also constitute another form of violence against LGBQ women and WLW. King (2014) refers to this process as "near-invisibility," that is, same-sex women are rendered invisible despite evidence to the contrary. This supposed "invisibility" has a deeper history rooted in a complex web of slavery, indentureship, racism, classism, gender inequalities, and the ways in which these differences are polarised and mobilized in the making of the nation.

Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Period

Writing on British Jamaica, M.G Smith developed the theory of "pluralism," where he argued that "different sections of the community liv[e] side by side, but separately, within the same political unit" (1960, p. 75). In other words, different socio-cultural groups co-exist with each other, each with its own set of rules but "combine social and cultural aspects equally (Smith, 1960, p. 767). These various sections within a society are governed by a common political institution (Smith, 1960). Scholars across the region have engaged with Smith's idea of

pluralism. For instance, addressing Smith's theory of pluralism, in *Cultural Power, Resistance and Pluralism,* Brian L. Moore (1995) writes that "composite societies such as Guyana are composed of exclusive cultural groups or sections which merely coexist with one another, lack value consensus, and are consequently characterized by conflict" (p. 4). Challenging this theory throughout his book, Moore (1995) demonstrates, in the case of Guyana, the ways in which different groups in Guyana— Whites, Afro-Creoles, and East Indians— negotiated and fit into different ideologies of integration and pluralism. Moore (1995) suggests that Guyana does not fit neatly into Smith's concept, but rather at different times adapts to the theory in different ways. He further writes that "…although seemingly divided racially and culturally, composite societies, especially those in the Caribbean, are in fact held by a set of shared values derived from a common 'creolized' experience in the contact situation of the planation. In other words, great emphasis is placed here on cultural integration rather than on a cultural divergence" (p. 5). While Smith's concept of pluralism and creolization is used to describe Guyana, the theory misses other crucial ways in which diverse groups are mixing, and integrations such as the process of douglarization, which I discuss in more detail below. Guyana is also marked by this 'creolized' culture since the advent of Europeans on its landscape. Creolization[3], according to M.G. Smith (1965), originally refers to the racial mixture between Europeans and Africans, known as *Creoles*, and the combination between European and African culture and elements (p. 5). As Smith (1965) notes, "creoles are really persons of Negro, white, or mixed Negro-white ancestry who are natives of the Caribbean" (p. 13). While the term was originally used to describe the progeny of Europeans and Africans, it also used to refer to someone who was born in the colony.

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[3] The term "creolization" is used differently throughout the Caribbean region to signify different processes. See Mohammed (1989), Khan (1993), Puri (2006) and Niranjana (2006) for a discussion of how creolization is applicable or not to different ethnic groups in the region.

Guyana was characterized by this structure of British whites, native black (Afro-Creoles) and a mixed-race population (Creoles) (Moore, 1995). Thus, the word 'creole' refers to someone mixed-raced and/or locally born, and 'creolization' to the process which they adopt and merge with Anglo-Victorian culture and ideologies (Moore, 1995). Within the process of creolization, this has meant a transference and adaptation of Victorian elite culture in colonial societies such as Guyana as a means for social, political, and cultural advancement and mobility in the social hierarchy (Moore, 1997, p. 17). In this dissertation, I use creolization in this latter sense to refer to the retention of an Anglo-Victorian culture and consciousness that has shaped the state of Guyana and continues to be mobilized by various racialized groups in the quest for political dominance. However, increasingly, other scholars have turned their attention to douglarization as a theoretical framework for explaining hybrid identities, particularly the mixing between Indians and Blacks in the region, and the syncretism between cultures in the state and soceity (Hossein & Outar, 2016; Kempadoo, 1999; Puri, 2004; Reddock, 2010)[4]. After emancipation in 1834, former enslaved began to gradually move away from plantations to establish villages, seeking better working conditions and wages in urban Georgetown (Rodney, 1981; Hope,1985; Mangru, 1996; Williams, 1991). This period in Guyana's history is marked by planters' class anxieties over the shortage of labour supply, competition between ex-slaves and incoming indentured labourers for work, reliance on wage labour introduced through indentureship, and the overall decline of sugar prices in the world market (Mohapatra, 1995; Rodney,1981; Williams, 1991; Moore, 1995). Amerindians, indentured Portuguese, and Chinese all acted as "buffer populations" to ensure the continuation of European rule in Guyana (Williams, 1991, p. 143). For instance, Williams (1991) details the ways in which British planters made concerted efforts to forge a racial affinity with

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[4] See below for an extended discussion of these ideas.

Portuguese labourers by granting them economic advantages to move into commercial and trade sectors; Portuguese upward economic mobility was then seen as a success of their "superior innate abilities" (p.143-144). Formerly enslaved people's lack of upward economic mobility was "attributed to presumed cultural habits and values" (Williams, 1991, p. 147), as opposed to colonial laws which operated to constrain their movements and options available to Africans (Williams, 1991). By the latter 19th century, creolization as a process was well underway as ex-slaves and Afro-Creoles had already adapted to and transformed Victorian culture, had better command of English, and access to education (Williams, 1991, p. 148), and by being located in the urban center moved into white collar professions (Moore, 1995, p. 18). Citing Portuguese and Chinese failure to acclimatize to plantation conditions, Indian labourers were brought to Guyana in 1838 under the indentured system.[5] East Indians were interpreted as the antidote to not only resist the demands of ex-slaves but were a new source of cheap labour to ensure the economic survival of the plantations. The economic conditions described above were also marked and intensified by racial stereotypes. The mobilization of ethnic stereotypes in the labour market (East Indians as hard working, Africans as idle, Amerindians as helpless children) also operated to consolidate ethnic groups into different sectors of the economy (Williams, 1991, p. 141) For instance, the stereotype of Quashie was used to described the Afro-Creole as a noble savage but lazy; Manny was used to describe Portuguese immigrants as hardworking but dishonest; Sammy was a docile but thrifty Indian; and John Chinaman was hardworking but an opium addict (Moore, 1995, p, 13). These racial stereotypes, strict labour laws and contracts, linguistic

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[5] The indenture period refers to contract work, usually three to five years, in exchange for transportation costs, food and housing during the period. The contract tied them to one employer. At the end of the contract, Indian laborers were free to repatriate; however, contract breaches and debt incurred were common, making repatriation difficult and/or impossible. There were also those who returned and re-indentured themselves for another term.

differences, and economic and geographical segmentation were indispensable in the

consolidation of white heteropatriarchy as it prevented any collective unity and organization

between these groups that could potentially challenge colonial control and management (Rodney,

1981, p. 181). Brackette Williams (1991) notes that "…the beginnings of the ethnic/racial

diversity in British Guiana also marked the beginnings of the unequal allocation of economic

rewards and its administrative and cultural rationalization" (p. 133). In other words, economic

roles and the allocation of resources, and the failures and successes in each economic sector,

were also linked to negative racial stereotypes.   These racial stereotypes were also

influenced by the sexual relations that unfolded between and within these groups. For instance,

Moore (1995) documents interracial relationships between whites and non-whites, and

"concubine" relations as the dominant formation by the Creole population in Guyana after

slavery; however, this was portrayed as sexual degeneracy, lack of morality on the part of black

women, and black men as wife beaters and deserters (p.102-103). What emerged, then, in the

colonial period is a hierarchy[6] of white planters at the top, followed by Portuguese and Chinese,

East Indians, African (Afro-Guyanese and Creoles), and Amerindians, all of whom were tied to

different economic strata, locked in and produced through ideological racial and cultural

differences (Williams, 1991, p. 166). Within this racially stratified society, women were not

outside of the economic and racial systems of representation. Moore (1995) notes that, "white

women were the 'custodians of morality' in colonial society" (p. 38). The influx of white women

to then British Guiana

> was related to the efforts to bring about social stability after the upheavals occasioned by
> the emancipation and the economic depression of the late 1840s. […] By reducing the
> incident of interracial cohabitation or concubinage, the increased influx of white women
> not only stabilized the white family structure, but also kept the mixed progeny (a major

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[6] See Williams (1991) for an outline of the social hierarchy established within colonial Guiana (p. 166).

source of social instability) to a minimum" (Moore, 1995, p. 38)

Women were placed and measured against Victorian standards of colonial womanhood (Wahab, 2008). With a White Anglo-Saxon and Victorian model at the top of the racial and class hierarchy, white femininity is the framework against which all other types of bodies and femininities were measured (Mohammed, 2001; Wahab, 2008). Amar Wahab (2008) asserts that white women were positioned at the top in terms of race (skin colour), morality, and femininity, while mixed women—Creole—were seen as approaching white standards. Black women and Indian women were competing for the next position in the racial hierarchy, with East Indian women seen as outside of Creole culture as they "were placed totally outside this structure as they did not embody a mixture, biologically or culturally, of either of the primary Afro and Euro ingredients of Creole culture" (p. 5). While Afro-Creoles are seen as having British values, customs, and beliefs, initially East Indians were not part of this process. In fact, as Moore (1991) demonstrates, it was largely in the domains of culture (religion, dress, music, food) that East Indians sought to resist Anglo-Victorian domination (p. 163-168) and were considered to be only partially 'creolized' in their adaptation to English patois or *Creolese* (Moore, 1995, p. 163).

D. Alissa Trotz (2003) writes that, "women who arrived in British Guiana as African slaves and Indian indentured laborers were defined and valued in relation to the productivity as laborers and not as dependent members of a family unit" (p. 16). Even though both groups of women laboured on plantations (Mohapatra, 1995; Mohammed, 2002; Reddock, 1985), in post-colonial Guyana racial stereotypes produced a perception of Indian women as passive, domestic, and subservient to Indian patriarchy, and African women as matriarchs, independent, and heads of their households (Trotz, 2003, p. 8). African women were not only enslaved, but were also concubines to white men (Reddock, 1986). Similarly, Indian women were also mistresses to white overseers; left their Indian male partners for another; engaged in polygamous relations; or

a combination of men and women living together (Mangru, 1987; Mohapatra, 1995; Bahadur, 2014). Sexual myths such as the aggressive and promiscuous African woman also influenced the ways in which they were positioned and contrasted against other women (Reddock, 2008; Ragbir, 2012; Trotz, 2003; Moore, 1995).

The indentured period was marked by gender and wage disparities between Indian men and women producing the phenomenon of "wife murders[7]," a term used by colonial powers to describe the murders of Indian women by their "reputed husbands" (Mohapatra, 1995). Prabhu Mohapatra (1995) writes that colonial explanations relied on racial stereotyping of Indian men as inherently violent due to their "tradition" and sexual stereotyping of Indian women as "unfaithful" women, thus such explanations erased any brutality inherent in the indenture system itself. Writing on these tropes, Trotz (2003) remarks that "we see an overwhelming obsession with inscribing women's bodies with a racialized sexuality that had to be controlled if the labour force was to be successfully regulated…" (p. 18). Diverting attention away from the psychological and physical conditions of the plantations, "the colonial state was able to project itself as the benevolent protector of the Indian community *from itself*: Protecting Indian men from promiscuous Indian women and protecting Indian women from the violent proclivities of Indian men through the enactment of various pieces of legislations…" (Trotz, 2003, p. 18). Gaiutra Bahadur (2014) adds a few other factors to explain the violence committed against Indian women by Indian men: the interpretation of the Ramayana[8] during the indentured period.

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[7] The unequal sex ratios between Indian and women are considered to have resulted in the
in the phenomena of "wife murders" on the plantations. Wife murders, according to Mohapatra, refers to the Indian women being murdered by Indian men on plantations within the British Caribbean. For instance, he notes that how the acts of violence committed against these women were rampant from 1885 to 1900 and diminished between 1900 and 1915. Seventy-eight of the 103 total murders between 1885 and 1900 were women of which 58 were wives; compared to only 30 of the 66 murders from 1900 to 1915, of which 20 were wives.
[8] The Ramayana is an ancient Hindu epic about the Ram, the eldest son of a king. It narrates the story of Ram, who was exiled on the request of his stepmother. His wife, Sita, and brother Lakshman went him. During their exile, Sita

Bahadur's (2014) analysis of the Ramayana during the indentured period is revealing as it was staged and frequently retold to the community, where indentured labourers may have drawn parallels between their lives and the story of Ram and Sita, and perhaps have influenced the violence exhibited against Indian women. The other dimension, the plantation model of violence, is also one wherein Indian men were frequently punished by physical beatings from managers and overseers. Bahadur writes, "men were not singled out, but they must have internalized the violence of the plantation in ways that women did not. Their masculinity must have been battered as their bodies" (p. 124). While Bahadur (2014) makes this speculation, it is worth noting that the brutality of plantation life, the violence from white colonial men, and the internalized demoralization of being an indentured labourer might have also caused Indian men to reassert themselves and their masculinity by directing violence against women (p. 124-125).

The relative shortage of Indian women suggests that there was some degree of miscegenation between Indian men and African women, producing children of mixed heritage, who are referred to as 'douglas' (discussed in more detail below). The low number of relationships between Indians and Africans has been attributed to caste and racial prejudice. However, Audra A. Diptee (2000) debunking these prejudices, argues that factors such as geographical segregation, i.e. Indian men were bound to plantations by contract and subjected to the 'pass system' to leave plantations; cultural prejudice by Afro-Creole women; and the fact that Indian men were at the bottom on the economic hierarchy, were all factors that acted to curb the interactions and relationships that emerged between Indians and Africans.

By the latter part of the 19th century, to respond to demand and to mitigate these high incidents of violence, the state moved towards institutionalizing heterosexual monogamy through

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was kidnapped by the demon king Ravana. The story tells of Ram's struggles to rescue his wife from the demon and his return to Ayodhya.

marriage laws. This became a key site of difference between Afro-Creoles and East Indians.

Mohapatra (1995) notes,

> Marriage laws were formulated to ensure orderly access to women's bodies, by curbing the 'immoral' nature of the women and channel the violent instincts of men. The image of the family that the colonial state gradually inscribed into the law of marriage was a patriarchal one which assigned to the woman the role of the reproducer (p. 250)

By legally instituting marriage laws, colonial officials made concerted efforts to restructure the intimate lives of labourers in Guyana and Trinidad (Mohammed, 2002). Linda Peake and D. Alissa Trotz (1999) note that women who were enslaved were not allowed to marry, as such marriages would have undermined and contradicted colonial power over their slaves. Slave women were considered to be inferior, yet colonial planters had sexual relationships with women, outside of the confines of their marriages to white women (Peake & Trotz, 1999, p. 42). This meant that a variety of relationships existed such as female-heads of household, alterative kinship structures, and polygamous relationships developed on and off plantations with both enslaved women and white planters (Peake & Trotz, 1999). According to these authors, it was not until the 1824 Order in Council, along with Christian missionaries promoting marriage based on nuclear family and Christian ideologies, that the heteronormative family structures started to formulate among former slaves (1995, p. 42). Unlike slaves, indentured labourers were permitted to marry, but marriages not conducted according to Christian norms and under the so-called Heathen Marriage Ordinance of 1860 were illegitimate (p. 43). In addition to Hindu and Muslim marriages, Indian women engaged in a range of relations, for instances, leaving one male partner for another, or exchanging husbands as they liked, polyandry, and "concubines" to white colonial planters (Bahadur, 2014).

The implementation of marriage laws for indentured labourers performed a number of functions (Mohapatra, 1995), particularly changing the gendered and working relations between Indian men and women (Mohammed, 1994; 2002). Peake and Trotz (1999), Mohammed (2002), and Williams (1991) looked at the ways in which the granting and purchasing of Crown lands by Indian men and women would ensure their dependence on plantation wage labour in rural areas (Williams, 1991, p. 148). The access to land schemes also shifted women's identities from independent wage earners to reproducers of the Indian family in both Guyana and Trinidad (Mohammed, 2007; Mohapatra, 1995).

A second function of marriage and land laws was to symbolically recast Indian women as "respectable subjects" (Wahab, 2007; 2008). The legal measures imposed on Indian women's sexual mobility and freedom were influenced by Victorian and Christian morality of femininity, womanhood, and motherhood. This symbolic maneuvering of Indian women as "docile wives and mothers" living under Indian patriarchy (Mohammed, 2002, Reddock, 1985) conferred a "civilized status" onto Indian women, which is also tied to a narrative of appropriate Anglo-Saxon "respectability" (Reddock, 1998, p. 70), while at the same time marking working class black women as degenerate and uncivilized (Wahab, 2008). We are reminded though that for middle-class Afro-Creole women, "legal Christian marriage became a desired goal among Creoles seeking social respectability, with common-law unions merely a stage along the way" (Moore, 1995, p. 103). Creole women, emphasizing their proximities to European culture and heritage in terms of skin complexion, Christianity, and access to wealth became a small upper class with economic power concentered in their hands, while remaining politically marginal (Sanders, 1985; Bisnauth, 2000). In Guyana, Canadian Christian missionaries played instrumental roles in "civilizing" the Indian population through education, especially the Canadian Presbyterian church

(Moore, 1995; Bahadur, 2014). Through compulsory heterosexuality, colonial powers and men of different ethnicities constructed women's bodies and sexuality as oppositional. Although Africans and Indians were similar in numbers in Guyana, these racial, gender, class, and sexual stereotypes constructed both groups as "natural oppositional" (Pragg, 2012). It is through categories of race, gender, sexuality, and class that Africans and Indians were constructed and managed in relation to each other, and although these differences are produced through discourses, they are taken to be natural, given, and ahistorical (Peake & Trotz, 1999).

As detailed above, the broader Anglophone Caribbean and Guyana has a deep history of non-normative sexual practices, desires and relationships between men and women that was denounced by the colonial government. Similarly, cases of same-sex relations between men were documented from colonial archival material. Sean Lokaisingh-Meighoo (2000) notes that conditions on board the ship and the formation of *jahaji-bhai*[9] is not only a gendered space, but also contains homoerotic/homosocial subtexts (p. 86). Bahadur (2014) details in the late 1890s colonial records describing "unnatural crimes" among male indentured labourers (p. 88) which were penalized across the British Empire. Anil Persaud (2007) also documents instances of "unnatural practices" and "horrible practices" among male Indian indenture labourers in Jamaica, Trinidad, British Guiana, and Mauritius. Persaud (2007) notes the ways in which the British colonial government intervened to curb same-sex relations between men: from increasing the number of women; gradual settlement schemes that were seen as "civilizing influences" that would change the behaviours of men; and the encouragement of family units to migrate from India to the Caribbean (p. 47-48). The intersecting factors of marriage laws and land grants enabled not only the reformation of the "Indian family" along the axes of heterosexuality,

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[9] Jahaji-bhai means brotherhood or brothers of the boat. The term is used to refer to the bonds, friendship, and connections that were formed among indenture labourers on board the ships.

monogamy, and respectability, but also produced distinct African and Indian ethnic identities that would ascend to claim political power pre- and post-independence (Williams, 1991; Peake & Trotz, 1997). Consequently, the erasing of non-normative relationships, desires, and options, such as the ones described earlier, were central in the making of heteropatriarchal British Guiana.

The role of religion

Even though, in my interviews, religion does not emerge as a central feature of analysis in the overall dissertation. I include a brief discussion of various religious discourses, as they have shaped Guyana's history and are formative features in Guyana's political and legal process. Today, for example, religious organizations and voices impact the lack of legal protection and rights that LGBQ women and WLW experience in the nation.

Religion as an extension of British colonial power has played a fundamental role in the expansion of colonialism in the Caribbean region. Sherry Ann Singh (2011), writing on Trinidad, notes that religion has been "truncated, modified, diluted, intensified or excised" (p. 21) through colonial power. In Guyana, various sectors of Anglo-Christian churches regarded Creoles and later East Indians as "pagan" worshippers, lacking educational, spiritual, and sexual morality, or overall saw these latter groups as uncivilized (Williams, 1991; Moore, 1995; Bahadur, 2014). Throughout the colonial period, there was an influx of different Christian groups such as the Roman Catholic Church in 1840, the Anglican Church in 1876, the London Missionary Society Methodist church in 1855, and Presbyterian missionaries and the Canadian Presbyterians in the 1860s (Moore, 1995). During the British colonial period, according to Patrick Taylor and Frederick I. Case (2013), the Anglican Church actively supported "planters during and after slavery and the interests of the rising middle class of all races while conducting missionary activities..." (p. 307). Other churches such as the Roman Catholic Church catered to Portuguese,

the Chinese, and a mix of elite Africans and Europeans, but also engaged in missionary work

with indigenous and other communities (Taylor & Case, 2013, p. 307). Other churches such as

the Canadian Presbyterian Church have conducted similar work in Guyana (Mohammed, 2007;

Bahadur, 2014), with each sect espousing the narrative of the destruction of Sodom and

Gomorrah that homosexuality brings about; the moral demise of the land and family (Taylor &

Case, 2013).

The majority of administrative and civil positions, such as teaching, law, and medicine

was administered by different churches. Consequently, access to these positions was tied to

conversion to these religious formations (Moore, 1995, p. 226). According to Moore (1995),

churches were tasked with the "christianization of Hindu, Tamil, and Chinese immigrants in

British Guiana" (p. 227). With the permanent settlement of different ethnic groups in British

Guiana in the 1900s, and in order to access jobs, education, and other state resources, conversion

to Christianity was a vehicle for upward mobility (Williams, 1991). However, for a large

number of East Indians, Williams (1991) writes that

> religious matters became political matters as religious revitalization and reform became
> symbolic of non-Christian (especially East Indian Hindu and Muslim) ethnic identity.
> Religion served as a key element in the East Indians' struggle to demonstrate the equality
> of Indian culture with Anglo-European culture as an index of racial equality and,
> therefore, of their right to equal participation in the sociopolitical and economic order"
> (p. 202-203).

The recreation of Hinduism and Islam among indentured labourers is an important space in

which "Indian solidarity" and "Indianess" was emphasized in opposition to Christianity and

other ethnic groups (Williams, 1991, p. 203). This also meant that religious and cultural

differences such as being Muslim were collapsed under 'Indianness' in order to ensure group

solidarity (Mangru, 1993). By the early twentieth century, with the breakdown of caste and

endogamy, religious differences between indentured labourers had to be subsumed under one standardized version of Hinduism and Islam (Mohammed, 2002; Bahadur, 2013) that could be practised by all, given the regional, language, and customary diversity within the population (Mohammed, 2002). Indentured labourers who crossed the kala pani[10] were associated with "contamination and cultural defilement as it led to the dispersal of tradition, family, class and caste classifications and to the general loss of a "purified" Hindu essence" (Mehta, 2004, p. 5). Consequently, within Indian nationalism, indentured labourers in the Caribbean were seen as impure, outsiders, and disavowed from the Indian state, politics and identity because of their voyage and subsequent mixture of castes (Niranjana, 2011; Mehta, 2004; Bahadur, 2013). Responding to this perception, Hindu leaders sought to reclaim "authenticity" and purity" by "imposing Vedic constructions of Hindu womanhood" by "traditional Hindu men and women in transplanted Hindu communities in Trinidad" (Mehta, 2004, p. 32). Brahmin priests or those who could read asserted their status as religious leaders over the Indian community—regardless of caste and regional differences (Vertovec, 1992). Peter van der Veer and Steven Vertovec (1991) term this the "Brahminization of Hinduism," in which priests recreated, organized, and established a standardized version of Hinduism with basic deities (Rama, Krishna, Ganesh etc.,), sacred rites, pujas, reading and reciting from the Bhagavad Gita and the Ramayana, and especially emphasizing Bhakti (love path) tradition (1991, p. 107; 2009). These Brahmin practices would later become consolidated and institutionalized into the hegemonic mainstream Sanatan Dharma tradition (i.e. an orthodox Hinduism) to be practiced in the Caribbean by the early 1920s and the Arya Samaj (reformist) version of Hinduism to be established (Vertovec,

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[10] The *kala pani* means dark waters. The crossing of the *kala pani* refers to the voyage that indentured Indians made to the Caribbean and represents contamination and pollution due to the breakdown of caste and religion.

1992; Singh, 2011). The majority of Muslims being Sunnis and a minority of Shiites also led to an orthodox version of Islam to be reconstituted in Guyana (Chickrie, 1999).

Currently in Guyana, approximately 64% of the population are Christians with the largest groups being Pentecostal (22.80%) other Christian groups (20.8%), Anglican (5.22%), Methodist (1.35%), Roman Catholic (7.08%), and Seven Day Adventist (5.41%). Hindus constitute about 24.8%, the single largest group, and Muslims at 6.77%, Rastafarian at 0.47% and Bahai 0.06% (Population composition, 2016, p. 36).

Most of these Churches oppose same-sex marriage and the decriminalization of sexual orientation/identity on the grounds that homosexuality is sinful, and that sex outside of heterosexual marriage is against Christian scriptures (Taylor & Case, 2013). For instance, the entire Christian community and the Inter Religious Organizations, which is made up of members of different religious communities, actively rallies against the decriminalization of cross-dressing laws and same-sex marriage ("Religious community condemns", 2004; "Religious leaders decry discrimination against LGBT", 2017). Bishop Juan Edghill, an active member of the Guyana Evangelical Fellowship (GEF), is now also a member of Parliament in Guyana, who advocates against including sexual orientation in Guyana's constitution (Kissoon, 2017). The Muslim community also fears that the legalization of same-sex marriage will breach Islamic principles, and marriage officers could be found in breach of the law ("Guyanese Muslims", 2012). Hinduism, despite its gender and sexual fluidity, also upholds conservative values regarding homosexuality, although there are different sects that take different approaches to the issue of potentially decriminalizing cross-dressing laws and legalizing same-sex marriage in Guyana (Kissoon, 2013). Guyana is a democratic and secular state, but religious bodies hold power and sway over the political processes as well. As minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Greenridge (2017)

said "this is Guyana and in these countries, you have a different mix of not only ethnic groupings, but you have religious groupings" ("Legalising homosexuality", 2017). And while these religious groups advocate tolerance and non-discrimination for LGBTQ individuals, they are also playing an instrumental role in the prevention of laws to protect these very subjects. Although there are dogmatic religious ideas against same-sex relations, some members within different religious groups are also advocating for tolerance and non-discrimination for LGBTQ individuals; offering varied religious interpretations of homosexuality or choosing to remain neutral and silent on proposed legislations regarding the decriminalization of cross-dressing laws and sexual orientation ("Religious leaders decry discriminations", 2017; Subramuniyaswami, 2011).

Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality in the Independence Period

Guyana's quest for independence and subsequent election years are often marked by inter-ethnic tension and violence. Almost equal in numbers, Africans and Indians recognized that their living and working conditions were no different when placed against plantations owners' desire for profit (Hinds, 2011, p. 3). Their common suffering, according to David Hinds, "precipitated united action between the two groups, despite their uneasy tension" (p. 3) resulting in cross-ethnic solidarity grounded in anti-colonial rule (p. 45). The formation of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in 1945 included a multi-ethnic group of Dr. Cheddi Jagan (Indian) and Forbes Burnham (African), among others, espousing a Socialist/Marxist framework to unify both working and upper class groups across ethnic/racial lines (Abraham, 2005; Hinds, 2011). However, a Marxist ideology was interpreted as a threat to commercial class interests in Britain and was considered a communist threat to the region (Hope, 1985; Griffith, 1991; Rodney, 1981). Backed by the US (the CIA), the British government intervened after the first official

elections in 1953 to suspend the constitution, arguing that they were "putting down a communist conspiracy" (Hinds, 2011, p. 6). Searching for a better political movement and leader to usher Guyana into independence, Burnham capitalized on this opportunity by splitting from the PPP to form his own political party – the People's National Congress (PNC), drawing his support from urban and middle-class Afro-Guyanese (Premdas, 1978; Hope, 1985). This split, although it was more ideological then ethnic, revived ethnic tensions that were rooted in slavery and indentureship and became further entrenched as Afro- and Indo-Guyanese started voting along racial lines (Hope, 1985; Premdas, 1978; Mars, 1990; 2001).

By 1964, the PNC was helped into power by forming a coalition government with the United Force (UF), a pro-capitalist right wing party in Guyana, and by demanding that electoral politics changed to a system of proportional representation (Hope, 1985; Mars, 2001). Outnumbering the PPP (most Indian constituencies), the PNC proceeded swiftly to govern in "authoritarian style" (Mars, 2001, p. 358). During these pre- and post-independence years, Guyana's history was marked by civil disturbances, riots, looting, and labour strikes, which were also ideological conflicts (Hope, 1985). Between 1962-64, there was increasing ethno-political violence between the Indians and Africans. For instance, backed by Jagan, the Guyana Agriculture Workers' Union (GAWU), a PPP union for sugar workers, called for a strike to be recognized as the "bargain agent for sugar workers" (Hope, 1985, p. 59), which lasted for 133 days. This strike, however, was met with opposition by the Trades Union Council (TUC), which was PNC dominated, escalating the patterns of racial violence (Hope, 1985, p. 59). On a larger scale, the strike represented, as Ralph Premdas (1978) noted, Jagan's ability to "bring the country's economy to a virtual halt" (p. 137), which caused the economy to suffer huge financial and human capital losses (Mars, 2001; Premdas, 1994). The ethno-political violence cannot be

read as only racialized violence, and as Perry Mars (1990) writes, "Guyana's history of inter-ethnic violence coincides with class conflict as well" (p. 77). After independence in 1966, the elections in 1968 brought the PNC into power officially, although there is a considerable amount of work showing that the elections were fraudulent; voters were permitted to vote without identification; and others were turned away from voting stations (Hope, 1985; Mars, 2001; Singh, 2008).

Another significant moment in Guyana's political history was the formation of the Working People's Alliance (WPA) in 1979, a political party dedicated to working across racial lines, given the racial tension embedded within the PPP and PNC. The WPA "brought together politicians and intellectuals from both major ethnic groups pledged to racial harmony, free elections, and democratic socialism" (Hope, 1985, p. 61), and represented an alternative to the divisive racial politics advocated by the PPP and PNC. The party and its main leader, Dr. Walter Rodney, an Afro-Guyanese, were subjected to police violence and brutality by the PNC, culminating with Dr. Rodney's assassination in 1980 by a car bomb from a military agent (Mars, 2001, p. 361). Consequently, while racial tensions were resuscitated between Indians and Africans, there was also violence cutting across racial lines to silence oppositional voices. Administratively, the PNC government also nationalized Guyana's economy; consolidated resources into the hands of the state; liberalized the economy through structural adjustment programs[11]; borrowed extensively from the World Bank and IMF; food and water shortages and electrical blackouts were common occurrences (France, 2005; Singh, 2008; Brotherson, 1989; Peake & Trotz, 1999); and unified most of the state apparatus under PNC rule, for instance through the Declaration of Sophia, in which Burnham made the PNC the "paramountcy of the

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[11] See France (2005) for an in-depth analysis of different economic policies that were implemented in Guyana during the Hoyte and Jagan years

party" (Hope, 1985, p. 6). These policies had direct effects on women, and as D. Alissa Trotz

(2004) noted, state mismanagement by the PNC had repercussions for women in a number of

ways:

> high levels of female out-migration as a survival strategy; growing rates of maternal malnutrition and infant mortality; high rates of female unemployment; and the exponential growth of the informal sector and women's occupation of the most marginal jobs within this sector (p. 5)

The economic changes instituted by the PNC had disproportionate effects on women across

racial lines. And even though the Burnham regime was extremely authoritative, the country

became socialist, and took the name of the "Co-operative Republic" to capture this orientation

which it still retains today (Singh, 2008).

After twenty-four years of PNC rule, the elections of 1992, also backed by the U.S and

Britain, ushered the PPP into political power. In 1997 after the death of Jagan, his wife Janet was

inaugurated as the President, but violence erupted once again, further sharpening racial politics

(Peake & Trotz, 1999; Trotz, 2004). The PPP minister Bharrat Jagdeo was elected in 2001 and

2006, followed by Donald Ramotar from 2011-2015. The PPP was also not without its own

issues. According to Hollis France (2005), Jagan and the PPP party could not "reconcile their

Marxist beliefs with free-market capitalist ideas" (p. 133) inherited from the previous

government. Although the PPP government took a Marxist orientation, it also advocated and

employed neoliberal programs within its rule (France, 2005). Although the PPP espouses a

socialist rhetoric, at the level of the government, its policies follow a neo-liberal model of

development ("The People's Progress Party", 2009). The transference of power from the PNC to

the PPP, according to David Hinds (2017), resulted in the resources being concentrated in the

"elites of one of our ethnic communities" (Hinds, 2017). In other words, far from representing a

change, the PPP "widen[ed] the gap between wealth and power" which is concentrated in the

hands of a few Indian-Guyanese elites (Hinds, 2017). Under the leadership of Bharrat Jagdeo and

Donald Ramotar, there were high levels of corruption within governmental ranks,

mismanagement of state resources, high rates of criminal activities and violence, failure to

reduce racial tension, and overall lack of safety and security for the general public (Bahadur,

2014; "People's Progressive Party", 2009; "Corruption enough to make PPP lose", 2015; "PPP

in anti-corruption call", 2015).

These two dominant political parties, the PPP and PNC, were not only divided along

ethnic lines but also firmly attached to particular formations of hegemonic masculinity and

attending gender and sexual roles. Although there is no full-length study exploring hegemonic

masculinity and nationalism in Guyana, I draw from the broader Caribbean, especially

Alexander's (2005) arguments on nationalism and heterosexuality, to help in conceptualizing

Guyana. Writing on nationalism in the Bahamas, Alexander (2005) notes that

> no nationalism could survive without heterosexuality—nationalism needs it no matter
> how criminal, incestuous, or abusive it might be. Heterosexuality still appears more
> conducive to nation-building that does same-sex desire, which appears hostile to it—for
> women presumably cannot love themselves, love other women, and love the nation
> simultaneously (p. 46).

In the Caribbean, alternative sexualities, desires, and bodies, as Alexander points out, are a threat

to state formation, or as Wahab (2012) has argued "homophobic nationalism" is at the center of

post-colonial nations such as Trinidad, where it is through "homophobic policing" that the state

constitutes itself as heterosexual, appropriately masculine, and racialized. I suggest that a similar

process might be taking place in Guyana's political arena. Within the nationalist parties, this has

meant that a brown and black middle-class group of elite men have actively engaged in

refashioning the state through the discourse of heterosexuality attached to hegemonic

masculinity and appropriate gender roles for its citizens, where LGBT men and women continue to face discrimination and violence sustained by the non-decriminalization of homosexuality.

Again, I draw from the broader Caribbean to help us think through how masculinity and heterosexuality might be operating in Guyana. Wesley Crichlow, Halimah DeShong and Linden Lewis (2014) uses the term "hegemonic masculinity to signify a set of idealised, institutionalised, socio-economic, socio-cultural and political forms of manhood, and while these forms might be unattainable to most men, men are certainly encouraged into achieving them" (p. 2). According to these scholars, hegemonic masculinity arises from compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy—heteropatriarchy—that rests "on men's self-imposed alienation from femininity, neuroses about feminist assertion, the feminine, effemiphobia, the gender-panic, with the penis as the ultimate representation of phallic power, domination and a weaponized form of social control" (Crichlow et al 2014, p. 2). While hegemonic masculinity is the idealized and dominant form of masculinity, they also argue that "masculinity is also amenable to floats and shifts contingent upon different social categories of Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, mixed race, skin color, class and sexual orientation (Crichlow et al 2014, p. 2-3). Oppositional and complementary to hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic femininity, which demands that women be heterosexual, where women's sexuality is restricted for men (Tinsley, 2010; Mohammed, 2002; Gopinath, 2005); engage in reproduction, domestication and motherhood; and be tasked with passing down of culture (Peake & Trotz, 2001; Kanhai, 1999; 2011; Mohammed, 2002). Throughout the Caribbean, within these hegemonic nationalist and masculine discourses, LGBTQ men and women are subjected to archaic colonial laws and are made invisible by hegemonic masculinity and femininity.

In 2001 under the PPP administration, for instance, the Parliament voted to pass a constitutional amendment that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, but that amendment was never passed into law due to pressures on then President Bharrat Jagdeo (Kissoon, 2001). Although the proposed law did not repeal the criminalization cross-dressing and "buggery", the amendment would have prevented someone from being terminated from their employment for being a homosexual (Kissoon, 2001). The PPP party continued to advocate for "no discrimination" against LGBTQ subjects but took no action towards changing the laws that fuelled an environment of homophobia (Kissoon, 2001; 2013); and remained non-committal to repealing discriminating laws due to religious and cultural pressures from Guyana's society ("Ramsammy lobbies for repeal", 2015). A second argument is that homosexuality is a Western imposition on Guyana's national culture, where rescinding the laws would be tampering with Guyana's nationalistic image and requires further debate between different constituencies in Guyana (Kissoon, 2001). These idealized forms of masculinity attached to heterosexuality continue to circumscribe the parameters of appropriate notions of masculinities, femininities, and sex, which was also reflected in the political realm as inaction from the government in Guyana.

While there is a hegemonic masculinity as noted above, Peake and Trotz (1999) remind us that "masculinities are femininities are not given but historically produced via struggle and context, and are also in flux today…" (p. 127). Gleaning from literature on the broader Caribbean, I suggest that there are different types of masculinities and femininities which might also be operating in similar ways in Guyana. Scholars have commented on the different types and versions of masculinity and femininity, such as Afro-creole patriarchy and Indian patriarchy, and how these intersect with class dynamics, and the positioning of femininities as well as Indian, Afro-Creole, or mixed-race women (Hosein, 2001; Mohammed, 2003; 2004; Peake &

Trotz, 1999; Reddock, 2004, 2016). Within these types of masculinities and femininities,

scholars also note uneven and contradicting factors within masculinities, with Indian men and

youths attempting to negotiate their Indian identity and seeking admission into the creolization

process, which does not appear to occur in the same ways for women (Sampath, 1993; Reddock,

2004; Hosein, 2001; Mohammed; 1988). Increasingly, though, scholars have also looked at

persons of mixed race ancestry between African and Indians, referred to as *Douglas*[12]

(Kempadoo, 1994; Puri, 2004). As Shalini Puri (2004) writes, "…any hybridization of black and

Indian identities threatens to compromise its construction of Indianness… (p.193), as the figure

of the 'dougla' threatens the racial hierarchy that depends on "clearly differentiable races." (p.

190). While creolization in the colonial context represents assimilation into Anglo-creole culture,

which historically has not included Indians, Puri (2004) argues that "douglarization," is a more

accurate description of the ongoing contact and cultural transformation and syncretisation

between Africans and Indians in the Caribbean, in spite of the term referring to racial impurity.

To this extent, douglarization as a process highlights contribution of Indian and African culture

and elements in the creation of culture in the Caribbean, decentering an Afro-Creole dominant

culture (Puri, 2004, p. 221; Hosein & Outar, 2016). As Puri (2004) succinctly puts it "…a dougla

poetics could provide a vocabulary for disallowed, delegitimized racial identities" (p. 220). The

figure of the 'dougla' is thus seen as a threat by some, especially those who believe in notions of

racial purity, such as upper-class Hindu groups in Niranjana's analysis (2006). Others, though,

have argued that douglarization is a way to, —symbolically and materially— think of cultural,

sexual, and political mixing outside of ideas of racial purity (Kempadoo, 1999; Puri, 2004;

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[12] The term dougla has many meanings, for instance, Hosein (2016) noted the term in India referred to mixing between castes. For a more detailed discussion on the term see Hosein (2016). Sue Anne Barratt (2016) writes that contemporarily the term 'dougla' is also used as a "salutation—"hey dougs," or as a neutral label or even a compliment for someone with a "particular look" (p. 229).

Mehta, 2004). Douglarization as a process, then, represents a way to break through rigid racialized, sexualized and gender constructions that have locked Afro and Indo-Guyanese as "naturally oppositional".

While there is rich potential for *dougla poetics* to bridge racial tension, the discourse is still underpinned by gender and sexual sentiments. It is still considered shameful for Indian women to have dougla children as opposed to Indian men, because Indian women are tasked with the responsibilities of passing down Indian culture and maintaining community boundaries (Mohammed, 2002; Puri, 2004). Women's bodies are still etched with appropriate and particular notions of gender roles such as being wives and mothers (Mohammed, 2002; 2004), and as a site of producing "Indianness" which is often mobilized by both Afro and Indo men (Niranjana, 2006; Gopinath, 2005; Hosein & Outar, 2017). Racialized hegemonic masculinities[13] to various degrees are also firmly attached to gender roles, such as the construction of men as bread winners; providers to their families and friends; sexual promiscuity is encouraged in men as seen as a critical aspect of Caribbean masculinity, whereas other sexual identities, practices, and desires are strongly regulated and erased in a heterosexist environment (Crichlow, 2004; 2004; Kempadoo, 2009; Crichlow et al, 2014; Reddock, 2004; Reddock, 2016).

APNU+AFC coalition: A politics of racial unity

In 2011, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and Alliance for Change (AFC) coalition comprised of six different political parties was formed. The joint coalition of the APNU + AFC represents another moment of multi-racial unity since the PPP's formation in the 1950s. The President Brigadier David Granger and Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo were elected in

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[13]See Reddock (2016) for a review of Indo-Caribbean Masculinities, especially her emphasis on the role of alcohol within the constitution of Indo-Caribbean masculinities, the chutney space, and the erasure of queer masculinities.

2015. This historical change in government signals, perhaps, a new direction in Guyana's history for a number of reasons. It gestures a return to an early politics of racial unity envisioned by the ideologies of Burnham and Jagan. Many Guyanese see the current government as a hope for change to address the material realities of poverty, violence, underemployment, corruption, and illiteracy that mark the lives of many people in the country. The APNU+AFC coalition also ran their campaign advocating that they will implement measures to protect against marginalization because of sexual orientation (APNU+AFC Manifesto, 2015). However, in an interview, Granger, citing religious tolerance and consultation with different religious bodies, has remained non-committal to decriminalizing sodomy laws and cross-dressing laws (Rockcliffe, 2015). Early last year, the government suggested that the National Assembly was "unfit to make a decision on that matter" and attempted to hold a referendum as to whether homosexuality should remain a criminal act or if those laws should be struck down ("Referendum to decide", 2017). However, the referendum was met with strong objections and criticism from different LGBTQ groups and human rights groups in Guyana that rights of LGBT persons should not be subjected to a popular vote by the majority (Burnham, Trotz & Andaiye, 2017; "Rights groups skewer", 2017). Leaving the lives of marginalized LGBT individuals to a vote by the majority abdicates the responsibility of the government in protecting a vulnerable group, and in this democratic process does not account for LGBT voices and experiences.

The Caribbean Context and Existing Laws in Guyana

Over the last two decades across the Caribbean, scholars have noted the ways in which individual nations' sovereignty and autonomy has been constrained through the Caribbean's participation in the world economy. Structural adjustment programs implemented by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and deregulation of agricultural economics in favor or

service economics—sex work, tourism, cheap labour—have continued colonial legacies of exploitation, but equally there has been a sustained attention to the ways in which Caribbean people, artists, sex workers, LGBTQ subjects, and others are resisting some of these discourses (Kempadoo, 2004; Alexander, 2005; Puar, 2001; Smith 2011, Sheller, 2012; Nixon, 2015).

The reliance on foreign investment has positioned Caribbean nations in a state of ambivalence. International pressure and the erosion of economic sovereignty, according to Alexander (1994) have led post-colonial governments to increase their surveillance over homosexuality, sex work, and HIV infected persons. Alexander (2005), Yasmin Tambiah (2009) and Amar Wahab (2012) highlight the multiple histories and tensions that the Caribbean is steeped in, such as attempting to hold onto colonial laws as a means to safeguard against Western understandings and imposition of homosexuality, while simultaneously seeing the West as a space of modernity and civilization. This follows in line with the next argument that homosexuality is unnatural to the Caribbean and thus a Western imposition, and yet the state desires to engage in self-determination and modernity to appease its former colonizer (Alexander, 2005). Within these ongoing challenges and debates, LGBTQ activism, NGOs, and human rights groups—both local and transnational— have become increasingly visible, outspoken, and are working on challenging existing colonial laws (King, 2014; Ghisyawan, 2016; Robinson, 2009; Murray, 2012).

Heteropatriarchy as the dominant organizing principle is still a feature in Caribbean countries maintained through laws. Alexander (2005) has linked the ways in which postcolonial states have inherited middle class Euro-American discourses of appropriate (hetero)sexuality tied to the categories of race, gender, class, and space to produce anti-colonial movements. These beliefs have been naturalized in laws within Caribbean nations. Writing on female sexuality and

laws in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas, Alexander (2005) draws our attention to the colonial inheritance of laws and legislation in which the state operates to mark the bodies of sex workers, HIV positive persons, gays and lesbians, and unwed mothers as "non-citizens" of the state (Alexander, 2005 p. 5). The coalescing of citizenship, heterosexuality, and reproduction by the state would "sexualize[d] and rank[ed] into a class of good, loyal, reproducing, heterosexual citizens, and a subordinated, marginalized class of noncitizens who, by virtue of choice and perversion, choose not to do so" (Alexander, 2005, p. 46). Or as Faith Smith (2012) demonstrates, the Caribbean region has a long history of sexual desires that did not conform to heterosexuality, it was only the "discourse of the nineteenth-century nationalists [who] naturalize heterosexual sex…" (p. 6). King (2011), pointing to the connections between citizenship and sexuality, notes that in the 1830s, working class black Creole women's status changed, which allowed them to enact and publicly perform "new sexualities" (p.216). Consequently, in different eras, the definitions of "citizen" and "citizenship", and who is entitled to citizenship, are underwritten by gender, racial, class, and sexual differences (Alexander, 2005; Puar, 2007; Smith, 2011; Sheller, 2012). The law as an extension of the heteropatriarchal state simultaneously upholds particular forms of heterosexuality and criminalizes sexualities that do not fit into this model (Alexander, 2004; Tambiah, 2009; Kempadoo, 2004).

This is also reflected in Guyana's retention of colonial laws regarding "buggery" and "cross-dressing." Guyana has two different legislative acts, the Sexual Offences Act (2010) and the Criminal Law (Offences) Act, under which non-normative gender expressions and homosexuality are targeted and criminalized. Most of these acts disproportionally affect men, however this is not to suggest that women are not impacted, rather the ways in which the law applies to them is the distinction. The Summary Jurisdiction Offenses Act, Chapter 8:02 section

titled, *Minor Offences, chiefly in Towns*, 153(1) (xlvii) states that, being a man, in any public

way or public place, for any improper purpose, appears in female attire; or being a woman, in

any public way or public place, for any improper purposes, appears in male attire" will be

charged a fine of seven thousand dollars. The law does not clearly define what constitutes

"improper purposes" and often uses this clause to target and imprison men who cross-dress and

transgender women in the public sphere. Since "improper purposes" is ambiguous and open to

interpretation, total power resides with the police, lawmakers, and judges who preside over these

cases. Furthermore, the law is excessively applied to men and trans-women in the public sphere

("Magistrate accused of discrimination", 2016).

The other piece of legislation that pertains to male homosexuality is the Criminal Offense

Act. Under the section titled "Offences against Morality" section 352 states that,

Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission, or procures
or attempts to procure the commission, by any male person, of any act of gross indecency with
any other male person shall be guilty of a misdemeanour and liable to imprisonment for two
years.

The Criminal Offense Act includes the following sections as well,
Section 353- stating that Everyone who commits one of the offences below shall be guilty of

felony and liable to imprisonment for ten years:

   (a) Attempts to commit buggery; or
   (b) Assaults any person with intent to commit buggery; or
   (c) Being a male, indecently assaults another male person

What exactly constitutes "gross indecency," "indecent assaults", or "indecent act" also remains

unclear with the punishments of ten years or life in prison if found guilty. "Buggery", on the

other hand, targets anal intercourse regardless of gender, sexual identities, and sexual orientation.

The current legislations, such as the ones described above, become one site/space which

continues to situate LGBT subjects as outside the parameters of citizenship, and by extension the nation-state. The policing and surveilling of sexualities and gender expression, i.e. gay men, cross dressing, trans women, butch women, through existing laws exacerbates the violence against LGBTQ subjects (Wiltshire, 2016). Given these multiple structures, how do LGBQ and WLW in Guyana make sense of 'LGBT rights as human rights?'. How do women engage in sexual rights debates, citizenship, and activism? I explore these questions in detail in chapter six of this dissertation.

Violence in the Caribbean Region

I offered a conceptualization of violence as a fluid and permutable category as noted in the theoretical section. However much of the literature in the Caribbean on violence is connected to patriarchy. I draw from the broader literature on violence within the Caribbean and Guyana to frame my discussion of Guyana. Caribbean feminist- and sociological-informed frameworks "examine[s] the relationships between individual and society, and link violence to issues of race, class, and gender" (Matthews &Goodman, 2013, p. 2) arguing that within patriarchal societies, men use violence to exercise control and power over women (Kanhai, 1999; Mohammed, 2001; Peake & Trotz, 1999; Kempadoo, 2009; Bahadur, 2014; Morgan & Youssef, 2006).

As a normal expression of masculinity, violence and sex are also encoded in everyday interactions and in public political discourses. The coupling of violence and sex is exemplified in nationalistic movements in Guyana, for example, in the ways in which women's bodies are crucial for not only marking ethnic communal boundaries and identities (Trotz, 2004), but also in each group's quest for political legitimacy and citizenship status. The repetition of violence, both sexual and physical, against both Afro and Indo-Guyanese women's bodies, is often seen and

read as an attack against each ethnic group. Trotz (2004) examines the ways in which women's

bodies are created as "vulnerable and victims" of "outsider" violence in the

1950s/60s/90s/2000s, and in need of protection from their community (p. 9). She argues that it is

through violence against women that each racialized group is able to

make further political claims to the state and does little to erase the violence. The violence, Trotz

(2004) notes, become spaces in which "masculinized violence against women becomes

sanctioned within communities and between communities" (p. 9), while concealing the

intimate/domestic forms of violence enacted within the private sphere (p. 9).

Furthermore, Caribbean feminist scholars have also focused largely on domestic violence

and gender-based violence in Guyana (Danns & Parsad, 1989; Shiw Parsad, 1989; Peake &

Trotz, 1999; Gopaul & Cain, 1996; Bahadur, 2014; Kanhai, 1999) and more broadly in the

Caribbean region, emphasizing the gendered nature of violence against women and intimate

partner violence (Morgan & Youssef, 2006; Lazarus-Black, 2008; Chevannes, 2001; Kempadoo,

2004; DeShong & Hayes, 2016; DeShong, 2015). Although statistics are unreliable, one survey

indicate that

> Out of more than 60 percent of women who were involved in a relationship or union,
> 27.7 percent reported physical abuse, 26.3 percent had experienced verbal abuse and12.7
> percent experienced sexual violence. Approximately half of the surveyed women
> responded that one of the likely causes of partner's abuse was jealousy (55.4 percent) or
> "hot temper". Nearly four of every five respondents perceived violence in the family to
> be very common in Guyana (76.8 percent). More than one in three knew someone who
> was currently experiencing domestic violence (35.5 percent) (Red Thread, 2000)

Despite inconclusive statistics, scholars across the region have offered multiple, intersecting

factors to explain why violence is a common and normal experience. For instance, the cultural

acceptability and explanation of domestic violence is seen as a primary way in which men assert

their control over women (Kempadoo, 2004; Morgan & Youssef, 2006; Peake & Trotz, 1999),

but tied to shifting gendered relations between Caribbean men and women (Lewis, 2003; 2004; Reddock, 2004; Mohammed, 2002; 2004); the changing economic situation in which the loss of jobs has caused men to respond violently towards women (Chevannes, 2001; Crichlow et al, 2014; Henderson, 2014); and the visibility of women's group in the public sphere which supposedly corresponds to "male marginalization" in the region (Lewis, 2004; Reddock, 2004); and that violence against women is an expression of love and jealousy on the part of men, with women being portrayed as sexually promiscuous (Mohammed, 2007). These aforementioned works have offered a rich analysis of the structures in place in the Caribbean that continue to fuel the cycle of violence against women. Other sources such as the media, however, position violence as a result of love and jealousy, as a private matter between individuals, without much room for holding men accountable and responsible for their actions against women ("Mother of five", 2017).

While Guyana has signed onto several pieces of legislation at the international level such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979, Domestic Violence Act in 1996, and formed a National Steering Committee for the Eradication of Violence against Women and Girls in 2000 (Peake, 2009), lack of judicial governance, responses, inconsistent application of domestic violence and rape laws, and an overall cultural acceptability of violence are cited as major barriers preventing women from getting the help they need, and mark the current situation in Guyana (Peake, 2009; Bahadur, 2014). Moreover, the studies above have also approached violence within a heterosexual context, where violence is a result of heteropatriarchy.

Regarding the LGBT community, there is ongoing work in the region addressing homophobia and structural violence against the community, especially since the region is being

labelled by international human rights discourses as homophobic (Murray, 2012). David Murray (2012) has noted how the term homophobia, especially in its application to the Caribbean, is being "used as a sociocultural trait, or more accurately, a pathological sociocultural trait" in which Caribbean people are marked as violent and dangerous, and in which Euro-American spaces emerge as progressive and accepting of LGBTQ individuals (p. 5). The high levels of violence meted out against gender and sexual minorities has branded the region as a homophobic space by international human rights groups and activists (Murray, 2012). This is reflected in international NGOs and LGBTQ activists boycotting Jamaican artists and performers in the Stop Murder Music Campaign (Wahab, 2016). Analyzing Barbados, Murray (2012) writes that labelling a group of people as homophobic misses the crucial ways in which homophobia is produced and mobilized within different narratives by the Barbadian state, media, and development agencies (2012, p. 5-7). Similarly, in 2012, responding to this dominant perception of the Caribbean as homophobic, Rosamond S. King and Angelique V. Nixon, Colin Robinson, Natalie Bennett, and Vidyaratha Kissoon launched the "Theorizing Homophobias in the Caribbean-Complexities of Place, Desire and Belonging" –an online platform that brings together activist reports, creative writing, critical essays, film, interviews, music, and visual and performance art

> to address the larger contexts of poverty, structural adjustment, neocolonialism, and violence in general within the region…while it is accepted that homophobia in the Caribbean has its roots in laws, religion, and social perceptions of gendered identity, there is more to understanding the scope and complexity of how homophobias work differently across the region. In fact, sexual minority and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activists and others living in the Caribbean have argued that there is a complex range of viewpoints and attitudes that must be accounted for in our defining of homophobias (King & Nixon, 2012).

This platform brings scholars, activists, and artists to share and theorize their own experiences of homophobia as it is produced through different formations in the Caribbean.

In Guyana, organizations such as Help and Shelter, Red Thread, SASOD, Guybow, and GTU continue to discuss the violence against the LGBTQ community that is sustained by a lack of legal protection such as recognizing sexual orientation in the constitution, and the persistence of cross-dressing laws that target cross-dressers and transgender women (Seales, 2014; "It is time to denounce homophobia", 2017; "SASOD alleges human rights abuse", 2015). And although the current president considers current laws to be in violation of human rights, there is still no action to repeal those laws, except as noted above the call for a referendum ("Guyana president takes aim", 2016). The lack of legal protections for sexual minorities further exacerbates this problem, as sexual orientations and identities are not legally recognisable under Guyana's law. In the CADRES report of 2013, in a random sampling of 1,034 people, the report found that 25% of the population was "gay tolerant" while 25% could be described as "homophobic" and 19% "gay friendly" (p.16). And while 25% were considered to be homophobic, overall 71% of the people surveyed believed that violence against LGBTQ people is a type of discrimination, with 53% opposing the decriminalization of buggery (CADRES, 2013, p. 24). The report explained these contradicting responses by Guyanese as showing that the vast majority perhaps believe that homosexuality is a choice and therefore does not warrant special protection or changing current laws. These responses were also complicated by age, gender, religion, and ethnic identification. Building on these findings, I interrogate the experiences of violence by LGBQ women and WLW in Guyana. How does violence cut across categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality? How does the state respond to LGBQ women and WLW experiences of violence? What are the implications of this in our theorizing of homophobia and violence in the feminist scholarship? These questions are explored in chapter five of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological frameworks used in this study, particularly detailing the qualitative research method of feminist in-depth semi-structured interviews. I use in-depth semi-structured interviews to track and map out women's perceptions of and feelings regarding their same-sex practices and desires in Guyana. Given the set of questions I asked at the start of my dissertation, adopting semi-structured interviews allow me to capture the different components of women's lived experiences of sexuality. Such an approach allowed me to thematically show how women's experiences overlap when it comes to their same-sex desires and practices, as well as how they differ depending on their multiple subjective positioning. First, I begin with a discussion on why I adopted feminist semi-structured interviews for this process. The subsequent sections describe the data collection process, coding and analysis. The last part of this chapter which draws from my personal experiences reveals the role of trauma in the fieldwork process. Beyond the theorizations of trauma as a pathological embodiment, I argue that we critically consider the workings of trauma as a productive and generative force that can guide one in the fieldwork process.

Feminist Methods and Interview Process

The semi-structured interview questions explore the lives and experiences of gender/sexual women minorities, or what Latoya Lazarus (2013) refers to as "hidden populations" located in Guyana. The exploratory nature of my questions cannot be fully answered by quantitative methods; however, this is not to negate the validity of these methods nor the information that can be obtained by them. Rather, the questions posed to my participants, attempted to uncover women's subjugated knowledge, their struggles and lived experiences that are grounded in location specific contexts (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007). In this dissertation, I

seek to capture the multiple experiences and standpoints of LGBQ women and women who love women (WLW) in Guyana within a heteronormative patriarchal society as informed by feminist post-modern and Caribbean feminist thought. Broadly speaking, feminism as a field of study is linked to different epistemologies, methodologies and methods which reflect women's experiences, oppressions, and marginality within any given society. Feminist epistemologies, methodologies and methods all work to reveal women's oppression that stem from heteronormative patriarchal structures.

Post-Modern Feminist Perspectives

Western feminist epistemologies and methodologies developed in the context of second wave feminism where women's experiences and perspectives were largely invisible within mainstream society (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 8). By rejecting previous empirical and positivist research that centered masculinist approaches, which understood the world as objective, factual, universal, and rational, (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p 6), feminist scholars from across disciplines offered various theorizations for understanding the social reality of women such as feminist standpoint theory, situated knowledges, and strong objectivity (Harstock 1993; Haraway 1993; Harding, 1993 quoted in Naples, 2003, p. 19). While invaluable for centering and highlighting women's experiences within Western patriarchal structures, women from the third world and postcolonial feminist scholars, and more broadly, women of color, have responded critically to the homogenizing category of "woman" as a universal category of analysis (Mohanty, 2003; Alexander & Mohanty, 1997).[14] By the 1990s, post-modern feminists heavily influenced by Michel Foucault's theorizing of power-knowledge discourses called into question the ways in

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[14] This body of thought has also been critiqued for re-essentializing gender differences and for taking the category of "women" as naturally given and/or ahistorical, and thus reinforcing dualistic thinking (Leavy, 2007, p. 83).

which multiple categories of analysis (woman, race, gender, sexuality) are discursively produced and normalized (Butler, 1993; Leavy; 2007). In other words, instead of taking the categories of race, gender, sexuality etc. as natural, ahistorical and universal, post-modern feminists have demonstrated that these categories are "discursive constructs, produced in language and in authorizing practices, rather than as underlying realities waiting to be found" (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2007, p. 87). We can only examine the ways in which these categories are socially produced, and its effects in terms of how an individual embodies these categories (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2007). These arguments, however, raised epistemological and methodological conundrums. If the category of "woman" is historically and socially produced through discourse(s), then post-modernist feminists argue, there is no essential subject in feminism. (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2007). In other words, there is no *a priori* subject who can claim to speak for all women (Butler, 1990). This would seem to undermine the political claims and objectives of feminism which require the subject [woman] in order to conduct research and articulate the subject's [woman] lived oppression. The decentering of the subject has also led to the rescinding of political activism (Naples, 2003; Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2007; Alexander & Mohanty 1997).

However, there has been a resurgence of social justice movements across North America based on intersectionality. Coined by the legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, the term intersectionality is a conceptual framework addressing the complex and overlapping ways in which black women's experiences of oppression are structurally organized and produced through the social determinants of race, class, gender, age, sexuality, location, nationalism (Crenshaw

1993).[15] As an analytic, intersectionality sought to highlight and reveal the multiple ways in which one's multiple identities of race, gender and class positionings intersect to produce particular vulnerabilities. There are some though who suggest that intersectionality is limited. Arguing for a shift from intersectional to assemblage, Jasbir Puar (2007) writes that,

> an intersectional mode of identity, which presumes that components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion are separable and can thus be disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and the body against linearity, coherency, and permanency…intersectional identities often involves taking imbricated identities apart one by one to see how they influence each other, a process that betrays the founding impulse of intersectionality, that identities cannot be so easily cleaved (Puar, 2007, p. 212)

In other words, intersectionality which assumes a stable subject with a fixed identity across time and space, and as a "hermeneutic of *positionality*" becomes "a tool for diversity management…collude[ing] with the disciplinary apparatus of the state…" (p. Puar, 2007, p. 212). She further writes that assemblages "allow us to attune to movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhibit events, spatiality and corporealities…underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information" (Puar, 2007, p. 215).[16] Assemblages, then, allow us to remain flexible, to read how identities are performed and, how they can also collide with dominant state institutions and apparatuses.

Consequently, while this dissertation centers the category of "woman" as the subject of analysis, along with categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality, I also uphold these insights offered by post-modernist feminists: that these categories are not static. Their meanings are

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[15] The term intersectionality has also been subjected to critiques and limitations. See, for example, a discussion on the critiques but also a defence of the term by Gines (2011)

[16] In another article, Puar (2008) outlined assemblage as a "reading practice, first and foremost, meaning that the implications for gay and lesbian activism is not that it needs to create assemblages but rather that contemporary and historical organizing practices need to be read as always already assemblages, and this re-reading may then open up new avenues of thinking, speaking, organizing, doing politics — lines of flight, affective eruptions, affect, energies, forces, temporalities, contagions, contingencies, and the inexplicable. assemblages prioritize encounter and movement over positioning and location, one can never know in advance 'how' to organize."

derived through historically specific colonial discourses, and the analyses offered in this dissertation stems out of research in this particular historical moment and can thus change and shift over time.

Caribbean Feminist Methodologies

Since post-modern feminism recognizes that meanings and knowledges are constructed and become 'truths,' this research draws on this idea to center Caribbean feminist epistemologies and perspectives, examining the ways in which knowledge is constructed, produced, sustained and dispersed throughout the region. Centering Caribbean feminist theories offers varied insights into the ways in which women's subjectivity and identity are constituted, and informed by spatial, socio-economic, and other material differences. Kamala Kempadoo and Halimah DeShong (2013) argue that Caribbean feminist methodologies evolve out of Caribbean feminist epistemologies. Offering three conceptual frameworks, they outline Caribbean feminist research as:

> (a) research that is explicitly feminist in orientation, which arises from Caribbean struggles against the intersection of colonialism and its legacies, racism, heteropatriarchy, class inequalities and other forms of domination, and which seeks to create more just societies for Caribbean peoples; (b) research that takes Caribbean women as the main subject of enquiry and takes gendered relations of power as the principal focus, as well as concerns itself primarily with the empowerment of the category of women; and (c) [research that considers] gender and sexuality as theoretical or analytic tools (p. 2)

Given the variety of methods, Caribbean feminist research and methodologies must ground themselves in the specificities of Caribbean histories and experiences as outlined above. Despite the historical and context specific differences between post-modern feminists and Caribbean feminist epistemologies, I have drawn on both streams of thought to frame my study. The reason for this lies in the fact that both streams of study intersect and share a commitment to: a) recognizing that there is no one 'Truth'—rather the knowledge that is produced stems from both

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the researcher and participant location and positionality situated within specific power relations; b) have an ethical and political stance that make researchers accountable to the participants or the community they are working with and; c) research that seeks to empower women and other sexual minorities and facilitate social justice and change (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2007; Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Nixon & King, 2013).

Recruitment

In the process of designing my research proposal in 2015, practical questions started to emerge before I left for Guyana. I was confronted by my own anxieties around the fieldwork such as: How would I gain access to participants in Guyana? Would women trust me enough to want to be interviewed by me? If they did agree, to what degree would they be willing share their experiences? Would I be safe in Guyana? How would they respond to me as a person who is Guyanese born, but currently living in the diaspora of Toronto, Canada? How would they respond to someone who they might see as a partial "outsider"? While I did not know any women, who identified as LGBQ and WLW in Guyana, I knew that I had to work on gaining trust and access to LGBTQ and WLW women in Guyana. Drawing on other Caribbean researchers, Lazarus (2013) discusses the complexities in gaining access and trust, in establishing rapport, and developing relations with "hidden populations" such as sex workers and same-sex individuals in the Caribbean region (p. 6). According to Miller & Bell, "highly trusted gatekeepers" are central in making such studies possible, "where one may have to rely on those individuals who are in a position to "permit access to others for the purpose of interviewing" (as cited in Lazarus, 2013, p. 6) However, Lazarus also cautions us, and directs researchers to pay attention to the "various degrees of power imbalances in the relations between us [researchers] and the gatekeepers, as well as our potential participants (2013, p. 6). Informed consent,

according to Lazarus (2013) may not always be a voluntary process, but rather this process is always steeped in relations of power, which raises questions about "access, coercion, participation" (p.7). I write on gaining access, trust and consent as key components of my research process as these three factors influenced the ways in which I collected my data and the overall research process.

The first step in accessing and building trust began in Toronto before I went to Guyana in January 2016. I was aware of two organisations. One was, Guyana Rainbow Foundation (GuyBow), a grassroots organization that does outreach work, provides support to gender/sexual minorities, MSM and LGBT individuals as well as HIV/AIDS services. The second one, was the Society Against Sexual Orientation and Discrimination (SASOD) that engages in advocacy work that focuses on repealing Guyana's colonial laws against gender and sexual minorities. I contacted both organizations prior to leaving Toronto, sending them a blurb of my research and asking them if they would be interested in collaborating with me. One of the organizations responded to my emails by setting up an appointment for when I arrived in Guyana. After meeting with and discussing my ideas with a representative of one of the organizations, I was asked to give my preliminary findings of my research at the end of the month. I noted in my field notes, "I am not sure how I feel about giving my findings in an unpolished manner (January 8, 2016). While the representative may have good intentions and wanted to collaborate, I felt that that sharing the materials would have been premature. Not only had I not conducted any interviews but asking to share those findings without the time and space to reflect on what I would find, added a lot of pressure on me. Furthermore, this representative exercised a lot of power over the research process. Even though this person was in many ways a "gatekeeper" to potential participants, the power imbalance had already emerged between us, making me feel

restricted, pressured, and confined to some of the potential objectives of the organization. Elana Buch and Karen Staller (2007) point to the ways in which "gatekeepers also participate in a *gatekeeping* function that can potentially exclude or hinder researchers…" (p. 200, emphasis in original). Given this power dynamic, I re-evaluated my involvement and potential collaboration with any organizations in Guyana. I also realized that in accessing and developing a rapport *only* with individuals who attended these organisations, could exclude those experiences and narratives from individuals who do not participate in such spaces (Buch & Staller, 2007). For instance, some my participants did not want to be associated with these organizations nor with the advocacy work done by them. In spite of my anxieties around finding participants, I resolved to gather them through other routes. Since I was not located within any organizational structure, and given the lack of formal networks, online groups and list-servs affiliated with gays, lesbians and WLW in Guyana, I relied on the snowball technique or the word of mouth as my primary method to gather and recruit participants. The way this worked was that participants that I got access to, would then pass on the contact information of another person whom they knew to contact for an interview.

Interview Process

My research questions were aimed at gathering women's ideas, thoughts, and feelings of their inner world in their own words (see Reinharz, 1991). According to me this was best achieved through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews refer to "a specific guide" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 115), or set of questions that can be asked to gather information. Based on a specific set of questions, women were asked about their experiences of violence, the ways in which race, gender, and class shaped their sexual practices either within an urban or rural context, and their involvement in LGBT human rights and activism. Even though my

interviews were semi-structured in design, the questions that were asked allowed, for an in-depth

interview to take place, where throughout the interview process I let it take its course, asking

probing and clarification questions, while exercising caution and restrain to bring the discussion

back on track. When participants were contacted for an interview over the phone, most of them

asked the same questions regarding my interest in the topic—i.e., if I was "one of them." In fact,

my first conversation at a mixer was marked by such a demand where an Afro-Guyanese woman,

Sandra, asked me in an aggressive manner,

> what's you interest in this topic besides being born and raised in Guyana?" I felt a bit
> attacked and called into question, but I responded and said that I want to know as a gay
> woman, how would I live here? She said, "ok, so you are part of the community." I said
> "yes." I know this is important for them, or at least to her. I also wonder if it had
> anything to do with me being Indo-Guyanese….is my sexuality separate from my visibly
> read Indian identity? Did I not "pass" as gay/lesbian/queer? Did she think I was straight?
> How was I taken up when I entered the space? If I was in that space—a supposedly
> LGBT space—wouldn't it be assumed that I was one of them too? (Field notes January 8,
> 2016)

While this line of questioning may have served to establish a connection and a sense of

familiarity for some participants to know that I am "part of the community," this engagement

also revealed to me some of my own anxieties regarding the ways I did not also belong to the

space. Participants also often inquired about my nationality, if I was Guyanese, and if so, which

part of Guyana I belonged to, all of which may have helped to bridge and reduce the gap that

exists between the researcher [myself] and participants. "Our shared background" (Hesse-Biber,

2007) facilitated a certain level of comfortability and assisted me in gaining access to these

participants. These shared commonalities, however, could have been perceived as *differences*

from some participants, and encouraged them to "help me out" as Sonia, indicated to me, when I

asked her why she agreed to an interview with me. My diasporic status—living away from

Guyana, lack of connections to the community, and my age (I was generally perceived as being younger) encouraged Sonia to agree to a request for an interview. The majority of my participants also chatted with me over the phone prior to meeting because they wanted to ensure that their identities would not be disclosed, and that I would take steps to guarantee their confidentiality and anonymity. On another level, since all my participants were women, most of them wanted to chat with me before the interview which I am assuming conveyed some feelings of safety and security, as opposed to showing up at a location to meet someone at they had no interaction with. After giving them details regarding the project and their concerns were addressed, most of them agreed to meet at a location of their choice, or sometimes the participant and I decided to meet at mutually agreed upon location. All of my interviews were conducted face-to-face, with one done on Skype. Thirty-three interviews were audio recorded and were between one and three hours, depending on the content that participants were sharing. After each interview, I would document in my field notes my experiences of the participants, what I found interesting in their stories or in the content they shared, and the ways in which they were interacting with me through other modes i.e. body language, flirtation, and invitations.

Since a central tenant of feminist practice is a commitment to reducing power imbalances in the field between the researcher and participant, I approached my interview process through the lens of what Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2007) calls "the co-creation of meaning" (p. 132). This perspective suggests that the researcher approaches the interview as a conversation, where both the researcher and the participant co-create and produce knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 132). This does not, however, imply that the role of the researcher along with their agenda is completely removed from the process, rather this approach forces the researcher to work through their motives by participating in active listening with the participant (Hesse-Biber, 2007). I

approached the interview process wherein both myself and participants were *co-creating* a narrative, where information was flowing back and forth based on the questions that I was asking (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 134).

Data Storage, Coding and Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded, with the exception of one interview as the participant did not want to be recorded. For this interview I took notes and later reiterated what I heard in the interview to ensure that I had gathered her narrative accurately. Consent forms were given out to each person prior to the interview. To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of my participants, all materials— the interviews, individual information such as consent forms, observation, and fieldwork notes are stored in a locked cabinet in my home. These materials will be kept on file for five years. Interviews were transcribed and coded, followed by storage on an external hard drive that is password protected and also accessible only to myself. I took precautions to ensure the anonymity and privacy of my participants by using pseudonyms and removing any identifiable characteristics from the material. However, there are a few participants whose narratives could be identifiable given their public activism in Guyana. To mitigate these effects and power imbalance, I have contacted these participants to share my concerns that parts of their stories may be identifiable and consulted with them on how best to proceed. I was given their written and verbal consent to proceed.

Once the interviews were transcribed, they were analyzed using *NVivo*, a software program, which helps with organizing the interviews. I approached the transcripts and field notes on *NVivo* as a type of text, highlighting emerging themes. Even though the program helps with organizing the interviews, I still had to manually go through each interview and highlight different phrases, key terms, or particular expressions that were common in the interviews. For

instance, a recurring topic in all of my interview was violence, however, I had to pay particular attention to the ways in which women expressed or spoke of their experiences of violence. This lead me to develop subheadings such as rape, physical abuse, and early childhood experiences of abuse. Within the overarching topic of violence, I include multiple and differential narratives of violence. This approach allowed me to develop nuanced and overlapping experiences and themes among the participants. Approaching the interviews through themes allowed me to highlight the overall experiences that women shared, but also paying attention to the grey areas and differences in their individual experiences.

LGBT/Queer identities and Women who Love Women (WLW)

The largest identification category that half of my participants used falls under the LGBQ acronym, while the other half identified as "women who like/date/love women." LGBT studies within Euro-American discourses have tended to focus on fixed sexual and gender identities with specific meanings, practices, and behaviours located within Western contexts, whereas *Queer* has departed from identification categories and is focused on the ways in which these categories are socially constructed and produced through heteronormativity and homonormativity (Butler 1993; Ahmed, 2006; Puar, 2007; Munoz, 1999; 2009). The use of 'queer' in Guyana is new and marginal. Given that half of my participants use the LGBQ acronym as another way to self-identify and to articulate their sexual praxis, I also use queer as an umbrella framework to capture these various formations, and as a framework of disruption. However, I am hesitant to apply or impose queer as a category of analysis to all of my participants as that would re-inscribe the universalizing predispositions inherent in queer theory (Tinsley, 2011; Wekker 2006; Puar 2007; Munoz 1999; Gopinath, 2005). Rather, I mobilize both LGBQ and local terminology of

'woman who like/date/love woman' as an analytic framework that my participants use to describe their own sexual subjectivities and sexual praxis. I also use queer more broadly to mark out the particularities of women's experience under the LGBQ framework. I utilize both frameworks in this study as there is an incommensurability in queer theory and gender/women's studies that does not adequately capture the lives of my participants. All social theory, or the knowledge that we produce reflects one's positionality and experience within a particular colonial, social, political and economic context. To apply Western queer/gender studies terminologies unequivocally to my participants' lives would be to re-inscribe and participate in neo-colonial tendencies. There is a tension between these two broad fields of studies and the lived experiences of my participants. Drawing on the fields of Queer studies, Gender and Women's Studies, Caribbean Studies and Geography, this project straddles multiple disciplinary formations.

Participants

In this research project, I interviewed a total of thirty-three women who identified along different axes of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and religion. There were 3 self-identified Black/Afro-Guyanese women, 12 Indian/Indo-Guyanese, 17 Mixed race and 1 Amerindian.[17] In Guyana, the term 'mixed race' is used for people who are mixed for generations, and who cannot always identify what the mixed ancestry is composed of. Unlike other racial groups like '*Dougla*' for example, where there is a Black and Indian parent, mixed raced refers to some combination of different racial groups which cannot be easily identified (See chart 1). In terms of sexual identity/orientation/praxis, 15 women identified as lesbians, 3 as bisexual, 3 as gay, 2 as

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[17] The term "Amerindian" is used to refer to indigenous people in Guyana.

queer, 1 as pansexual, and 9 as women who like women/are attracted to women/who only date women (See chart 2). My participants also varied in ages from 18-60 years old.

CHART 1: ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHIC OF PARTICIPANTS

Ethnicity	Count
Amerindian	1
Mixed (Black/Indian/Amerindian/Portugese/Chinese)	17
Indian/Indo-Guyanese	12
Black/Afro-Guyanese	3

*

Chart 2: Breakdown of sexual identity/orientation of participants

- Lesbian 47%
- Bisexual 10%
- Gay 6%
- Queer 6%
- Pansexual 3%
- Love Women 28%
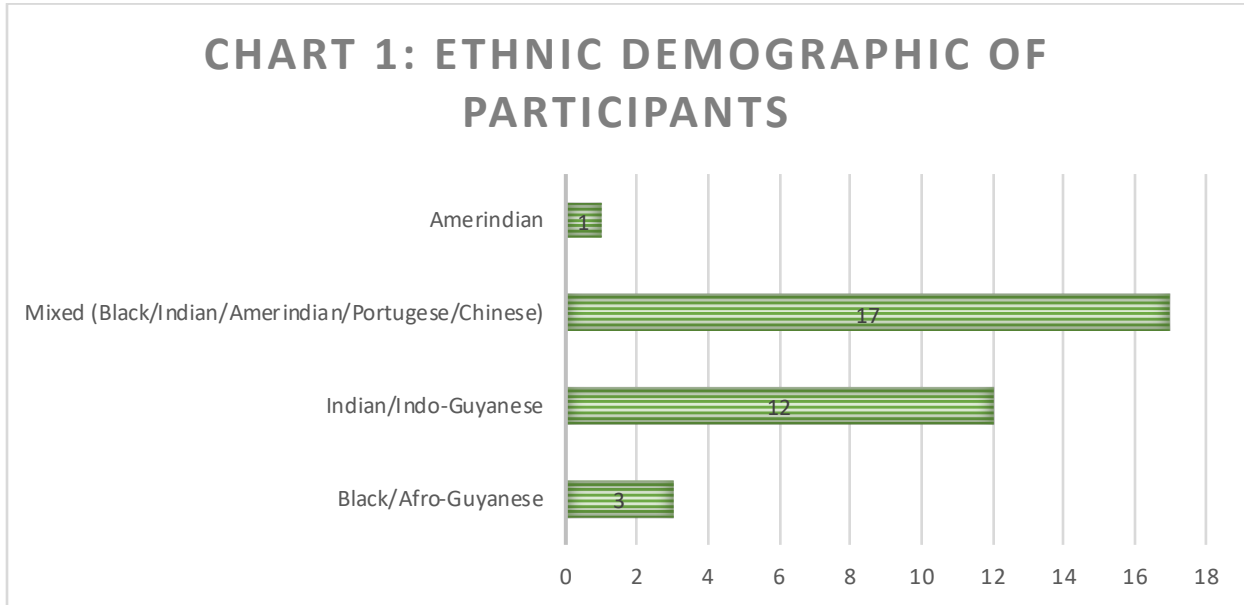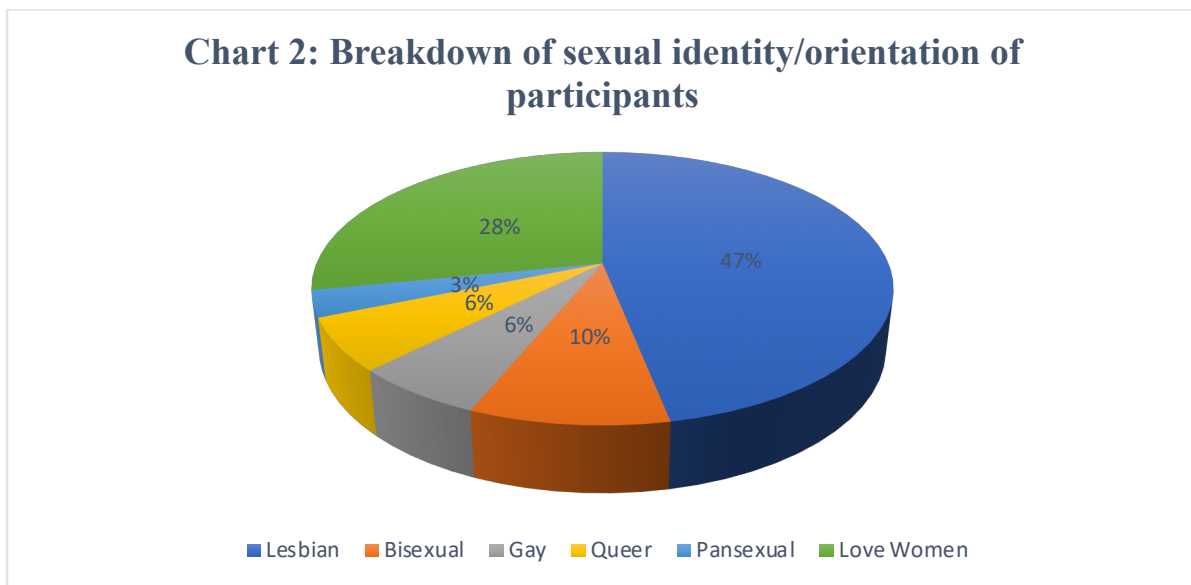
Locations and Demographics
Georgetown

According to, *Guyana's Population and Housing Census Report of 2012*, Guyana has a

total population of 747, 884. Georgetown, the nation's capital and its suburbs, located in region 4 has a total population of 311, 563 (Population Composition, 2016). Given the region's colonial history, it has a larger population of African/Afro-Guyanese of 126, 378, followed by East Indians/Indo-Guyanese of 109, 105, Mixed of 66, 844 and Amerindians of 7,066 (Population Composition, 2016). From Georgetown, there was a higher representation of individuals who identified as mixed in my research sample (See chart 3). The city is the center for financial and governmental services, retail, and commercial industries. Georgetown was selected for several reasons. It is an urban space where there is an increasing visibility of an LGBTQ community. The city is the hub where LGBTQ rights, advocacy, and activism are taking place. Many of the organizations working towards the decriminalization of crossing dressing laws, buggery laws, and other LGBTQ related issues are located within the city. Participants who were interviewed in Georgetown are divided into two categories: those who live within the city and those who live in villages or in suburbs outside of the city. I borrow from Emily Kazyack's (2010) work in which she made a distinction between participants who live within the city and those who live outside of the city. This latter group describe themselves as part of and within the city due to their social networks, jobs and connections to the city (Kazyack, 2010). From the thirty-three interviews, eleven participants whom I interviewed lived within Georgetown, while thirteen indicated that they lived outside of the city in villages/suburbs, however, due to their proximity to the city, work, leisure activities, and social circles, they saw and describe themselves as part of and within the city. Consequently, the women that I interviewed understood their experiences as being located within the urban space of Georgetown. In this sample group, twenty-one participants from Georgetown identified as middle or upper class and three identified as working-class (See chart 5).

Chart 3: Ethnic Demographic of Participants in Georgetown

Ethnicity	Count
Amerindian	1
Mixed	18
Black/Afro-Guyanese	2
Indian/Indo-Guyanese	3
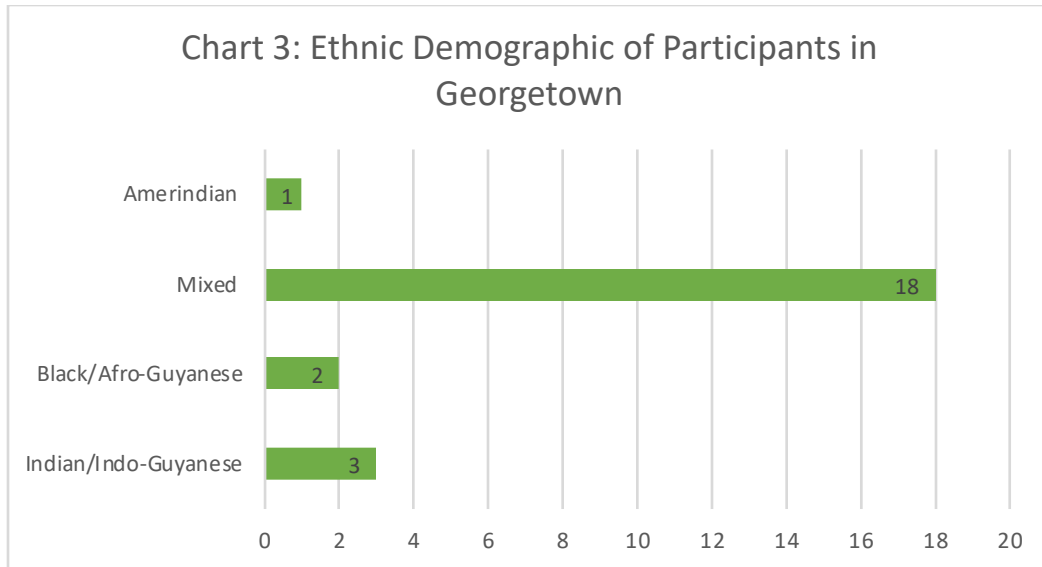
Berbice

With over 70% of the population residing in rural areas, I wanted to account for the spatial, socio-economic, racial and gender differences, along with the diversity of women's experiences in another location specific context. My reasons for including Berbice in my study are also numerous. On a personal level, I was born in a small village in Berbice and spent my childhood growing up in that space until I migrated to Toronto, Canada in 2001. My early childhood experiences in my village shaped my decision to include Berbice as a site to conduct interviews. Berbice, or region 6, is one of the 10 regions of Guyana. Berbice has a total population of 109, 652 or 14.60% of the national population as of 2012 (Population and Housing Census, 2012, p. IV). Given the country's colonial history, migration, and settlement patterns, Berbice has a greater population of East Indians/Indo-Guyanese at 72, 405, followed by African/Afro-Guyanese at 23, 383, and Mixed at 11, 727 (Population Composition, 2016). The main source of employment, according to the Bureau of Statistics, is unskilled occupations at 38.7 %, followed by workers/farmers at 13%. Geographically separated and distant from the capital city, the region's main source of occupation consists of agricultural industries such as rice

and sugar. The region's geographical layout reflects its colonial history where housing patterns are dispersed along the main costal road, with greater concentration near sugar estates and rice farmlands. As a result, from Berbice, there is a higher representation of Indo-Guyanese women participants in my study (See chart 4). The geographic distance from the city of Georgetown, the lack of access to information and technology, along with the limited conversations around LGBT issues makes Berbice a unique site to conduct research. Out of the thirty-three interviews that I conducted, 9 participants were from different villages along the coast in Berbice. In Berbice, all participants identify as working-class, however as I outlined in my theoretical section, three participants cannot be classified as such, rather they are middle-upper class women. Six other women also identify as working class (See chart 5). I interviewed these women in order to explore the ways in which they navigate their same-sex/gender practices within a rural space. In other words, what was it like to live in a rural space as a 'woman who loves woman' and/or if they identified as part of the LGBT acronym. I was also interested in exploring the ways in which the urban/rural binary influenced their perception of their sexual practices and how the rural/urban impacted their decisions to stay in Berbice and/or migrated to Georgetown and abroad.

Chart 4: Ethnic Demographic of Participants in Berbice

Ethnicity	Count
Mixed	1
Black/Afro-Guyanese	1
Indian/Indo-Guyanese	7

Chart 5: Class Composition of Participants in Georgetown and Berbice

	Georgetown		Berbice	
	Middle-upper class	working-class	Middle-upper class	working-class
Count	21	3	3	6
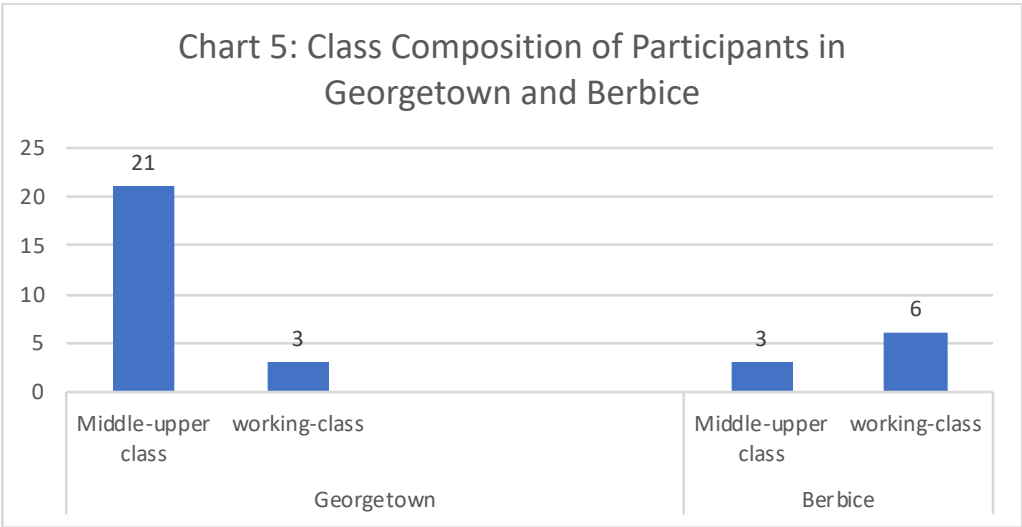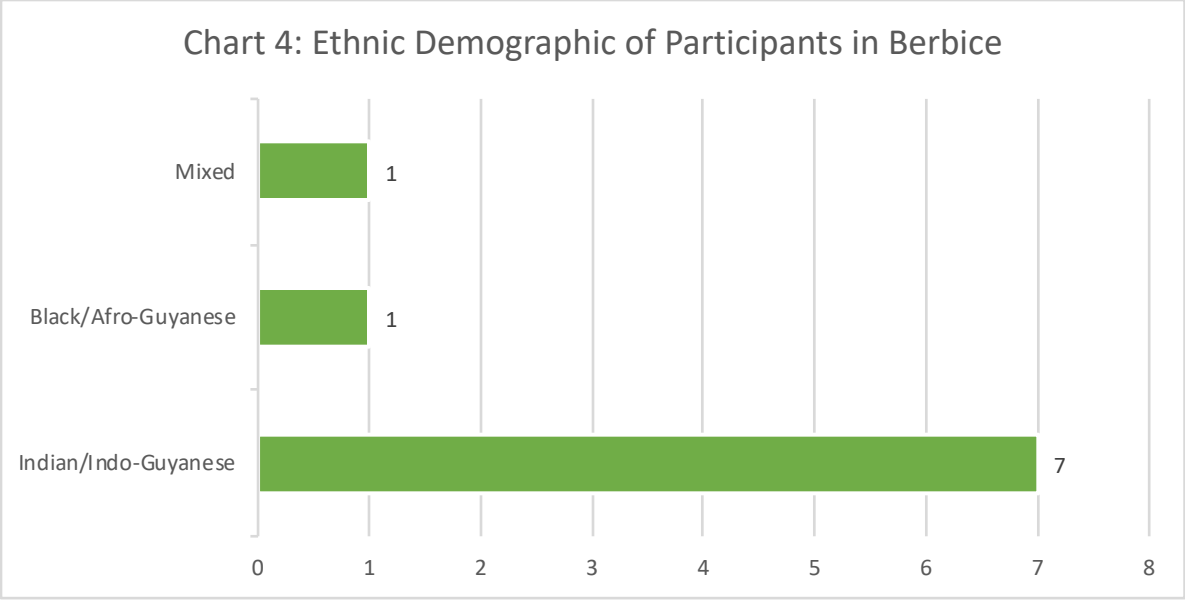
Limitations

This is an incomplete project. Given the small sample size that I worked with, the findings of this research cannot be generalized or applied to the population of women who love women and/or LGBQ individuals. My primary recruitment method was snowball sampling and hence is not representative of the population (Miner-Rubion & Jayaratne, 2007). The findings of this research are only applicable to the group of individuals who participated in this study and

cannot be used to homogenize the experiences of women in Guyana. Another limitation of this project is that participants were recruited from two sites, Georgetown and Berbice. These regional differences between these two sites also shaped the findings of this research. There were no participants from the hinterland nor from Essequibo, and hence their findings are restricted to only urban Georgetown and rural Berbice. Another limitation that underscores this project is the timing and funding constrains of being a diasporic researcher located in Toronto. After completion of the in-depth interviews with participations, I was able to conduct follow up interviews on skype and ask for clarifications to ensure that I was receiving participants' narratives accurately. I was only able to follow up with ten participants on skype out of thirty-three. Since I was unable to return to Guyana during this process, certain parts of this dissertation pose questions yet to be addressed and warrant further research beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Insider/Outsider/[Returnee][18]

Power differentials are inevitable and inherently embedded within any research process. Ann Oakley argues that power differences within the interview process can be minimized "when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (as cited in Doucet & Mauthner, 2007, p. 41). Feminist researchers continue to grapple with power relations in the field, addressing power disparities between the researcher and participant by engaging in self reflexivity, which refers to the ways in which the researcher's own subjective positioning— racial, gender, class, sexual, along with their beliefs, assumptions, emotions, location, and

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[18] I borrow this terminology from Latoya Lazarus who uses 'insider/returnee/outsider' as a framework to discuss her subjective position in doing research in the Jamaican context.

positionality influence the research process and the knowledge produce (Oakley, 1981; Wolf, 1996; Kempadoo & DeShong, 2013; Nixon & King, 2013; Lazarus, 2013; Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; DeShong 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Naples, 2003; Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2002). Despite the wide-ranging consensus and theoretical application of reflectivity as a central component within feminist work, the process of reflexivity has been met with criticism— our awareness is always partial, limited, and can never been fully known nor transparent (Doucet &Mauthner, 2007; Proudfoot, 2015)

I draw on Lazarus's (2013) formulation of 'insider/returnee/outsider' to discuss my own subjective positioning, while recognizing that this dualism is not fixed nor is it static (see also, Naples, 2003; Valentine, 2003). Rather, our positionalities within the field are constantly shifting and re-negotiated through "our own fluid performances of the self and the ways that these are read by each other…our performances can always be read against our intentions" (Valentine, 2003, p. 123). In other words, the relationship between the researcher and participant is always permeable, unstable, and changing due to the ways in which both the parties construct and read the bodily performances of each other. While these social determinants did facilitate rapport and support from the women, these factors nonetheless shaped the research and the information that participants shared with me. Below I reflect on the ways in which my positionality and my participants actively shaped and influenced the research process, or what Raymond J. Michalowski refers to as the "subtle co-authoring of the eventual ethnography" (1996, p. 65). I occupy and share a number of commonalities, or what is generally referred to as an "insider status" in relation to my participants, as I was born in Guyana and spent my childhood there. I am racialized as Indian/Indo-Guyanese, and I am queer. However, I also differ from my participants since some of them believed that I am "middle-class," and being a diasporic

Guyanese living in Toronto. I often struggled through the interview process when participants would share difficult moments of their lives and proceed to refer to how great it must be to live in Toronto—to experience a different life, and to be "open and out." While this was their common perception of Toronto—as a space of freedom and openness for LGBTQ individuals— it nonetheless operated to influence their responses to me and the questions that I was asking. My Canadian citizenship status reflected this reality for them; that I had the ability to leave Guyana that I embodied mobility and freedom, and perhaps even "queerness" in ways different from them.

My own sexual and gendered positioning was also constantly negotiated with participants. Writing on her fieldwork experience in Nicaragua, Julie Cupples (2002) examines the ways in which she was an 'object of desire' by others (p. 386). Participants often exercised their power and agency in this research process by expressing their sexual interest in me. While I initially did not anticipate this form of interaction, it became very clear in the interviews that I was an 'object of desire' for a number of women. For instance, after finding out that there was a known "gay bar" I wanted to visit that space for a number of reasons—to check out the scene, to potentially connect with other women, and also generally to experience and participate in such a space in Guyana. After meeting a woman, Gail, and sharing my research interests, we exchanged numbers to reconnect and do an interview. Within a few days of texting, she asked me if I had a girlfriend to which I said, "yes." After this conversation, she never responded regarding the interview. As I noted in my field notes, "I wondered how come she messaged me so late in the night? Did she really want to know about my sexuality? She asked how old I was and if I was single? Was this just for reassurance to see if I was part of the community? Is she curious about me or my project? (Field notes January 23, 2016). There were many assumptions being made

about me regarding my "outsider" status i.e. I was not a local woman in the queer community, I was [maybe] sexually available, I was generally read as really young and femme. While I embody/perform these categories, it also operated to position me as different and outside of the everyday interactions the women would have, and thus might have created sexual attraction from women. In this particular case, while I had doubts about the women's interest in me, my project or both, I also wondered about the consequences of having an intimate relationship with someone during my fieldwork. Wekker (2006), for instance, details her long-term relationship with Juliette, her main informant, during her fieldwork in Suriname, challenging the rigid sexual boundaries assumed to be inherent in the field as part of the objective research. My sexuality as the "researcher" as well as that of my participants was constantly shifting and renegotiated throughout the research process. As much as I wanted an interview with Gail as it would add layers of depth and information to my research, I was also not prepared or willing to engage in such a trade-off and eventually decided to forgo the interview. I would eventually find out from another participant, Jane, that Gail wanted a sexual relation with me and was actively discouraging her and others from doing interviews with me. This incident reflects the ways in which my sexual positioning/object of desire can operate in the fieldwork process. Other participants often indicated to me that they "like Indian girls/only date Indian girls/Indian girls are dem dream things"—a comment I often received during the interviews, while the participant smiled or winked at me.

Other women after the interviews would invite me to have drinks, go to clubs, or movies with them, all of which I was unsure of, but I also wondered about the consequences of not participating in these outings; or when participants touched my arm, or reached for my earrings during the interviews or placed their hand on my lower back. To what degree were some of these

interactions cultural i.e. was it just how women interacted with each other as part of the culture

in Guyana where such interactions may be normal? I was unsure. On another level, I was coming

from Toronto where such a culture of interactions does not exist and would be considered

flirtation, and hence I wondered whether I was constructing these exchanges through those

lenses. In such moments, while I did enjoy some of the attention that I got from women and

thought of my own erotic attachments (see Newtown, 1993) to a few women, given the ways in

which I appeared to them—as diasporic, femme, —the women also held power and sway over

what they were sharing with me based on these bodily performances. The content they shared

could very well have been contingent upon their perceived assumptions about me in terms of my

sexuality, availability, diasporic(ness), femininity, and distancing from their everyday lives.

Returning: Familiar landscapes and the old wounds

As indicated above I want to spend some moments reflecting on what it meant to *return*.

What does returning mean? To whom, and in what ways do we return? Who is returning? For

what purposes? Where do we return to? Avery Gordon asks us, "in what fields does field work

occur?" (2008, p. 41) What happens when the "field" is a former home—a home that has

imprinted upon you a colonial history and legacy, a space of violence and a continued experience

of trauma? What happens when the "field" is where you spent your childhood, where memories

of riding bikes, scraped knees, and eating mangoes was an everyday experience, but so was the

scented air of alcoholism, burning tires, and pesticide fumes that your friend's dad used to take

his own life. Is the field simply the field? I depart from the traditional writings of "methods" to

consider my experiences of the field as one which already had an impression, a familiarity, a

knowing[ness], an imprint on my body—to speak about my experiences which lie outside of the

dominant Western frameworks of methods, and more broadly, ethnographic fieldwork. This

project is about returning—*returning to a previous home, to a part of myself left behind, and to a place I call home.*

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldua presents her autobiographical text in which she challenges the Western dominant mode of thinking which is based on duality. The border as an analytic concept, a space of analysis, and as a place between Mexico and Texas, where she writes from, forms the epistemology of *mestiza consciousness*. This mestiza or border consciousness involves "a shift out of habitual formations: from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes" (2007, p. 101). The epistemology of mestiza consciousness resists duality, modes of thinking, and knowledge production that centers logic, objectivity and neutrality. The mestiza consciousness as an alternative framework or mode of being in this world represents "a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave" (2007, p.102). Key to Anzaldua's formulation of mestiza consciousness is her attention to the ways in which borders affect the body and psyche of those who live and who are from borders or 'in-between-spaces.' To demonstrate the ways in which trauma affects the psyche of those who live in liminal spaces, Anzaldua posits the concept of *La facultad*,[19] explained as an affective space/state that develops within individuals because their trauma has altered and modified their state of being. According to Anzaldua, *this faculty* develops as a response mechanism or "survival tactic" by those who are marginalized and have experienced multiple forms of oppression and violence. Since trauma is simultaneously a bodily and psychosomatic experience that interrupts our rational/normal state

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[19] Thank you to Krystal Ghisyawan for pointing me in the direction of Anzaldua's work.

of functioning, Anzaldua distinguishes the ways in which trauma is experienced on differential levels. On a basic level, *La facultad* is the "capacity to see…the meaning of deeper realities…an instant "sensing," a quick perception arrived at without consciousness" (Anzaldua, 2007, p. 60) caused by traumatic experiences. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak…it is an innate ability to *feel, know and sense* imminent danger whether through "the lingering charge in the air…the smell of others, or the tingling of the skin" (Anzaldua, 2007, p. 60-61). On a deeper psychical level, Anzaldua points out that *La facultad*, is

> anything that breaks into one's everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one's defenses and resistance, anything that takes one from one's habitual grounding, causes the depth to open up, causes a shift in perception…the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing [that]…makes us pay attention to the soul, and we are thus carried into awareness—an experiencing of the soul (Self) is made possible. (2007, p. 61)

La Facultad as an affective state informed by trauma which allows you to perceive the world through a heightened awareness and sharpened sensibility. *La Facultad*—an affective state— informed by my own trauma serves as the guiding framework of the rest of this chapter. As I demonstrate, my fieldwork experience was structured and influenced by my early childhood trauma; however, it is precisely through my trauma that I was able navigate the research process in Guyana. During my fieldwork, while I was aware of some of the threats present to myself, it is only upon the completion of my fieldwork and returning to Toronto that I became even more conscious of the ways in which trauma was operating in my research and my time in Guyana. I utilized *La facultad* as informed by my trauma as the structure of this chapter as it helps me put into partial understanding that which I have experienced, but I could not have expressed in words. Anzaldua's work offered me the language to communicate those *feelings* and *senses* which were speaking to me but could not be translated and neatly captured by language. I write

of the ways in which I was confronted with my old trauma and new ordeals in the fieldwork process as these experiences shaped not only the ways in which I saw myself in these spaces but molded the research process and the "knowledge" that I am producing. For me, my trauma cannot be erased from the sites of analysis and the places where I was conducting the research. Our relationships to place and our experiences of spaces is often layered with deep feelings of suffering, uncertainty, ambivalence, and at other times, moments of tranquility and feelings of belonging. On a basic level, there is anxiety and fear that stems from the overall process of doing a Ph.D. in the academy, from being away from one's home and in a different country. However, I want to suggest that we go beyond the surface level of these fears to consider the ways in which trauma inform, mediate, and shape the research process. What would it mean to listen to and seriously consider *La facultad* informed by trauma in the fieldwork process?[20] What work does trauma do for both the researcher, the participants, and the places in which the work is taking place?

Rejecting medical and pathologizing models of trauma which keep intact the binary that one's experience of trauma is pathological, or one is a victim of trauma, queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich (2003) expands the boundaries of the category of trauma to consider "…accounts of pain as psychic, not just physical" (p. 2-3). Broadening the framework of trauma, beyond physical and worldly events, to consider the "everyday affective experiences" of distress on one's psyche, Cvetkovich (2003) pushes the theoretical, emotional, and physical space wherein we can think of "trauma specificities and variations" (p. 3). Trauma, then, for Cvetkovich is connected to the "textures of everyday experiences" (2003, p. 3); in other words, the everyday

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[20] Jesse Proudfoot discusses the role of the unconscious in shaping his fieldwork research after undergoing psychoanalysis, please see for further details. Given the cost and time of doing psychoanalysis, I have decided to reflect on the role and work of trauma in my own research.

interactions and exchanges that are not necessarily overtly violent but produce emotional duress. As described in the theoretical section, Fanon (1963) situates the physical and psychological trauma within a colonial context, that is the coinciding of violence and trauma that arises within specific structures that produces particular types of vulnerabilities and subjectivities. To this end, I draw on Fanon's perspective of violence embedded within a colonial context and Cvetkovich's insights on trauma to trace the ways in which my own trauma was enacted, encountered and re-experienced in the fieldwork process. These experiences, I argue, gave rise to the faculty of *La facultad*. My own experience of trauma is also one of the reasons why my research hones in on violence that other women experience in Guyana and which forms a chapter in this dissertation.

I present two sites to demonstrate the manifestations of trauma on myself and consequently on fieldwork processes. I also write on trauma because most scholarly reflections on the fieldwork process are restricted to discussing their racial, gender, sexual positioning's ties to power relations—an approach that does not sufficiently capture our complex and multi-layered experiences of and within the field. The "insider/outsider" model also seals our conversation to a surface level discussion of the categories of race, gender, class, etc., and through these self-definitions we foreclose those agonizing experiences that bring us closer to ourselves, to our work, and to our participants in the field. By defining our place in the field, we exclude those experiences that allow for self-growth and transformation, and thus reduce our possibilities for deeper scholarly work.

Site 1: Trauma at home

Leaving the harsh winter of Toronto for the tropical heat, I arrived in Georgetown, Guyana on January 5, 2016, feeling tired from the lack of sleep on an overnight flight. My first day in Georgetown was marked by disorientation and overwhelming anxiety. A family friend

picked me up from the airport to take me to the "home" that I would be staying in for the next 3-4 months. Catching up with small talk in the car, I concealed my fears about, being alone in a city I knew nothing about, being away from my family for an extended period—that I had never seen the place I was going to live in, nor had I met the person who was overseeing my accommodations. My accommodation was facilitated by a friend who lived across the street from the place I would be staying in, and although the landlord and I had spoken briefly over the phone, I was dependent on my friend's assistance to ensure that the flat was suitable, and that the environment was relatively safe. Arriving at a lot that housed three different units in Georgetown, I met my landlord, an Indo-Guyanese man in his late 30s or early 40s. Singh was shorter than I expected, with no shirt on, a protruding stomach, loose pants and his glasses on, he welcomed my friend and I into the compound. I felt uncomfortable because he had no shirt on and we were meeting for the first time. His soft-spoken voice and friendly demeanor seemed too composed for my liking. In fact, he seemed too pleasant. I brushed aside what I felt and attributed it to my judgmental nature. Putting aside most of my anxiety and fears, I wore a mask of confidence and spoke to him about the flat, rent, and other necessities. He showed me a ground floor unit and an upper level unit that was above his own where he lived with his wife and two kids. It seemed like a logical choice to select the flat above his, after all in the event there was an issue or an extraordinary situation of break and entry/robbery, at least he and his family were in proximity. I settled in to unpack and attempted to get over the shock that I was in Guyana, alone and attempting to do research. Later that evening, an unsettling feeling arose inside of me and my anxiety took over again. Something in the air felt disturbing. My anxiety led me to consciously/unconsciously place a knife under the pillow next to me, and I would later keep it in close proximity on a dresser for the rest of my stay. How does one explain this

experience within the fieldwork process? Why did I do this? Did it make any rational sense for those months I spent in Guyana? I was well aware that I had a knife under my pillow as I would ensure that I moved it before Singh came into clean my flat or fix any amenities. Why did I not let it be? Why did I go to lengths to move and hide its location? There was no physical or visible danger that I could discern, yet I *knew* that something was peculiar with Singh. Sara Ahmed (2000) writing on strange encounters argues that the "stranger is not *any-body* who we have failed to simply recognize, rather the stranger is *some-body* whom we have already *recognized* in the very moment of the face-to-face encounter" (p. 21, emphasis in original). In other words, the stranger is already *recognized* as someone *familiar*; someone already too close and already encountered. Singh reminded me of my own previous traumatic experiences as a child growing up in Guyana, particularly my interactions with Indian men. His demeanor did not feel quite right.

Despite being conscious of the unsettled feelings that I would experience in my encounters with Singh, I rationalized these feelings as part of living alone as a woman in a new city. In May 2016, after returning to Toronto, Singh was found guilty of murdering his first wife and burying her under the balcony of my flat where I was living in Guyana. This cannot be merely coincidental. Words cannot capture my initial shock, disgust, horror and experience of this situation. I write in my field notes "In the inside, I could feel my intestines churning and my psyche slipping into a state of shock…I walked out the door and drove away from home, clenching the steering wheel to prevent my hands from shaking. I drove a few streets down and parked the car to cry...I can't cry at home" (Fieldnotes May 26, 2016). I cried because Singh, both as a stranger and affiliate, was extremely close to me in physical proximity. What if I had said the wrong thing, could it have been me? He was in my flat, my "home" away from home in

Toronto, we shared tea and meals, and we had conversations about domestic violence in which he told me that domestic abuse is an epidemic in Guyana. The hypocrisy. While on the one hand, my trauma caused a "break in [my] habitual grounding" as suggested by Anzaldua and urged me to prepare myself in a limited way by allocating a knife, on the other hand, there is another infliction of trauma that occurred within me by the encounter itself with this stranger. Cathy Caruth (1996) argues that trauma is not caused by the direct threat of the mind of a stimulus "but by fright, the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly. It is not the direct perception of danger, that is, that constitutes the threat for the psyche, but the fact that *the danger is recognized as such one moment too late*" (1996, p. 10, emphasis mine). During the research process, I assumed that "danger" existed elsewhere in the field, and I could not see how close of a threat Singh was to me. Even though I was suspicious of him, I could not adequately or fully gauge Singh's actions and intentions as threatening and overwhelming for me, and hence it became another type of trauma that I experienced in the "field." It is precisely my limited ability to fully understand/know who I was interacting with that becomes another type of trauma experienced in the field. I write about this encounter to demonstrate the "everyday textures" of trauma that Cvetkovich (2003) appeals us to see: that trauma can be felt and experienced in the everyday emotional interactions and encounters, and that the effects of trauma continue to reside within us. To write about the everyday textures of how trauma informed my interactions in the field and the research process is an attempt to put into words the ways in which I was confronted and dealt with moments that are always a moment too late; moments that resurface and continue to haunt me.

My early childhood trauma of abuse and violence accentuated my feelings of discomfort with Singh. Never feeling physically and psychologically safe, trauma can have different effects

on the individual. The re-experiencing of trauma can cause you to freeze, pause, or shatter you open, it can break down your defense mechanism(s) and throw you off your balance. You can become overwhelmed by your bodily experiences of anxiety, tightness in the chest, irregular breathing patterns, and extreme emotional responses. However, I also suggest that in these moments, trauma has the capacity to allow for an opening of something new; for something else to enter your realm of experience. This is not to negate or undermine people's experiences of trauma, but to consider what trauma brings to our awareness; what is speaking to us from our depths; what is tugging at our attention; what is coming forth and waiting to be healed. Trauma has the potential to deepen our experience of the moment by drawing our attention to our bodily experience—whether we are being triggered or reacting to an underlying discomfort; we are reacting to another presence, or what Caruth (1996) characterizes as a 'voice in the wound' (p. 2-3) According to Caruth (1996), in Freud's writing trauma is always about a wound that repeats itself,

> trauma is a wound of the mind—breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world…experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor (p. 4).

In other words, trauma is any experience or event that overwhelms the subject's capacity and cannot be assimilated into consciousness (Caruth, 1996). It is the unassimilated nature, or "what remains unknown" that is constantly re-enacted and repeated. Caruth (1996) argues that trauma, then, "is always a story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is otherwise available." (p. 4). Upon reflection, I realized that my early childhood experiences with some Indian men particularly, were guiding my interactions with Singh, it was my own past wounds that were calling out and asking for some attention from

myself. It is through my own trauma that I was also able to protect and safeguard myself. My own trauma was not simply about an original experience that remained confined to the realms of childhood, rather trauma left an impression on the body, my body. The body remembered, even if rationally I could not comprehend the experience in the moment as it was occurring.

My own trauma, then, becomes a voice/a presence that communicated feelings of unsafety; that something else is present in that moment even in its seeming absence. This voice/presence/(partial)knowing that I could not rationally understand in the moment guided my interactions with Singh. Experiencing deep feelings of uncertainty in my interactions with Singh, or "living in a psychic state of unrest" (2007 p. 95) as Anzaldua explains, required that I paid attention to a part of myself that was split and waiting to be recovered by myself. *La Facultad* expressed itself by ensuring that I kept myself emotionally and physically aware of his presence in my environment; where I was standing in relation to him, what conversations I would engage in with him; whether his second wife was close by and if I could invite her to participate as well. Although he was extremely friendly and kind, I was sensitive to his negative energy which felt misplaced and ill intended. Some individuals might read this work and argue that any single woman travelling alone would experience feelings of uncertainty and unsafety but paying heed to Anzaldua's claim that trauma sharpens one's sensitivity, my psyche—that affective space or voice—communicated to me that something about his presence was dark and sinister. I want to suggest that this was the workings of trauma for myself in my fieldwork; it protected me; it urged me to listen; it demanded that I turned simultaneously inwards to myself and outwards to my environment; to recognize the link and connection between the two sites—that of myself and the environment; it saved me in some ways by piercing through my senses and deepening my experience in interacting with others. Trauma, then, can be a rejuvenating experience because

while the process requires the re-opening and confronting of old wounds—the cleaning out of emotional debris—it may also create the space for reclaiming, for restoration, and more importantly, for cultivating a different sense of self through healing.

Site 2: The Space between You and Me in the interview process

Over the course of a few interviews I noticed that my own lived trauma often prevented me from fully being present and from practicing active listening with my participants. Feminist scholars have noted that one way to minimize the power imbalance is for the researcher to actively listen and put aside their personal agenda and motives in the field work, to name their social locations, or the ways in which their experience/non-experience influences their research (Hesse-Biber, 2007; DeShong, 2013) However, what happens in the fieldwork when the researcher is confronted with their own trauma in the course of the interview? How does the researcher, or in this case, myself, address the effects of trauma, engage in active listening, and be present with the participant? How does trauma operate to foreclose the interview process or take the interview in a different direction? How does the researcher navigate these multi-layered experiences simultaneously?

In the interview space, there were exchanges and transferences occurring between myself and the participant. Exchanges of subtle emotions, bodily posture relaxes and stiffens; the gaze of the other is held for a moment too long, or we make no eye contact at all, silent smiles, and lingering touches all transpire within the space between myself and the participant. While attention has been paid to the visible bodily cues in the fieldwork process, less attention is given to the emotional struggles of the researcher, especially when the field is a site experienced and embodied. I want to highlight a moment where my own trauma arose within the interview causing me to pause and become almost frozen in my bodily responses to a participant. In this

space between myself and the participant, the interview was not contained to what was verbally said. The space between us took on new meanings and intimacy precisely because it makes me confront my earlier experiences and wrestle with my own memories. The space became contaminated and infused by my own feelings which caused me to interact with the participant and content they were sharing differently. As I write in my field notes after an interview with Sophie,

> In midst of talking about her mother falling down in a gutter when she was drunk, I felt so triggered. I had these flash backs to my father being drunk, having to go to a rum shop to bring him home, helping him upstairs and putting him to bed. I remember having to make some water drink for him in the morning, so he can feel better. I just feel so annoyed at all of these dynamics...the memories that I didn't know that I had. Were these real memories? How come I recalled them so vividly when she was talking? Why didn't I remember them before? On top of all of this, I came home from an unrecorded interview, I am trying to type up her story to the best of my ability and to recall all the tiny details, but I can't remember much of what she said because I feel so triggered by these memories of father (January 17, 2016).

The resurgence of these feelings and the recollection of these intimate memories reveals the ways in which the fieldwork process is never simply about naming and labelling one's social positional and identity categories. The fieldwork process is never static, fixed, nor can we merely discuss our racial, classed and gendered positioning, in order to be reflective rather our subjective positionalities are constantly in flux. In the space between Sophie and myself, there was a shared haunting that was eerie. By recalling her experiences with her mother, the participant drew me into a familiar affective space, where I started to recall an experience of my father—a memory/moment that I did not know that I had stored somewhere inside of me. Recalling such an experience during the interview not only diverted my attention from her and her story, but also captured my emotional attention, my intellectual awareness, and moved me into another realm, where I straddled two liminal realities—one in which I recollected the past

and one that forced me to be present in that moment. I became disconnected from the participant, from their story, from the space and from time. In this space, then, between her and me, there was a counter-narrative that was taking place internally within me; there was a recalling and reliving of a history, a period of my life that was hidden and waiting to be recovered by me. Even though we were both moving through our own individual memories, it was through the shared experience of trauma that made us related and connected in that space as well.

At the same time, as the researcher, I had to maintain the space for Sophie to share her stories. I became more mindful that what she was sharing took immense courage. In exposing herself to me in such a manner—her vulnerability—meant that she had to feel relatively safe and secure in my company to describe those details of her life. I am assuming that Sophie also felt intimacy and connection to me in this interview, and consequently I had to be extremely cognizant of this internal breach upon my awareness and the ways in which I was responding to the her in this moment. Navigating this space between us, meant not only recognizing our insider/outsider status, but also the ways in which our bodies and our trauma are connected— whether individual or collective. While the insider/ outsider position was momentarily blurred because of our shared experience, this taught me that we are more than our identity markers, in some ways we are all connected through our collective trauma, but in that moment, it was also important for me to facilitate a safe space for my participant to narrate the difficult experiences in her life. It meant embracing a place of uncertainty and unpredictability by acknowledging my internal fears, while holding space for her. It meant taking deep breaths and letting the memories move through me, while I maintained synergy in the space between us. It meant listening to all the fragmented parts of myself that became present, and how those parts of myself shifted the narrative, content, and meaning between us.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methodologies and methods that I employed throughout my study. Situating my dissertation within Caribbean feminist and post-modern feminist methodologies, I have outlined the subject of feminist thought and the ways in which the subject is flexible and constituted through power relations. I also discussed the role of the researcher in the field; the shifting power relationship between the researcher and participant; and the process of positionality and self-reflectivity. Additionally, I discussed the methods that I utilized, the interview, data and storage process, including my own reflections and impressions of participants. The violent colonial conditions and structures that Fanon reflected on and Cvetkovich's ideas of trauma that stems from the everyday encounters give rise to the faculty of *La Facultad* as theorized by Anzaldua. Reading trauma through the framework of *La Facultad*, I have argued that trauma can be a productive psychic force that can act as a conduit to guide the researcher, and perhaps, even keep the researcher safe in the fieldwork process. Refuting Western understandings of trauma as pathological and as a phenomenon that needs to be fixed, I propose that trauma can be a regenerative process as it forces one to pay attention to their emotional state and how this state is impacted by the external environment. To this end, trauma offers us an opening into our sense of self.

CHAPTER 3: GEORGETOWN: MAPPING URBAN IDENTITIES AND BELONGING

After spending the afternoon doing an interview poolside, in a small hotel in Georgetown, Anna invited me out to have a drink with her and some friends. Hesitant at first, I accepted her invitation, but I was nervous as to where we were going and who I would be meeting. I remember this night distinctly, as it was the first time that I was going out with one of my participants to a bar where I would meet some of her friends who were also LGBQ women. My curiosity was sparked by the invitation. After a quick freshen up, Anna drove us to a bar in the city where six other women joined us. We sat in a dimly lit section of the patio, ordering drinks and absorbing the cool breeze that night. I watched in amazement because here I was in the presence of women that I had only imagined existing, much less that they would have a close-knit community amongst themselves. I was in their space, getting to catch a glimpse of their lives. Even though it was a long and emotional day due to the heat, and more so because of the content that she had shared with me, Anna had a smile on her face—a type of smile that is big and wide, and a laugh that was contagious. You just had to laugh. We ordered many drinks that night, in fact, too many. With local tunes playing in the background, the flow of liquor and the breeze, the women openly talked about their lives, the good and bad moments of their jobs, their shitty bosses. They talked about the current government and the lack of the changes the new administration failed to deliver on, the failed relationships and marriages, the abortions, the failed encounters they had with life so far, and the possibilities of what could have been. They also talked fondly about the ups and downs of the relationships with their partners, long fights, the kind that keeps you up all night and makes you exhausted. They talked about who they were fucking or trying to fuck, who they were making love to and who they wished they were making love to. It seemed to me that in spite of the many limitations of their environment, all of these

moments and encounters taught each and every one of them something about themselves as a human being, from finding the resilience to leave their marriages, abusive relationships or actively sharing their lives with another woman; all of these moments and choices brought them closer to their own sense of self, and to who they have become today. This encounter with them also taught me something, that such moments are filled with such raw, unfathomable beauty and unexplained depth. This experience cannot neatly be painted by these words here. And as we continued sharing the intimacy of our lives with each other that night, I didn't realize that I was also making bonds and connections that I continue to nurture today. It goes without saying, that these women's lives are also vibrant and beautiful. They have managed to forge a community of belonging, offering each other different levels of emotional and material support and resources.

This chapter turns to the intimate parts of women's lives in the city of Georgetown. It focuses exclusively on mixed-race middle-class LGBQ women and WLW in the city. When the analysis departs from these dominant categories of analysis, I signal that. It starts by examining the ways in which women in the city make sense of their sexual identities. How do they claim, reject, modify and embody their identities? Following that, I analyze the ways in which gender expression informs and structures this community of women, followed by a discussion of how women make space and form communities. The last part of the chapter addresses the ways in which the urban/rural dichotomy operates to inform women's subjectivity, that is, how does the imagined perception of the other living in rural spaces inform their own sense of self? This chapter aims at mapping out five themes that emerged from the responses of women living in the city: their identities, gender expressions in the city, the making of safe spaces, and their perception of women living in rural spaces.

"Cauxin'/Coxen/Cockson" and other Identities

In this section, I examine the ways in which women identify and discuss their sexual identity and subjectivity in urban Georgetown. I offer a discussion that illustrates that the ways in which women reject, modify, and accept identification categories is connected to larger cultural narratives of what it means to be a lesbian, gay or bisexual woman in the city. I demonstrate that claiming, rejecting or modifying identity categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and pansexual exists in tension with the local discourse of 'cauxin/cockson/coxen'—a term that the majority of the women mention do not want to be associated or identified with. The international gay and lesbian human rights commission (IGLHRC) states that the term "cockson" refers to both feminine and butch lesbians and often is used as a "hateful description" for lesbian women (2015, p. 17). The term cauxin/cockon/coxen, according to the women interviewed, is a slang and derogatory word used to describe women who are having romantic/sexual relations with other women. The term was only used exclusively by participants in the city. None of the women could agree on the spelling of the term, so I use the three common variations of the word interchangeably as noted above. The majority of my participants expressed a disconnection between how they saw themselves as lesbians and the cultural narrative/discourse of cauxin, which is understood by them as a stigmatizing and derogatory term. I argue that claiming another sexual identity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual and loving women can be understood as a strategy of disidentification as proposed by Munoz (1999), which refers to the "survival strateg[ies] that work within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously" (p. 5). In other words, women both in Georgetown and Berbice (which I return to in chapter four) who use the category of 'LGBQ' and 'loving/like woman,' embody an identity and praxis that resist the dominant culture. They are engaging in identity formation and sexual subjectivity as an ongoing

process, which may at times, partially collide with, or embrace the dominant culture. We can think of their identity and practice of 'loving/liking woman' as "identities-in-difference" which "emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere" (Munoz, 1999, p. 7). In this chapter on Georgetown, I argue that since the culture marks the bodies of women through the discourse of cauxin/cockson/coxen/ connected to a particular gender expression, women might be claiming a lesbian identity as outside of and separate from the derogatory narrative of cauxin. Phrased differently, claiming and identifying as a lesbian/bisexual/pansexual etc., might afford them the psychological and ideological space to disidentify with the local discourse of cauxin/cockson/coxen.

The majority of my participants express anger and frustration at being called or labelled a cauxin. Anna (mixed race, 30s) says "when a woman likes a woman, they say she's a coxen. I hate it." Describing a robbery incident at the sea wall that caused her to hate the term coxen, Anna said,

> My friend, Zoe, is more of a butch woman, yuh can tell right away that she is, she has a boy cut hair, she dresses like a guy. With the two of us [referring to her and her partner] if we were there alone, the words wouldn't come out, but because Zoe was with us, we were automatically identified as that. So, them guys were passing us and saying, "look at these coxens" … they turned around and braced Zoe with a knife and came around to my side cause I was sitting on the sea wall, and they made these comments about coxens, and they automatically realized because of her demeanors, they realized that we are gays, right? So, I hate that word.

Anna's description of the term reveals the ways in which the term has a gendered and sexual component. I stress and emphasize the "butch" and/or "masculine" meanings that is embedded within the term "coxen", that it is these particular underpinnings that women often emphasized and disidentify with. First, they were identified and revealed as "coxens" because of her friend's gender presentation as a butch woman. Her friend's transgression of appropriate femininity made

them vulnerable to violence in a public space. Anna's rejection of the term is connected to a particular gender expression, that is she understood the term "coxen" to be associated with butch women's gender presentation and gay men. Second, she clearly identifies that if she and her partner who are femme-presenting were there alone, the men passing by the sea wall would not identify them as "coxens." The rejection of the term is also connected to the broader socio-cultural environment where being identified as a "coxen" caused her to experience a violent situation as indicated by Anna. In other words, the rejection of the term and its attending gender meanings by women like Anna could be an attempt to circumvent the homophobia, which is distinctly gendered, and the violence they may experience for stepping out of appropriate gender norms.

Marina (mixed race, 20s) said, people would judge you, like "oh she's a cauxin.' She's dis or da, so that's why I don't want to be label…the term is about a woman that cross dress, is what I think". In this context, Marina refers not only to the ways in which the term is used to label people, but she makes specific reference to the fact that the term is used to describe a woman who cross dresses. We can assume here that she is implying a woman who cross dresses, or dresses like a man. Julie (mixed race, 20s) said term "I didn't want to identify with da …like she's a man." Describing a situation when her friends called her "tomboyish," Julie disclosed the ways in which she had to perform gender conformity to avoid being label as a "cauxin,"

> I remember the day I made a decision to kiss a boy and if I kissed this boy, I wouldn't have to hear these remarks about cauxin. It will never be said to me…my friends they won't say 'oh why don't yuh ever wear pink?' I wouldn't ever have to hear that because I start wearing make-up so I decided to put on lip gloss, fix my hair, and I ask my mom to buy me a fucking pink top [laughs]…

Julie points to the ways in which she resisted being called or label a cauxin by engaging in normative feminine behaviours, that of kissing a guy, wearing make-up and wearing

stereotypically feminine clothing. In order not be labeled, identified, and revealed to be different from the norm in particular ways, Anna, Marina and Julie point to specifically the ways in which they understand the term and its attending notions of "masculine" gender expressions. These gender expressions, to them, are seen and interpreted as negative expressions, hence their resistance to identify as cauxin/cockson/coxen.

Other women highlight the derogatory connotations, as opposed to the gender expression of the term, such as Roxanne (mixed race, 20s) who says, "faggot is a nasty word…cauxin' is a variation of that term… yuh know, growing up this is something that society doesn't readily accept, and this is something people are not okay with…" Sonia (mixed race, 30s) said that, "

> it's like a description of a sodomite, they would say 'that is not a life to live and burn them' and that made it harder fuh me to accept how I was feeling because I didn't want people to be calling mi them names, it made it really rough for me to basically who I was or how I felt…

Words such as "sodomite" and "man royal" are also used and linked to a Christian religious ideology (Silvera, 1999), which are "given to women by men used to describe aspects of our lives that men neither understood nor approved" (p. 15) as noted by Silvera (1999) in the Jamaican context. The pejorative connotations of the term in the cultural space imposes limitations on women as the terminology regulates women's gender and sexual expressions. The term performs a number of functions. First, it operates to stigmatize the masculine/butch woman's body causing hierarchies and boundaries to be established between women. This may cause gender conforming women to also participate in upholding a pathological discourse of masculine women. Second, masculine/butch women, although simultaneously positioned as challenging and wanting to be part of hegemonic masculinity (Halberstam, 1998) may be routinely met with violence for being transgressive as Anna identified. Third, language is extremely powerful as it can cause one to self-regulate and embrace normative gender standards

that Julie narrates. Language can also stir up emotional distress causing women like Roxanne

and Sonia to resist certain aspects of their sexuality and their identities. Given the gender

dimensions and the negative connections of the term cauxin/cockson/coxen in the space of city

as outlined in this section, I suggest that women may identify as lesbian (14 out of 24) as means

to resist this discourse.

Lesbians

Since the majority of the women interviewed in Georgetown identify as lesbians, I turn

towards examining what the term means for them, and when/where they first encountered the

term. Although scholars in the region have noted the derogatory connotations associated with the

term lesbian in the Caribbean such as "man royal" and "sodomite" in the Jamaican context

(Silvera, 1995), Ghiswayan (2016) noted in her study in Trinidad, the ways in which women

reinterpreted the term to mean different things for themselves. For instance, a "femme-lesbian"

found it harder to convince others that she is a lesbian and could love other women due to her

"soft" appearances (Ghiswayan, 2016. p. 213). Anna's (mixed race, 30s) understanding and

subsequent rejection of the term coxen may have caused her to claim a lesbian identity.

However, she also draws our attention to the processes and changes she went through in figuring

out her identity,

> I had heard words like coxen before I actually heard the word lesbian. I knew the word
> gay. I identified as being gay. I started reading, I realized I wasn't bisexual. I wasn't
> heterosexual either so that's why I use the word lesbian because I started reading up
> online…started chatting with random people online, basically reading and enlighten
> me…"

Jackie (mixed race, 20s) describes not knowing how to make sense of attraction towards women recalled a definitive moment on TV where she was watching America's next top model. She said,

> They twins, one was gay and one was straight, and I am like, 'huh that's really brave,' and she was crying and her mom was happy didn't make a big deal out of it, and I was thinking well that's how every parent should be, not make a big deal about these things. I was scared of what I was beginning to realize…and yeah that episode really stood out.

Media and online sites provide a space where Anna and Jackie could interpret their desire for women outside of the cultural and political understanding of lesbian in Guyana. Jackie said that, "I love the word. It sets me apart somewhat. Makes me unique for that, I love it. It makes me feel comfortable. And I have a nice community too." For Jackie, the term is experienced as a feeling that "sets her apart" from the mainstream society, and in claiming the term she sees herself as part of a community. Given the lack of public visibility and positive media representation of lesbians in Guyana, almost every participant cited the media as the site and space where they began to explore and think through their desire for other women. It is important to note that their experience of desire is not connected to the *local media* and discourses of what being a lesbian is and what it means. The ways in which they started discovering and exploring their desire for other women is intimately connected to neoliberalism and transnational flow of information through media and other pop culture material, coming from the global north. It is through online spaces and TV that the women are able to connect to their sexual/romantic attraction towards women, develop a vocabulary to name their experiences, and claim a sexual identity. Access to online media and information might also have been enabled by their middle-upper class status.

Dina (mixed race, 20s), for example, referred to watching, "Gia with Angelina Jolie, so it kinda like opened me up to knowing and being drawn to females." Julie (mixed race, 20s) discusses Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, where "I saw two women kissing and that blew my little

innocent 13-year-old heart …so I started accepting myself when I realized this has been me. [When] I came across TATU[21] and that was my breaking point." After searching on the internet, Amelia (Afro-Guyanese, working-class, 20s) said

> I remember watching Ellen DeGeneres' coming out story on Oprah. I think that was the first LGBT related stuff I watched online …when I saw the whole thing I was like 'wow' …I cried. I was by myself so I could a cry and do all that, and it was like I get it now, this is exactly how I felt…she was describing the feelings [I had] growing up.

While most women pointed to movies, TV shows, and music as sites that offered them a space to think through their desire for women, other women pointed to their identification and/or reclaiming of the term through pornography. Referring to the lack of information on sex and sexuality, and specifically not knowing how to make sense of her desire for women, Lisa (black 20s), for example said, "most of what I learned, I learnt on my own and through the media…to experiment with self-pleasure..." For Lisa, online pornography became a space where she could learn to engage in her own self-pleasure, and also discovering how to sexually please other women, "from porn sites, I got exactly what I was looking for in a variety and I was there because I was specifically looking for lesbians and how they have sex with [each other]." This, for Lisa, was a site of empowerment to explore what self-pleasure meant for her. Although Sidney (mixed race 30s) does not identify as a lesbian, she did indicate that she came to an understanding of her desire for other women by watching late night shows on HBO, specifically soft porn, "I use to look forward to the female-female parts."

Although I am suggesting that women claim and reclaim a lesbian identity outside of the local discourse of cauxin/cockson/coxen by accessing transnational online spaces, I want to also make it clear that many of these women have had relationships with men prior to identifying as

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[21] Spelled as t.A.T.u is a Russian duo music group that consisted of Lena Katina and Julia Volkova. In the early 2000s, the duo sparked a lot of controversy for having a music video that consisted of them kissing.

such. Consequently, their identification as a lesbian reflects the ways in which they interpret and experience their sexuality at the time of this research. Even though the majority of them claim this identity, they are also consciously aware of the ways in which it limits them. Though Lisa (black, 20s) identifies as a lesbian, she said

> I don't like labels because I don't like to be boxed into a particular sexuality, or have people think of me in a certain way. In Guyana people have a certain perception of gay people or lesbians and I don't particularly conform to that…like they would say all lesbians are butch or all lesbians are aggressive or all lesbians are jealous…so many different things, derogatory things, and I don't want to be boxed into that…although I know that being a lesbian is nothing of the sort, we are very diverse…

Lisa points to the ways in which she understands her sexuality and how her identity as a lesbian exists in tension with the general public conception of lesbianism. The socio-cultural and political understanding of lesbians as "butch," "aggressive" and "jealous" makes it difficult for Lisa to fully accept this identity. Ghiswayan (2016) has referred to this cultural representation as the "public lesbian," that is a lesbian woman who is marked as "aggressive and butch" in the public imaginary (p. 213). This is reproduced in the newspapers, where a fight between two women was labelled as a 'violent lesbian brawl' ("lesbian brawl", 2016). This representation and circulation of the "public lesbian" as aggressive and violent is cementing itself in the public imagination and perception of WLW creating a homogenizing picture of who and what they are. Thus, there is a tension between their self-identification as lesbians and how the term is defined publicly and politically.

Bisexuals

Not all women, however, claim a lesbian identity. Maya (Amerindian, 20s) still unsure of her sexual identity says,

> I think I am still quite open, I am not sure if I should say bisexual but I would definitely say I have a high preference for women, but I am not close off from men…my sexual identity isn't who I am. I would say I am Maya and I'm a Guyanese … I don't think its

definite, sexuality is on a spectrum so I always thought of it like that…I neva really confine myself to one thing…

Maya expresses frustration around claiming a sexual orientation and identity. Seeing her sexuality on a spectrum, and more fluid, taking on a sexual identity would entail confining herself to a category. While she emphasizes her nationalistic identity of being Guyanese, a sexual identity would imply that she will be seen only through her sexuality, which erases other aspects of one's identity and personhood (Ghisyaway, 2015). Jackie (mixed race, 20s) who I discuss in the next chapter because of her light-skinned mixed-race position, is aware of the hyper sexuality associated with her sexuality. Describing the process of talking to a lesbian woman about her relationship problems with her male partner, Jackie said:

> I told her that 'I am having a bit of a shitty time with this person' and she asked me what was the problem and I told her it's a man and she said, 'so he can't please yuh anymore so you're here.' So, she said that how she always knew that I was a straight girl. I said that, 'I'm not a straight girl, it's just a thing that happened between me and a man, yuh never had a thing happen between yuh and a man before?' She said, 'no, not like that,' and she's convinced that I'm straight or a bisexual and I'm just posing as a gay lady because I don't know what I want….

Jackie reveals the ways in which her relationship with a male partner is met by crude remarks from a lesbian friend. Her relationship with a male person serves as the basis to police and call into question her sexual identity as a legitimate identity. Ghisyawan (2016) reminds us that biphobia can be perpetuated by straight persons as well as members of the LGBT community" (p. 216). She further writes that in Trinidad, "bisexuals are not respected as much in the community and there is a sense of not upholding the acceptable model of "lesbian", as though there is *right way to be gay*" (2016, p. 215-216, emphasis in original). As a result, because of biphobia, Jackie's sexual desire and orientation are met with skepticism. Furthermore, she is not afforded the space to explore her sexual desires without being judged and reprimanded by other women who may identify as lesbians. Bisexuals are often seen as promiscuous because of their

attraction to more than one gender, and because of their attraction to different genders, bisexuals are also seen as unable to make a commitment to one partner. Sandra (mixed race, 30s) aware of this connotation emphasizes her commitment to her current female partner by saying, "I identify as bisexual, but I don't practice a bisexual lifestyle…because I am a committed type…" The women express ambiguity and complexity in claiming a bisexual identity, highlighting the ways in which their embodiment of their sexuality is an ongoing process. This, however, is compounded by bi-phobic responses from lesbian women and a cultural environment that interprets bisexuals as promiscuous and unable to "pick a side."

Women who love women

Three women in Georgetown who identified as "loving women" made references to a few different reasons as to why they refused to claim a sexual identity. Sidney (mixed race, 30s) says it is "because I don't see myself as part of the group…"

> P: why don't you see yourself as part of the group?
>
> S: I don't know. I just don't fit it… I was brought up normally …because for me once you identify with it [lesbian] you gotta conform to a specific lifestyle. I just like being free…and these people who are associated with it, they don't see I am Sydney here …and my sexuality is just a part of me. They see it first, that my sexuality is me, and that's the problem, well that's how I see it….

First, Sidney refuses to claim a sexual identity as she does not see herself belonging to the community of lesbian women. Second, she highlights that if she were to claim an identity, she would be fixed to a category with rigid meanings, i.e., a lifestyle, where her sexuality would be the defining aspects of herself. In other words, she would become a sexualized person through her identity (Ghisyawan, 2016) as opposed to her sexuality being one part of her identity. Lara (mixed race, 20s), on the other hand, who is married to a man describes that she does not identify

as "bi or a lesbian" as these categories do not neatly capture the ways in which she sees herself. Claiming to "love women" allows her to still explore her sexual desire and have relationships with other women and still be married. WLW that were interviewed in Georgetown reject the category of lesbian and bisexual as they point to the ways in which these categories encase them into a particular image and representation. Furthermore, categories can be limiting to the extent that they do not afford women the space to convey their many sexual experiences, as noted by Lara.

Pansexual and Queer

Only one-person Dina (mixed race, 20s) identified as pansexual. Also referring to "reading up online and through YouTube" she indicates that she is attracted to more than one gender. Dina said, "it's not very well known in Guyana as yet but understanding the differences between pansexual and bisexual and lesbians is important to me. I'm drawn to persons' personalities, not what the person looks like…" Pansexual as an identity, for Dina, means that she is attracted to people's personalities as opposed to a physical presentation of one's body and gender. Pansexuality, for Dina, takes her beyond the narrowly confined understandings of being attracted to someone of the same-sex/gender also comes with taking on a particular sexual identity.

In my study, only two women opted to use the term "queer." Ghisyawan (2016) in her study also explores the relevance of the term as an identity category in the Caribbean. She writes that, "the usage of the term "queer" as an identity marker emerged as a crucial place to look at global sexual politics, demonstrating transnational connections, social class privilege and travelling discourses of sexuality" (2016, p. 219-220). In other words, the usage and claiming of the term queer as identity provides a space from where we can explore the connections between

the transnational discourses of sexuality, class and mobility. Importantly, Ghisyawan (2016) found that the use of queer as an identity marker stems from middle-class educated women in Trinidad and Tobago. The claiming of this identity in her study was restricted to particular niche spaces. Following Ghisyawan's (2016) suggestion to pay attention to the ways in which "queer" as identity emerges within the Caribbean context, I highlight the ways in which queer becomes an identity marker for the two women in Guyana. Although all the women discussed above, center the media in their claiming of a sexual identity, I add that for the two women who studied and lived abroad for a number of years, this might have also played a crucial role in their claiming of queer as an identity.

Roxanne (mixed race, 20s) discusses the ways in which her understandings of what a lesbian look like and means through media representation from the U.S contradicted the local discourse of cockson,

> I'm talkin' shows like the L-word, the Ellen show, and other shows that has major lesbian characters, or at least a few side lesbian characters. They all show lesbians as either comical relief or in a position of passion and power, right? That was something I aspire to, but then society here oh, lesbians are cauxins.' So, I saw that society has this really negative view. I neva felt that it wasn't okay, I always felt that society wouldn't think that it was okay…

Roxanne emphasizes the Ellen show and the characters from the L-word (a popular lesbian TV based in LA running in the mid 2000s) as exemplars where she could form an identification with the term lesbian. However, the common perception of lesbians as *cauxin* prevented her from claiming that identity as a lesbian. Disclosing the rigidity and fixity of sexual identities, Roxanne went on to say that,

> most of the time when people say, 'oh what's your sexuality?' they are lookin' for something along clear lines they are like, 'oh you're gay, you're straight', even if you are gay, they are lookin' for some kind of white or black variation, but I'm kinda of a mix of all… I want to say bi as well because there is a ratio to it too…I am not just bisexual cause I like girls, but I am also attracted to gay guys…There was queer eye for the

straight guy, where queer was throw around, and when I first started to really look at myself and ask what is my sexuality, I was going with the term lesbian because that's what everyone says, 'oh yuh like gals yuh is a lesbian' but I'm like 'well I don't really just like girls,' I like everything… so lesbian didn't cut it…

Moving through different experiences of her sexuality from thinking of herself as a lesbian, to pointing out the ways in which her attraction is connected to many different genders, Roxanne claim a queer identity for its openness. However, I suggest that Roxanne's middle-class status which allowed her to live abroad and having access to U.S based programming in Guyana allows her the privilege to claim and embody a queer identity.

Jenna (Indo-Guyanese, working-class 30s), although she identifies as working class, was educated, lived and worked in the U.S for a number of years. She describes the different meanings that the term can offer and the reclaiming of the term queer,

I like the word queer, in a perverse way. It's transgressive in a way that I like, it started out being a negative, right? It started out like being a derogatory term, it's kinda the reclaiming that I like a little bit, yuh know? …it's not really clear to a lot of people, and especially here in Guyana, it's not used. It's not understood so if I tell somebody I am queer, they are like "wha is da?" I like queer because not because it's vague, I like that it could be a lot of things…it doesn't box you in a 'this is what it is,' it's kinda freeing in a way, but yea I know it's not clear to otha people but I don't necessarily wanna be clear to otha people all the time, it's not about you, it's about how I feel.

I suggest two things. First, given that Jenna was educated and lived abroad, her claiming of the term as an identity is linked to her reclaiming of the term itself from its derogatory meanings. This particular understanding of queer as "negative" grounded in perversity originates from Euro-American discourse in the early 19th century, where queer was understood as a pathological disorder for having same-sex desires. By the 1990s, queer was reclaimed as a positive identity category and way of being by different scholarly disciplines and communities. Consequently, I am suggesting that Jenna's reclaiming queer is grounded in this particular history, given her educational background and experience of living in the U.S. Queer afforded her to the space to

define what her sexuality means to her, but also a space to remain ambiguous. Furthermore, she

highlights that the term is not commonly used in Guyana, and its meanings are unclear when

used. Drawing upon Richardson (2006) Ghisyawan (2016) outlines how "queer" functions now

is similar to how the "political lesbianism"[22] functioned three decades ago (p. 220). Taking on a

queer identity, according to Ghisyawan (2016), is not "based on a shared identity, but on partial

disassociation with sexual norms and standards of dominant or more dominant groups and

identities" (p. 220). In this manner, queer is reinterpreted as a radical strategy, a method of

disrupting contemporary homonormative standards, and remaining ever ambiguous poses a

threat to the dominant order (Ghiswayan, 2016).

Although Jenna's usage of the term is linked to a particular history, queer is not new to

the Caribbean. In fact, scholars such as Tinsley (2010) and King (2014) have demonstrated in

their work how "queer" is merely *one* formation and construction of nonheteronormative

sexuality in the Caribbean. Instead of positioning queerness as originating in Euro-American

discourses and imposed on the Caribbean, King (2008) argues that "Black and brown Caribbean

women's sexualities have always been considered "queer," odd, and less moral by European

(and often by coloured) elites," (p. 193 cited in Ghisyawan, 2016, p. 217). The Caribbean space

along with its people is inherently queer when positioned against colonial discourses of sexuality

and respectability. Others such as Tinsley (2008) center the transoceanic middle passage of the

Atlantic as a site of "crosscurrents" where blackness and queerness met each other forming a

"praxis of resistance" against the dehumanizing conditions of slavery (p. 199), and Lokaisingh-

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[22] Drawing from Richardson (2006) Ghisyawan (2016) describe the "political lesbian" as "the claiming of a lesbian identity as a fugitive or rebel against hetero-patriarchy. It includes retaliation against male tyranny and conservative gender values regarding female labour, sexuality and marriage" (p. 214).

Meighoo (2008) contends with the potentiality of queerness within the jahaji bhai[23] narrative on board the ships during the indentured period. While attention has been paid to queerness attached to the male gender, Lauren Pragg (2012) and Aliyah Khan (2016) explore it within the female Hindu space of Matikor[24] and through literary works respectively, situating queerness within the complex discourses of slavery, indentureship, post colonialism and ongoing nationalist projects in the Caribbean.

"It's a trade-off:" Strategic femininities in the city

This section considers the ways in which the binary of sex/gender operates to normalize, structure and signify women's identities and presence in the city. Particularly, I examine the ways in which gender performances structure the community, and how through different gender expressions of femininities and masculinities women navigate urban public spaces.

Women's middle class and mixed-race status allow them to participate in a "strategic femininity" which enables them to move in the city without fear of violence. Embodying hegemonic gender expressions offers women privacy and anonymity in the city as they can move in public spaces without being subjected to public hostility and scrutiny. With the exception of two women who are butch/masculine presenting, twenty-two women identified as "normal" femme-presenting (i.e., wearing feminine clothing, behavioural characteristics, hair styles, and cosmetic aesthetics). For femme-presenting women, their gender presentations allow them the possibility of remaining inconspicuous. As a result, femme presenting women are also suspicious of and regulate other women who do not conform to normative gender expressions. Femme-

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[23] Jahaji bhai refers to "ship brothers." The term is used to describe the relationships that were forged on board the ships during the indentured period, replacing family, caste and kinship structures.

[24] Matikor/Maticore- refers to the Hindu female only ceremonial space that takes place on the Friday night before a Hindu wedding. In this space, women engage in highly suggestive heterosexual sex acts through song, dance and role play.

presenting women to some degree engage in a politics that do not contest the heteronormative

gender assumptions but uphold and sustain them in their regulation of butch/masculine women

who signal danger and pose a threat to reveal their sexual practices in the public sphere.

Butler (1990) theorizes gender as performance, even gender expressions such as

butch/femme performances cannot be assumed to be imitating heterosexuality, because such a

claim would constitute heterosexual as "original" and "natural." According to Butler (2011)

> hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own
> idealizations. That it must repeat this imitation, that it sets up pathologizing practices and
> normalizing sciences in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and
> propriety, suggests that heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can
> never fully overcome….that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally
> or fully achieved, and that it is constantly haunted by that domain of sexual possibility
> that must be excluded for heterosexualized gender to produce itself (p. 85)

The dominant ideology of heterosexuality engages in constant repetition to secure itself as

normal, however, it is precisely through the reiteration that the ideology can be ruptured by other

gender and sexual discrepancies. Gender roles, such as butch and femme[25], are subversive acts as

they expose the social construction of heterosexuality and its claims to naturalness.

It is imperative to examine how these performances are played out in the broader social,

political and economic structures of a society. Joan Nestle (1992), for instance, discusses the

economic benefits such as job security that femme women were able to access in the 70s and 80s

in North America (p. 142). I extend Nestle's ideas to the following section, to ask what is the

role of femininity in Georgetown? What purpose might it serve for women? Within the context

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[25] There is a whole body of scholarship that explores the butch/femme binary, where majority of the literature focused on female masculinity (Faberman, 1991; Halberstam, 1998; Bulter, 2006). Within this body of work, the butch woman is often the privilege signifer of gender transgressions and seen as a true lesbian. Additionally, the butch woman through her gender expressions is seen as highly sexual through performances of dress, behaviour and mannerisms. The femme within this binary emerges as invisible, passive, and often colliding with heteronormative definitions of femininity (Nestle, 1982). However, starting with works from Nestle (1982) scholars are increasing turning towards examining femme identities such as the work of Maltry & Tucker (2002) and Brushwood & Camilleri (2002).

of Guyana, where violence is normalized against women for many different reasons, embodying conventional femininity affords women the space to be subversive and protective of themselves. While women's construction and embodiment of femininity might be seen as paralleling hegemonic conceptions of femininity, I suggest that we think of their embodiment as a type of *strategic femininity* that helps them navigate the violence embedded in their environment. Strategic femininity, although aligning with normative femininity, becomes radical to the extent that it deviates from and subverts the demands of the heterosexual project (Nestle, 1992). If heterosexuality demands that women engage in appropriate womanhood and reproduction, then I suggest that women exploit the dominant category of femininity to serve a very different purpose—to articulate their desire for other women away from the male gaze and the overarching heteropatriarchal system. Women who embody femininity appropriate the conventional scripts of gender to conceal their sexuality in a space of violence. Rather than thinking of women as simply colluding with hegemonic femininity or "passing"[26] as straight, perhaps we can start analyzing the ways in which women embody, adopt, collide with and resist the heteronormative social order. We can also postulate the reasons as to why women would want to embody a normative femininity, such as mitigating violence, but at the same time how this embodiment becomes subversive. *Strategic femininity* is subversive as it allows women to re-write the scripts and take ownership of their sexuality, to determine who they find desirable and to conceal those choices within a culture of violence.

Sandra (mixed race, 30s) highlights the ways in which her gender performance [femme], which I suggest are strategic performances, affords her certain privileges in the public sphere in

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[26] Passing generally refers to the ways in which a person assumed sexual orientation and identity is different from the sexual orientation and identity that they identify with. For instance, a femme lesbian woman might be able to "pass" as heterosexual woman, even though she does not identify as a heterosexual/straight woman.

comparison to gay men and transgender women. Referring to herself and her partner as "lipstick lesbians"[27] she said,

> It's hard to pick up on women unless they dress a certain way, walk a certain way or behave a certain way. It's not so obvious with us…I can walk down the road and get away with it…people around me don't know of the way I am …I have been here for 3 years, and people in this neighbourhood don't know who I am because it's not obvious. I'm polite with everyone. I don't exactly exhibit my out there …it's more obvious for gay men and transgender women…

Sandra's gender performance of normalized hegemonic femininity allows her to remain indistinguishable from other women. She emphasizes the ways in which women's gender performances play a critical role in their ability to move in public spaces without being subjected to scrutiny. Her feminine performances though, are connected to particular behaviours of politeness, not being overtly "out there," and being considerate in public spaces. She indicates that as much, "when we out in public, we don't hold hands, kiss or show affections for each other." Conscious of her physical environment, where violence from the public is always present, Sandra does not engage in public display of affections with her partner as such engagements would draw unwarranted attention to her and her partner. In a context of increasing violence, transgressions need not always be bold and visible, rather the use of one's femininity to disguise and make one's sexual desire, especially for other women, unnoticeable in of itself is a transgressive act.

Other women also note that they do not engage in behaviours in public that will draw attention, especially from men, Anna (mixed race, 30s) also said,

> We don't really do pda [public display of affections]. Not being able to have an open relationship here is a bother to you, but it doesn't affect us that much because we have our own home. We can be affectionate in our own home, we don't need to go outside and kiss, but even if we do now, I think Guyana is more tolerant towards women than men.

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[27] A lipstick lesbian is a slang term used to refer to a lesbian who exhibits traditional feminine characteristics such as wearing making up, dresses, and high heels.

Anna underscores a number of factors that are operating to shield femme-presenting women from the public gaze. First, femme-presenting women are much more likely to be tolerated as their femininity does not challenge the dominant order. Anna is aware that even if she engages in public display of affections with her partner, there is some degree of acceptance and tolerance towards women. Furthermore, her middle-class status and owning her own home grants her the privilege of being intimate with a partner in comparison to those who live with their families or lack the means to afford their own places. This is reflected in Puar's (2007) analysis that access to private home ownership is a middle-class feature enabled by the neoliberal market, where middle class queers can practice their sexual desires in private spheres, demanding a right to privacy by the state (p. 125-127). For middle class femme-presenting women, embodying strategic femininity protects women from violence in the public sphere, whereas their middle-class status affords them the luxury to practice their sexuality in the privacy of their home.

Sandra (mixed race, 30s) points to the ways in which her sexuality is called into question in the public space when she was in the company of a butch woman,

> when it comes to our [her and her partner's] sexuality, we don't have any insecurity about people making fun of us. One time we were made fun of, but there was this girl with us and she was very butch, so there is no hiding there, that's the only time we gotten attention, only when we are with butch women…if we're alone people never say anything to us …just considering she's butch, the responses from people out there would be different…

The figure of the butch woman in Sandra's perspective is a visible figure that produces vulnerability and subjects her and her partner to the public gaze. While Sandra embodies strategic femininity, she notes the ways in which a butch woman warrants different responses and attention from individuals in the public. Although femme and butch women are part of the same community, Sandra highlights how her sexuality becomes questionable by the public through the body of the butch woman. We can assume she comes into "visibility" through this

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figure as well. She further emphasizes her sexual/romantic attraction, and the necessity of

maintaining specific feminine performances,

> I personally like femme women. I don't like butch women, I guess everybody has their opinion, but if you wanna be with a woman be with a *real* woman [emphasis hers, not mine] not a woman who thinks of herself as a man. Like I said when you're a butch woman and you walking down the road you draw attention to yourself here in Guyana, automatically they know immediately who you are

Sandra not only articulates a physical attraction to femme women, but importantly, she

understands butch women as not being "real" women due to their performances of gender. A

butch woman, due to her gender performances, crosses into the threshold of masculinity or

manhood. Her comments underscore the ways in which she understands sex and gender as

synonymous, and hence the sex/gender binary is conflated, reinforced and maintained in the

community. Nicole (mixed race, 20s) who sees herself as a "normal woman" because of the way

she dresses, discusses the ways in which butch women are ambivalent figures who do not

conform to the sex/gender system,

> they are lesbian too, but their dressing is different cause you don't know if they are a guy or girl. They don't fit it. I don't think they should dress like that even though they are gays, they should dress like girls. They don't need to bring [it]out there…[referring to that dressing masculine/like a guy is making yourself visible]

Dina (mixed race, 20s) also signals to the ways in which she is not attracted to butch women, "I

am not really so much into the butch women…they are too much butch, they dress too

masculine…they are like thuggish" Sonia (mixed race, 30s) also expresses aversion to butch

women due to particular characteristics she interprets as masculine,

> they are very intrusive sometimes like they see girls and they behave like men completely. [They] walk up to me and tell me stuff or pass and touch. I find it very intrusive and I don't like that…once you're intrusive and I classify [them like] males they are very aggressive, so when girls behave so aggressive socially…I would be like 'oh they are like guys…they turn up with their thuggish look'

Both Dina and Sonia evoke specific kinds of behaviours associated with butch women, that is characteristics of aggression, roughness, and intrusion into their personal space, all of which serve to mark and set them apart from each other. While some femme women do not question butch women's sexuality, it is their gender performances that unsettle them. Through these behavioural characteristics, Dina and Sonia perceive butch/masculine women as "failing" to conform to appropriate femininity. They engage in relegating butch women to the domain of masculinity. Gender expressions, particularly of women embodying certain kinds of masculinities, or characteristics associated with a specific masculinity, function as a basis of division within the community. The majority of femme-presenting women offer similar narratives of butch women as ambiguous figures regarding their sex/gender identity. Equally important, the presence of butch women in public spaces subjects them, femme-presenting women, to public suspicion and scrutiny. In some cases, the presence of the butch women opens them up to violence as noted in the earlier discussion of the term cauxin. Consequently, for femme-presenting women, their embodiment of hegemonic femininity is strategic insofar as women's sexual desires remain in disguise and offset the violence. Strategic femininity grants women certain benefits of being covert and anonymous in public spaces, however, they also maintain and surveil these gender boundaries. This becomes especially clear in their distancing from and policing of "butch/masculine" women in the community who signal too much visibility—a figure that threatens their safety and security in public. Despite these internal gender boundaries and differences that structure the community, Anna (mixed race, 30s) expressed changes in her understanding of butch women,

> I have a very good friend who is a butch lesbian. If it wasn't for her, I would have been creating that barrier between butch lesbian and femme, but because of her I have warmed up to women that are butch looking.

Women's growing interaction and friendships with butch women serves as a basis for breaking down some of the negative attitudes and structures within the community.

Masculine women and threats to the hegemonic order

Within Euro-American discourses, there is a growing body of work that addresses "butch" "femme" and "female masculinity" as legitimate identities and subject positions that challenge the dominant models of gender expressions (Halberstam, 1998). Halberstam (1998) draws our attention to the ways in which butch identities, female masculinity and performances are transgressive as they deviate and detach from the white male body and attach to female bodies. Butch performances and alternative versions of masculinities in white women were pathologized and categorized under different categories of "female husband, "tribade", "hermaphrodite" and "inversion" by the 19th century (Halberstam, 1998, p. 50-51). Despite the medicalization and stigmatization of butch/masculine women, recent writings have sought to recuperate the butch woman from these negative discourses. Thus, writings focused on the ways in which butch-femme roles and dynamics are played out within the lesbian communities from the 40s onwards (Kenney and Davis, 1992; Newton, 1984; Nestle, 1992), to more recently, looking at how butch/masculine women challenge the sex/gender binary and disrupted compulsory heterosexuality (Bulter, 1990; Rubin, 1992; Halberstam, 1998; Nestle, 1992) While there is substantive scholarly work on butch/femme gender expressions and female masculinity, there is little work interrogating butch/femme and female masculinities in the Caribbean. In Euro-American discourses, while butch/femme and female masculinities are theorized as legitimate identities and gender performances, Afro-Caribbean women's masculinity was understood as an extension of their African nature (Ghisyawan, 2016). Afro-Caribbean women who embodied masculine traits of roughness, violence, hypersexuality and aggression were

stereotypically seen as possessing an excess of blackness (Wekker, 2006; Tinsley, 2010). Although there is some attention to Afro-Caribbean women's masculinities in Caribbean research, there is less attention to Indo-Caribbean and mixed-race women's masculinities, with the exception of the Indo-Caribbean "mannish woman" from Shani Mootoo's fictional work (Khan, 2016) and "the mannish-looking Indian woman, with flashy gold teeth, a Craven A cigarette always between them" (Silvera, 1991, p. 526). Although there are mentions of "butch women" in fictional works, there is no historical research that offers a genealogy of this figure, especially in the context of Guyana.

If femme-presenting women are accorded certain benefits by conforming to normative femininity, then how do butch/masculine women navigate the city? Discussing the many complexities and understandings of the term butch and butch roles, Gayle Rubin (1992) notes that "butch is most usefully understood as a category of lesbian gender that is constituted through the deployment and manipulation of masculine gender codes and symbols" (p. 467). In other words, butch women and their attending performances reveal the ways in which masculinity can be "adopt[ed] and transmut[ed] the many available codes of masculinity" (p. 469), producing new meanings and signification. While I do not interrogate what butch identity and masculinity mean for two of my participants, I draw on Rubin's framework of masculinity as a type of gender performance in order to situate and frame two of my participants and their experiences in the city.

Rachel (smixed race, 20s) who identifies as a lesbian and is more masculine presenting says,

> I was walkin' down here on Regent St and a guy told me he was gonna cut off my locks because I'm lookin' like a man. Many times, I would walk and people would just

discriminate…even the other day me and she [partner] was walkin' and a guy was a little bit disrespectful, 'she wanna be mo' man more than mi, fire man…'

Rachel's experience of being verbally attacked is linked to her visible ethnic and gender performance in public. Laura Harris and Elizabeth Crocker (1997) notes that visibility is a double edge sword for butch women, as it makes them visible as butch women (and as "real" lesbians) and as "targets of homophobia in public spaces" (p. 2). In the context of Georgetown, physical presentation and appearances carry tremendous significance as one's gender expression evokes different responses from men and women in the public sphere. It is quite common, for example, for men to engage in different forms of cat-calling as women pass by. In this hostile environment, women who do not follow appropriate feminine norms run the risk of drawing the public's attention to their gender and sexual alterity. Rachel's gender performance of masculinity is interpreted as threatening the status quo of hegemonic masculinity, that is, she is transgressing into a domain where she does not belong and hence she must be regulated. This is clearly expressed by a man who perceived her as "more" masculine than him, thus threating to cut off her hair locks. Although Rachel is perceived as stepping into masculinity by this person, Halberstam (1998b) reminds us that "…butch does not essentially and necessarily partake in the privileges assigned masculinity in a male supremacist society. Butches also suffer sexism …experience misogyny; butches may not be strictly women, but they are not exempt from female trouble" (p. 64). In other words, despite being perceived as a figure of transgression, butch/masculine women who visibly exhibit gender non-conformity are also vehemently subjected to heteropatriarchal hostility. In their study of 149 queer women in the U.S, Heidi M. Levitt and Sharon G. Horne (2002) noted that butch and androgynous women reported disproportionate levels of discrimination and harassment by the public.

Rachel further describes the ways in which her interactions with her partner in public subjects them to violence,

> my other half, she is very open, she feels like wiping meh eye she does it, she feels like kissing me, she does it…yuh can see I dress like a male and she's a female version, a femme, so they could see. It was like about 1:30 in the morning and some guys was driving in a car and saw mi and her holding hands and they stop the car and came out, pull a gun on us. A cop was passing, well they had to drive off because they had a gun on dem…

As noted above, many femme women, such as Sandra and Anna, who are conscious of their environment do not engage in public display of affections. However, public display of affections combine with gender presentations that confirms sexual alterity renders butch/masculine women open to public scrutiny, and possibly to violence, in a manner that femme women might not experience.

Describing an incident that took place at the sea wall in Georgetown with her partner who is more masculine, Julie (mixed race, 20s) says,

> We were standing there and I had my hand around her waist and she had her hand around my shoulder and a guy a ran up towards us and abruptly and said "ya'll two is lesbians?" That's how they saw it. I also see the way people would look at her when we're out in public because she is *androgynous*. They generalize it as her being the man and me being the woman, because the way we look when we in public, and they are more prone to saying something to her than to me because she looks more *masculine*. Persons, male and female, feel threaten by her, or they want to make her feel negative towards herself.

As also noted by Julie, her partner's masculine expressions are seen as a threat by others, causing persons to be aggressive towards them. For femme-presenting women, although they are sexually transgressive, their gender expressions are not interpreted as challenging the dominant order, and thus to some degree they are socially accepted. However, for bodies that do not fit into the two-sex model and whose gender presentations do not match their considered sexed body are met with a wide array of responses, from aggression, disgust, and violence (Butler, 1990; Munt 2001; 1998; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010; Halberstam, 1998). Gender ambiguities combined

with public display of affections that displaces the sex/gender binary such as Rachel and Julie's partner are seen as transgressing appropriate gender and sexual norms. King (2014) notes the differential levels of attention and violence that are meted out to same-sex desiring women in the Caribbean. She outlines, it is not that same-sex desiring women are naturally "invisible," rather the structures in place operate to make them invisible. Violence, particularly murder and rape, as she notes, operates in the region against same-sex desiring women, especially against those "women who refuse to embody (or to engender) hegemonic, heteropatriarchy femininity" (2014, p. 98). Gender expressions, particularly those performances that "fail" to conform to the heteronormative sex/gender system as exemplified through the butch/masculine woman, become grounds for public violence. The butch/masculine figure threatens to reveal the societal enforcement and unnaturalness of heterosexual gender and sexual expressions. The violence against butch/masculine women is twofold, butch/masculine women who are marked with particular gender and sexual alterity tend to be seen as outside of the dominant heterosexual order, and so as being from within the queer community (Halberstam, 1998). The violence against butch women stemming from heteropatriarchy could be a result of many layers, from defying the logics of femininity, seeking to appropriate masculinity, and their bodies/sexuality no longer subjected to the male gaze as site of pleasure. On the other hand, butch/masculine visibility might pose a threat to femme's women gender conformity and by extension their sexual practices. For middle class women in the city who prefer to remain "invisible," the butch/masculine woman by association brings them into visibility, where the possibility of losing their social and economic resources has serious material consequences. This can result in both men and women attempting to regulate and safeguard against butch women, although from different gender/sexual domains.

"The spaces we exist in"

In current theorizations, cities within North America and elsewhere are often seen as spaces of freedom and sexual liberation for LGBTQ individuals (Valentine & Skelton, 2003). Away from small towns and family relations, places within cities are presumed to offer anonymity and possibilities for engaging in alternative sexual relations, fantasies, identities, and the opportunity to be "out and proud." However, with the exception of Ghisyawan's (2016) work on the ways in which same-sex loving women make "queer safe spaces" in Trinidad, there is no work examining the ways in which women who love women and LGBTQ individuals use, modify, and inhabit urban spaces in the Caribbean. We do not know, for example, how spaces might make visible and/or invisible alternative sexualities and how women might transform urban spaces. In this section, then, I focus on the ways in which mixed-race middle-class women make use of urban spaces. In their access to urban spaces of consumerism and leisure, women not only alter the social relations within those spaces, but their access to spaces also fractures the community along economic, racialized, and geographical lines. Writing on how the social relations of gender and sexuality shape the city and also how cities shape bodies, Fran Tonkiss (2005) notes that women's experiences of spatial practice is "constrained by violence and fear" (p 94-95). While the city offers women some degree of freedom, Tonkiss (2005) further writes that "uncertain meanings [are] attached to the figure of the woman in public, who variously signified disorder, danger and desire" where "women's fear of male violence is manifested as fear of *space*" (emphasis in original, p. 95). This ideological and material *fear of male* manifest *as fear of space* governs women's use of spaces and their movement in the city. Even though the fear of male violence influences the ways in which women use space, I borrow from Ghisyawan's (2016) framework of "queer safe spaces" which she defines as the "negotiated and

produced spaces of safety" (p. 137), which are "not fixed, but fluid, produced in and through a

dialectical process of negotiating heteronormative spaces and pressures (p. 138). Recognizing

that feelings of safety and spaces are discursively produced, women's use of spaces is

simultaneously constrained and subversive. Although most spaces and places are generally

perceived to be heteronormative in so far as they are gendered and sexualized spaces belonging

to some men, Ghisyawan (2016) draws our attention to the different *types of queer safe spaces*

such as "transitory spaces" or liminal spaces (p. 156). Transitory spaces are defined as places

where "the rules of ordinary life are temporarily suspended as "something in flux or in-

between…such as stations, airports…places of leisure that are temporarily inhabited" (p. 156).

Below I discuss how women interviewed in the city, although conscious of the violence, engage

in making queer safe spaces. As Jenna (Indo-Guyanese, 30s) reminds us, "spaces that we exist in

are not necessarily the most public spaces, they are more kinda the interstitial spaces." They

enter into, participate, modify and reclaim transitory spaces for their own desires and practices,

temporarily displacing the heteronormative norms and rules that govern their lives.

Bars and Clubs

The majority of the women interviewed in the city note either using their own car and/or

renting a taxi in the city to move around. Anna (mixed race, 30s) said,

> we mostly drive wherever we [are] going. If we going into the heart of the city, we
> probably take a taxi. It's not because I'm a lesbian, it's just because the crime rate is too
> high in Guyana. We hang out at Tropical Palace, Lotus, Spring or we would just do house
> limes so basic places we would go…

Recognizing the larger context of violence and associated high crime rates, Anna feels safer

using her private vehicle and/or renting a taxi. It should be noted that some of the women who

use taxies often hire the same person to drive them around the city, developing a relationship

with one or two drivers. The places that Anna frequents regularly, such as Palm Court, Hibiscus

and Iguana, are not visited by the working-class—these spaces cater to mainly middle-upper class groups. They are generally understood to be heterosexual places for dating, having drinks after work hours, and as spots to socialize. Sidney (mixed race, 30s) adds, "the regular spots for me are the Q, District and Wave." These are high end sports bars and lounges in the city.

Bell & Valentine (1999) and Valentine (2000) have shown us how spaces are discursively produced as heterosexual, and the ways in which various performances act to naturalize the space as heteronormative. However, not all spaces are continuously produced as heterosexual, the "identity of spaces, like the identities of individuals, are always cross cut with multiple contra-dictions and tensions" (Valentine, 2000, p. 5). If places are generally understood to be heteronormative, then gender performances and sexual norms are the behaviours that can transform the social relations in these fixed places, making them into queer spaces. Julie (mixed race, 20s) describes the ways in which her queer presence and performativity temporarily changes the ambiance of the space,

> We would go to Revival often, a sports bar. A lot of allies of LGBT hangs out there, no crude remarks, I don't feel threaten in that space. I can order my beer and hold my babes hand, but we are not allowed to kiss. Most I have ever done is lean in and fix something on her top, just to share that intimate space with her…

Although the spaces listed above are presumed to be heteronormative, Julie relates to the space differently. For her, Revival is a space that is non-threating, where different sexual identities and desires are somewhat acceptable—this sports bar is experienced as a relatively safe queer space. Valentine (2000) argues that "lesbians can produce their own relational spaces or read heterosexual space against the grain, experiencing it and producing it differently" (p. 5). Even though Julie can hold her partner's hand in Revival, she is still aware of the ways in which the space is controlled as they are "not allowed to kiss," or make gestures that convey physical/sexual intimacy. The heteronormativity of the space is subverted through non-sexual

acts and intimacy such as Julie acting to fix her partner's top. Valentine (2000) has drawn our attention to this, that "dress, language, [and] music are just some of the vehicles…[used] to mobilise such relational spaces (p. 5). The subtle performativity by LGBQ and WLW individuals in these spaces can act to subvert and fracture the heteronormativity embedded in these venues.

The momentary disruptions of heteronormative norms, however, are restricted to middle-class women in Georgetown. Referencing a bar she visited with me, Sidney (mixed race, 30s) points out that,

> like when we were at the bar there, those groups, none of them are middle class, you could tell. You will find that middle class and upper class, they would lime at the regular spots like Tropical Palace. They would intermingle with regular people and people would still know…

Sidney draws our attention to the fact that access in the city is highly divided by class and ethnicity for women. In spaces like Tropical Palace, a high-end night club in the city, women can be somewhat sexually expressive with each other and not be subjected to much public scrutiny, i.e., where one can say "they would know." However, the bar that I visited with them has particular negative connotation as a space frequented by the 'gays' and a working-class space where fights are prone to take place. This bar is geographically located outside of the city center, but what is of importance are the ways in which it is symbolically imagined by middle-class women who never frequent the space. Referring to the bar on the outskirts of Georgetown, Sandra (mixed race, 30s) tells me she that she heard that "fights break out there," that is it not a place where she and her partner would "put themselves". She further went on to say that the "place is ghetto," that they do not do ghetto. Sidney (mixed race, 30s) also says that she heard, "you go don't go alone, go with somebody, because you might get beat up. Sonia (mixed race, 30s):

I wouldn't do it…like you can be social and talk about anything and everything here [Georgetown] and then there's ghetto people like they would just make a mess. For some reason those are the people that would go there, yuh always hear about fighting, somebody beat up somebody, cause someone looked at their girlfriend, or somebody threw beer bottles and popped somebody. I don't wanna be in that kind of scene, no.

Due to their economic independence, women access spaces that often reflect their social and economic status. Spaces such as Tropical Palace, Revival, and Wave lounge are spaces generally understood by the majority of the women interviewed as spaces where they can be "somewhat open" or socially acceptable. Lacking publicly designated LGBTQ spaces in the city, middle and upper-class women inhabit and modify the heteronormative rules associated in these spaces. By occupying these particular venues, socially, economically and physically, women demarcate themselves from working class LGBTQ individuals who visit other spaces located on the outskirts of the city. This differentiation between them and others is evident in their imaginations of the bar located outside of the city, by circumscribing those who visit that space as "ghetto individuals" who are prone to violence.

Strip Clubs

Another queer transitory space that women discussed feeling relatively safe in were strip clubs. The common and dominant perception is that men visit strip clubs for many purposes. However, women also indicate that they visit strip clubs as the space offers them some degree of freedom to interact with other women sexually. Elspeth Probyn (1995), writing about a hypothetical scenario, she describes how two lesbians kissing at a bar can reproduce the space (p. 81). Probyn (1995) notes that,

> while their kiss cannot undo the historicity of the ways in which men produce their space as the site of production of gender (Woman) for another (men), the fact that a woman materialises another woman as the object of her desire does go some way in rearticulating that space. The enactment of desire here can begin to skewer the lines of force that seek to constitute women as Woman, as object of the masculine gaze...the desire of one woman for another produces a small opening…in a male homosocial space…making out

in straight space can be a turn-on, one articulation of desire that bends and queers a masculine place allowing for a momentarily sexed lesbian space'' (p. 81).

Following Probyn's (1995) line of reasoning that although homosocial spaces are highly gendered and sexed for the male gaze, women who appropriate other women as objects of their desires within these spaces rupture the seamless heteronormativity of the space. Women who access strip clubs engage in a process of temporarily restructuring the space by desiring other women. Although LGBQ women and women who love women might be the object of desire by men in the broader culture, within the spaces of strip clubs, they momentarily produce a "sexed lesbian space."

Lisa (black 20s) indicates that Brass is one of the only strip clubs where women feel free to engage with other women sexually. Jackie (mixed race, 20s) concurs, "I've been 3 times. I met a woman and we had drinks and chatted for hours, one of the dancers. Everyone is somehow into each other, freer I suppose." Seeing strip clubs as a space where she and her partner can physically and sexually interact, Sidney (mixed race, 30s) says,

> I always go to the strip club. Most of the times when I went there, it would be me and [my partner] and she would be snuggled up unda me [laughs], and these girls would give us lap dances cause she's [partner] cute. She even became like friends with some of them…

Marina (mixed race, 20s) describes her Friday night,

> we would go to this strip club every weekend, Brass. Now Raval opened. Every Friday and Saturday night, Raval. Nobody would say anything there, I got my money I do what I want to do, so I don't see any issue…you would get girls and get dance, you would pay fuh dance and you would do all kind of yuh know, yuh does get freaky with da strippers

Marina speaks to the ways in which her middle-class status grants her access to other women in the strip clubs. Given that she has money, she is able to pay for women's services at both of these clubs. Even though these spaces are understood as heteronormative sites that belong to men, women who love women defy the rules of the space by inserting their same-gender desires

within it. In visiting strip clubs, women who love women subvert who the space belongs to, who the intended audience is, and who is desirable. In a heteronormative society, where women lack designated spaces and where their sexualities are often under the gaze of men, visiting strip clubs enables women to reclaim and own their sexual desires. They participate in and claim other women's [dancers etc.,] sexualities as a site of pleasure for themselves.

Hotels

Lacking their own private spaces, women who currently reside with their families often access different hotels in the city. Writing on how lesbian women experience (hetero)sexual spaces, Valentine (1993a) notes that "hotels have a dual image; they represent a surrogate home for families on holiday and therefore are associated with heterosexual family units; second, they are effectively surrogate bedrooms having specific (hetero)sexual associations as a site for adultery and 'dirty weekends'" (p. 404). Hotels, as a heterosexual space, can be *both* a space of leisure *and* discomfort for WLW. Middle class women, embodying a normative femininity, discuss how they inhabit and experience these spaces. Although I cannot speak to the ways in which butch/masculine access these spaces, I suggest that normative embodiment of femininity along with economic status plays a critical role in accessing of hotel spaces.

Jackie (mixed race, 20s) said,

> She was insisting on us sleeping together and I'm like okay. It's just that I didn't have the space, she didn't have the space, so we have to find space, yuh know? So we ended up renting a room, tacky I know? We ended up renting a room, it was called Sleep Inn. I did it because she felt uncomfortable speaking to the front desk person and I never done that before [laughs] so I felt really awkward. The adrenaline was coursing through my body, and suddenly I didn't care what anyone at the desk thought of me or what they would have discussed later on.

For women with financial stability, hotels are spaces they use to meet their partners privately away from the gaze of their family. To rent a hotel room as a single female in Guyana can be

interpreted by the receptionist at the front desk in all sort of ways. It might be uncommon for a woman to rent a hotel room alone, without the presence of a male partner. Even if women do not experience verbal comments, Valentine (1993a) in her study notes that women "often feel out of place in hotels…[in] [an] overtly heterosexual environment" (p. 405). Despite her experience of awkwardness, Jackie resisted the normativity of the space by incorporating her same-gender desires in a semi-public space.

Marina (mixed race, 20s) describes feeling regulated by the female receptionist,

> I normally just walk in and booked it for a day. Sometimes with my girl. It's weird at times, especially if the receptionist is a female. A female would give u a look that umm makes u feel weird, but a male doesn't really care.

Marina's experience of discomfort stems from having a female receptionist at the front desk where a woman might be policing her choice to book a room differently, especially if she was not present with a male partner. Roxanne (mixed race, 20s) says,

> we usually get a hotel room and we hang out there. There is a hotel in Kitty, not sure the name of it but that's our mutual one, [we] meet 2 times in a month. The receptionist is very professional, she doesn't question or give any funny looks or give any passing remarks.

Although hotels are commonly viewed as a heterosexual space and a place of leisure, LGBQ women and WLW also access and use these spaces for their pleasure and desire. Through their access to these liminal spaces, the rules and norms of heteronormativity are briefly stalled, making their same-gender desires visible in these spaces. Their ability to enjoy this access and visibility though, is premised on their socio-economic status.

A counterpublic against a culture of violence

What does community look like for LGBQ women and women WLW? Do they imagine themselves to be part of the LGBTQ community? If so, in what ways? The term "community" is

a multifaceted concept connoting different meanings. In *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, Kate Weston (1991) details the historical emergence of the term "community" within the LGBT population and gay movement in the late 1960s in North American (p. 122). Contrary to familial and kinship relations that emphasized "blood relations" and "marriage," gay and lesbian family structures could not rely on this original model for community, given the loss of blood relations after "coming out" (Weston, 1991, p. 116). In this context, gays and lesbians' kinship pushed and expanded the boundaries of how families were structured and imagined. Familial structures for gays and lesbians were more fluid and forged through other networks, such as sharing a common sexual identity and providing material and emotional resources. (Weston, 1991, p. 119). Additionally, Weston (1991) points out how rigid boundaries that existed within family structures are blurred within the LGBT community, that is between friends/lovers, community/individual and erotic and non-erotic (p. Weston, 1991, p. 119). She further writes that the term community is used to refer to the process of "coming out", by developing social relations with other gay people based on sexual identities, forming a subculture, as a basis of organizing for political rights and access to urban spaces (p. 123-124). However, Weston (1991) warns that community, especially the gay community cannot be assumed to be a "unified subculture" (p. 124). Issues of "differences" steeped in identity politics undermine the "harmony and equality carried by the term "community" (Weston, 1991, p. 129). Does the term community as outlined by Weston have applicability within the LGBT subculture in Guyana? How do women forge "community?" And in what ways do issues of "differences" operate within the "community?"

A major concern within queer geography discourses is the ways in which space and place play critical roles in the making of queer subjects, their identities, and the ways in which gays

and lesbians create communities, develop social networks and access urban commercial spaces in North America. This, however, is not the case in urban Georgetown, where violence at every turn threatens women's personal safety and structures the options available to them. Violence from the dominant heterosexist public sphere does not allow women to have a *designated* queer/gay or lesbian space which they can call or claim as their own. Referencing the fear of the dominant culture or male violence, Sandra (mixed race, 30s) explained that "in regular public spaces, we can only be friends. It's not that it's not going to be safe for you, it's just that you don't feel 100% safe, you always feel like you need to watch around and how are they looking at you. There might be so much hate for this kinda stuff in some peoples' eyes and if they see it they can come after you, you know?" Within this context of violence, Munoz (1999) tells us that women, queers, people of color, and other minority groups intervene in the dominant heteronormative culture to "produce minoritarian space" (p. 148). Referring to these spaces as *counterpublics*, he writes that there are "spheres that stand in opposition to the racism and homophobia of the dominant public sphere" (p. 143). Counterpublics are "communities and relational chains of resistance that contest the dominant public sphere" (Munoz, 1999, p. 146), however we must be attuned to local specificities and particularities that produce *multiple publics* (emphasis mine, Munoz, 1999, p. 148).

In the following section, I look at the ways in which women form community within their social, economic and ethnic strata. For middle class women, "community" is organized, produced and experienced as an insular microcosm within the larger community. I suggest that we conceptualize their community as a *type of counterpublic* as proposed by Munoz that attempts to resist the heterosexist violence from the dominant culture.

Community, for middle class women across ethnic identities, is not linked to any urban space in the city. Forged and communicated through word of mouth, their community is highly informal, tightly regulated, and structured along class and ethnic/racial lines. The community that exists within this elite group of women follows two patterns: first, through socializing, networking and developing other relations with women take place within the private sphere of women's home. Second, most of the women have a shared sense of community by taking trips together across different parts of the country, although undertaking such trips is made possible by their middle-class status. Both community formations are constantly in movement—whether from one person's home to another, or by travelling to different locations in the country.

In the city, middle class women, across ethnic identification, are conscious of the ways in which men respond to them in public spaces, and against this backdrop of violence, women have built an informal "community" that is always on the move. Jackie (mixed race, 20s) says "I feel content with the fact that our little community even exists. We find comfort in each other, knowing we are there, knowing we can be seen." Critiquing organizations in the global north that prioritize visibility, King (2014) notes that alternative communal engagements such as "parties and chat sessions maybe not be political, even to some of those who attend them, but these activities counter near-invisibility by creating a community that is at least *visible to itself*" (p. 112, emphasis mine). For middle class women, their community presents a space where they can be 'visible to themselves'; a space where women can share emotional support, find comfort, belonging and reduce isolation. These activities do not prioritize public visibility and other forms of traditional communities that center on political activism.

Sandra (mixed race, 30s) explains "we lime as they would call it and would go over to other people houses and hang out or they would come to us. We and our friends we would meet

in a common place." Julie (mixed race, 20s) who owns her place adds that, "I used to have house parties and that was a safe space for the entire community, or we hang out at her [partner's] home." While the majority of the women indicate that they have private get togethers at each other homes, differences of class and racial/ethnic positioning make their community private, secluded and fractured. Anna (mixed race, 30s) points to the ways in which the community is divided, "you gotta be in the circle and you might hear of stuff. I have been to a couple of events, unfortunately, you don't meet women because they women don't come out to those events. [We] had arranged a party, strictly women only at the club, that was a nice experience." Anna highlights two important ways in which their community takes shape. One, women have to be a part of their social circle in order to access information and be invited. Second, when they host private events, these socials are catering to and targeting upper-middle class women, which is an indication of why a lot of women might not come out to their event.

Jackie (mixed race, 20s) also notes this divide within the community,

> there isn't any public spaces. There are private ones, and if yuh get invited to by some miracle, yuh can meet women da way, that's about it. Most black women, women from the ghetto and low earners, they have their own groups. It's a whole different scene. It's not so damn expensive and uptight…

Jackie's comments reflect the multiple layers and tensions within the community. Community formation, as Jackie noted, is directly linked to one's racial/ethnic and class lines. Similarly, Sidney (mixed race, 30s) reflecting on the different "intellectual background" of the groups says that,

> you would find like certain groups of people stick to their social groups, while others they interrelated. Like in the various socio-economic and social groups, cause you have high end ones and the ghetto ones, the rough ones, yuh get some, they be very proper and they don't mix. I would see it as a separation, the various categories of lesbians' sub divides itself in each economic and intellectual group too…

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If we pay heed to Weston's warnings of differences within the community, we can see the ways in which their community is highly structured and fragmented. While predominantly mixed-race middle-class women in Georgetown have forged a specific type of counterpublic— moving from one person's home to another—in response to the dominant culture of violence, their community is highly structured along racial and class lines.

Another way in which middle class women in the urban context interrupt the dominant culture of violence is by taking trips together. Taking trips, while enabled by their economic status and mobility, is a type of counterpublic, as being in transition offers women some safety and security from violence. In her work on same-sex eroticism between Caribbean women, Tinsley (2010) re-appropriates the Caribbean landscapes of mountains, swamps, springs, gardens, water, flowers, and other geographical spaces to show that queer transgressions in the Caribbean did not only occur within interior spaces, contrary to some of metaphors found in queer theory such as the "closet." She writes, 'inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's landmark study *The Epistemology of the Closet*, too many northern studies of same- sex sexuality stay out of springs or swamps and close to bedrooms. Their cartographies often rely on standard metaphors of interior and exterior space… In fact, 'the closet' seems to work not (only) as the space that confines queers but also as the space that confines queer studies' (2010, p. 25-26). Resisting the divide between interior/exterior/private/public spaces, Tinsley (2010) in her work, remaps these alternative spaces from "landscapes of work" to "landscapes of desires" (p.15), where same-sex female transgressions regularly occurred under the confines of Caribbean heteropatriarchy.

Following Tinsley's (2010) account of "landscapes of desires," middle class women blur the boundaries between private/public/interior/exterior/visibility and invisibility as they re-

appropriate spaces, generally assumed to be public/nature for their own queer desires. Dina says

to me, "we did a trip, but this is mostly with women. We carpool and went to the creek[28] on the

highway." The creek off the Linden highway is known as a hotspot for spending the weekends

with friends and family ("Oases along the highway", 2012). It is generally perceived to be a

space where men, women and children swim, barbeque, dance, and "lime."[29] However, Middle

class women such as Dina see this space as site where women can be together, "one girl was

with her partner…there were transwomen too." The creek is interpreted as a space where middle

class women can be somewhat intimate with each other as it is common for some women to

exhibit and exchange physical gestures.

Nicole (mixed race, 20s) says that she and her group of about ten women often travel to

"Linden,"[30] and "go camping on the coast.". Julie adds that "when we are in groups we find

ourselves taking road trips to see other places in Guyana, away from the Coast." Marina (mixed

race, 20s) who owns a farm says that, "I have a farm off Linden highway, sometimes we go

there. We have friends up there also, so we would arrange it. We go by these friends' place or

my cousin's place after her mom migrate, it's her alone. We would go there and invite girls over

and drink." It is imperative that within a cultural context of violence and lack of rights, we

explore the ways in which minority groups forge counterpublics to resist the dominant culture.

While dominant theorizing in queer studies centralizes private spaces, that of the home,

bar/clubs/ and other queer friendly consumer spaces, Tinsley (2011) writes that "engag[ing] [in]

historically specific, previously unmapped erotic geographies, looking for what resistant

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[28] There are a few creeks such as Soesdyke/Linden Highway, Hauraruni creek, Umbrella Resort, Yarrowkabra creek, and Splashmins Resort along the highway that used for recreation purposes.
[29] The word "lime" refers to hanging out either by yourself or with a group of people. It generally refers to a gathering, a social or a party.
[30] Linden is a mining town off the coast of Demerara. The town is increasingly becoming a tourist destination.

sexualities mean outside the metropole" (p. 3) takes us beyond the private spaces generally assumed to be sites of queer sexual activity. Traversing different spaces together might be part of their survival strategy as well as a means to build community amongst themselves. Taking trips together and having access to private property in small towns/villages are particular types of counterpublics that develops as both a response to and a strategy for dealing with the constraints of their environment. Within the Western context where queer visibility and where queer visibility is a political strategy for gaining human rights, visibility for middle-upper class women might actually be detrimental to the personal and social/economic well belling. Reading the different spaces as a counterpublic to the violence and remapping of traditional spaces to "landscapes of desire" allows us to see the ways in which spaces fluid, malleable and renegotiated by LGBT women and WLW, rather than thinking of spaces as spatially fixed and bounded.

Envisioning the rural

From the twenty-four interviews conducted in Georgetown, thirteen women made references to the rural spaces of Berbice and Essequibo. Drawing on Agnew (2011), Ghisyawan (2016) outlines *space* as a "dimension within which something is located; it is an empty shell within which anything can be situated" and *place* is a "point in space that represents something physical, social, or economic" (p. 22). In other words, space can be conceptualized as an abstract and fluid concept, encompassing different movements and meanings, whereas place refers to a fixed, static entity, and position in space. Throughout this section, I look at how "space is *produced*, and that it has both material and symbolic components" (Bell & Valentine, 1995, p. 18, emphasis in original). In other words, I examine the ways in which the rural spaces of Berbice and Essequibo are produced within the imaginations of urban women, and how this

perception informs their subjectivity within the urban context.

A common discourse within queer studies is that queerness, queer identity, and queer culture can be found and situated within an urban setting, often in North American cities. This discourse of linking queer identity to an urban space has resulted in queer "metronormativity"—which is a dominant "story of migration from the 'country to the 'town,'" "a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicious, persecution, and secrecy" and imagines the urban space as the only viable space for queers (Halberstam, 2003, p. 36-47). The physical journey that one takes, of leaving the rural community for the urban center is also marked by "the psychological journey from closet case to out and proud" (Halberstam, 2003, p. 37). In other words, metronormativity tells the story of not only a repressed queer subject who leaves the physical confines of their rural community to find tolerance and acceptance in the city, but also that of a linear migration to the city, where they experience their full sexual subjectivity by "coming out." Scholars have noted that this perception has resulted in a binary construction of the urban/rural, where the rural within North American is portrayed as inherently white[31], and imagined as a *closeted* space that is homophobic, steeped in sexual and religious conservativism, and full of violence—an antithesis to the urban space (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Halberstam, 2003; Gray et al, 2016). The urban, then, is conceptualized as a space where rural queers must escape to experience freedom, anonymity and tolerance (Weston, 1995). Studies have emphasized the city as the *only* space where alternative sexualities (LGBTQ) can flourish, given the density, isolation, anonymity, consumption, and social networks afforded by the city (D'Emilio, 1983; Knopp, 1995; Weston,

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[31] Although rural towns are assumed to be white, rural spaces are racialized in particular ways. For instance, in the work of Kazyak (2010), she discusses how rural spaces are racialized through other categories of "hick", "redneck" and "white trash," with each term underpinned by an element of class.

1995; Binne, 1995). Recent scholarship on queer ruralism are responding to this myopic portrayal of the rural as incompatible with queerness and queer identity, such as Scott Herring's (2010) *Another Country: Queer anti-urbanism*. Herring expands Halberstam's framework of "metronormativity" to include six analytic axes[32]. I draw from the following four axes for my purposes:

> Narratological: metronormativity often appears as a travel narrative that demands a predetermined flight to the city; a mythological plot that imagines urbanized queer identity as a one-way trip to sexual freedom to communal visibility, and to a gay village [… however] migration […] have not been essential to queers of various races and ethnicities […] often dictated by socio-economic demands
> Aesthetic: an aesthetic norm occurs when the lesbian and gay urbanism that informs metronormativity consolidates itself as queer urbanity. Such urbanity functions primarily as a psychic, material, and affective mesh of stylistics informed by a *knowingness*, a *sophistication*, a *fashionability*, and a *cosmopolitanism* that discriminates anybody or any cultural object that does not take urbanity as its point of origin, its point of departure, or its point of arrival.
> Racial: […] the narratological norms assume that urban areas are more racially diverse and racially inclusive than ruralized ones.
> Temporal: a hierarchized assumption that a metropolitan-identified queer will always be more dynamic, more cutting-edge, more progressive, and more forward looking than a rural-identified queer, who will always be more static, more backwards, and more culturally backwater (p. 15-16)

Drawing on Ghisyawan's distinction between *space* and *place*, and the four analytical axes outlined by Herring's above, I trace the ways in which the rural operates in the imagination of urban women. This imagination of women in rural spaces allows urban women to perceive themselves as more sexually "free" and "liberated" in the city as LBQ women and WLW, in comparison to rural women.

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[32] The other two axes are: "Socio-economic: the economic and social status of queers that allows them "to announce, to mold, and to capitalize on their leisure-oriented urbanism as a bourgeois privilege and as a niche market. Epistemological: the hierarchized assumption that the closer proximity you have to a sky-scraper, the more in-the-know, in-the-loop, and up to the minute you must be, irrespective of your weekly alternative's actual entertainment listings" (Herring, 2010, p. 15-16)

From the interviews in Georgetown, one finds that the women often refer to rural spaces

by comparing their lives to other women living in Berbice and Essequibo[33]. Women in the city

often indicated that women in rural spaces are "far worse off" in comparison to their lives in the

Georgetown. Most of the narratives paint a picture where women in Georgetown are

skeptical/ambivalent about the ways in which women who love women can exist in rural spaces,

that their sexual identities, desires, and praxis cannot fully exist, or does not exist in the ways

they imagine their lives in Georgetown.

> ..it's weird that we in GT might feel that we can't do certain things, but then, look at the women in Berbice and Essequibo, they can't do anything at all…unless it's very private, because we can still go to the club or bar here and be somewhat open and not looked upon, because recently with the younger generation I don't like what they do cause, it's like a fab thing to do…it's like an in thing to do, if you wanna be in the in crowd, pretend you're a lesbian…they young girls go in the club and do it all the time, so in GT we have that freedom and not look down upon because it's now becoming a common thing, but then I feel sorry for the women in Berbice and Essequibo, especially where East Indian men are so dominating. It would be very scandalous and probably violent to some extent if they were to witness two women showing those affection to each other. I would recommend they come to live in Gt [laughs]… I went to Berbice, and we reach at some restaurant and order a shot of rum and beer and the girl is cracking up. Why is she laughing? She found it funny that women sitting there ordering alcohol before 12, that 4 women order drinks…what you would do in GT as the norm, you wouldn't do that there …the point is the mentality there… (Anna, mixed-race, 30s)

> I have a friend who lives in Berbice, her family is Indian, but Christian, and we go out a few times when I go to the country. She's closeted in that she doesn't publically support any LGBT events or online or anywhere else, and she doesn't want her family to know that she's a lesbian and she wouldn't hint to them or she doesn't want them to be expose to that part of her because she's scared of what they may do to do. I am not sure if they would be violent towards her or try to harm her…I don't know but she's terrified of telling her family that she's a lesbian… (Lisa, black, 20s)

Anna's perception of women who love women in Berbice and Essequibo reveal a number

of axes that Herring (2010) discusses, such as the racial axis which imagines urban areas as more

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[33] According to the Population census of 2012, Essequibo or region 3 has a total population of 107, 416. Afro-Guyanese accounts for 22, 774, East Indian 64, 183, and mixed race at 17, 652. The region is a multi-racial/ethnic space, producing agricultural goods and services.

racially diverse and inclusive. The rural spaces of Berbice and Essequibo in Anna and Lisa's imagination materializes as racialized spaces where East Indian women are controlled by violent East Indian patriarchal masculinity. Ghisyawan (2016) in her research on where same-sex loving women feel safe, notes that spaces were racialized as "coolie-villes,"—a derogatory term used to refer to indentured labours. "Coolie-villes", or spaces that are predominately occupied by East Indian communities were understood as intolerant and hostile towards queer women due to their retention of East Indian patriarchal ideals. (p. 38). Although my participants do not use the language of "coolie-ville", there is a parallel understanding of Berbice and Essequibo as predominately East Indian spaces. These spaces figure in their imagination as racialized, gendered, and intolerant of sexual diversity. As exemplified in Lisa's excerpt, the Indian family situated within the physical space of Berbice is more prone to violence, with Berbice figuring in her perception as a space that is intolerant of queerness.

Neither Anna nor Lisa speak directly to if and how other groups of racialized men in the city might act towards women, but based on Anna's narrative, East Indian men in Berbice and Essequibo may not respond to women's showing of physical/sexual affections in the same ways as men in Georgetown. Implicitly, then, Georgetown is understood as a racially diverse space where other groups of racialized men are less likely to be violent, or where violence does not occur in the same ways against women who love women. This reflects the racial and temporal axis put forward by Herring, that urban spaces are more diverse and tolerant to queer differences.

If both rural spaces of Berbice and Essequibo are perceived to be controlled by East Indian men as indicated by Anna, then it makes sense for her to suggest that "I recommend they come to live in GT." This parallels Herring's narratological axis which is the notion that queer subjects living in rural spaces must flee to the city to find sexual freedom. In other words, a

particular story is imagined: one where WLW in Berbice are physically and sexually subjugated to East Indian patriarchy and must relocate to the racially diverse urban space of Georgetown to experience "freedom."

Equally important in Anna and Lisa's narrative is aesthetically the ways in which rural spaces are visualized. Herring notes that the metronormativity is further maintained by the aesthetic norm which "occurs when lesbian and gay urbanism… consolidates itself as queer urbanity" (p. 16). He further writes,

> Such urbanity functions primarily as a psychic, material, and affective mesh of stylistics informed by a *knowingnes*s that polices and validates what counts for queer cultural production; a *sophistication* that demarcates worldliness, refinement, and whatever may count as the "latest"; a *fashionability* that establishes what counters as the most up-to-date forms of apparel, accessory, and design; and a *cosmopolitanism* that discriminates anybody or any cultural object that does not take urbanity as its point of origin, its point of departure, or its point of arrival (2010, p. 16)

Rural spaces of Berbice and Essequibo are marked as fundamentally different from urban Georgetown through the above material and affective aesthetics that Herring outlines. Women in the city participate in the above stylistics outlined by Herring, which centers the urban as their reference point for understanding their own sexual subjectivity. In Anna's narrative, she centers the bars/clubs and being "somewhat open" as a means to establish and separate her sexual subjectivity from rural women. Although the public spaces of bar and club spaces are presumed to be gendered (male) and (hetero) sexual, these sites are the focal point that women use to differentiate themselves from rural women. By engaging in normative gender and sexual expressions that contest and subvert the heteronormative norms and rules, lesbian women can experience and reproduce space differently (Valentine, 2000). The public display and subversions of space, although still under the guise of men, that is "somewhat open and not looked down upon" as indicated by Anna, distinguishes her queerness from women in rural

spaces. Their limited sexual expressions in these public spaces in Georgetown informs and marks the rural space as lacking public spaces, and by extension, the rural is seen as "private" or a closeted space as Anna and Lisa noted. I suggest that it is the partial access, transformation and inhabiting of these assumed heterosexual spaces for sexual exploration and expression that urban women use to distinguish themselves from rural women (Valentine, 2000; Valentine & Skelton, 2003).

In addition to her gender and sexual performances in bars, Anna reveals a particular lifestyle of consuming alcohol, a type of *sophistication* that rural women lack due to their "mentality," through which we can assume a type of conservatism. Within middle and upper-class circles, drinking in public spaces is a social norm in the city amongst the women that I interviewed, an activity that women in the city do not envision women in rural spaces to be participating in. This reflects the dominant queer consumer-citizen model, where queer subjects—a niche market—are associated with a particular consumer lifestyle of being refined, engaging in fashion trends and having sophisticated tastes, which are met by the neoliberal market (Puar, 2007). Consequently, as we see in Anna's narrative, lack of access to this consumer-oriented market in rural spaces is shored up to construct the space as inherently backwards and intolerant.

Lisa, on the other hand, interprets her friend who lives in Berbice as being in the closet due to her lack of public life. Sandra understands queerness as a type of activity that is linked to visible public expressions and engagement with LGBT related content. The splitting between the urban (read as public) and the rural (read as closet) manifest as a key feature of differences between women who love women in the urban and rural. This sophistication is further

exemplified in the ways in which rural women are imagined to be unwilling to talk about their sexual practices, as Marina (mixed race, 20s) said,

> they ones in the city they can conversate [talk] but they ones in the countryside like they don't conversate. I think, Indian women, they don't really conversate about their sexuality, but the mix race and Afro they say it out, but the Indians, nah. They don't. I wonder why though…

In Marina's perception, the rural/countryside is conflated and assumed to be an Indian space only, where the city is seen as a space for mixed race and Afro-Guyanese individuals. Naomi (mixed race, 20s) also states, "It's different here, because we in the capital Georgetown, so yuh gonna get a bit much more blunt than you goin' to get from Essequiboians and Berbicians because their shy…yuh won't get them to talk about sex…". Both Marina and Naomi conceive of the rural as spaces where women are reserved when discussing sex and their sexual practices. They imagine that rural women lack the ability to vocalize their experiences of sex and sexuality, that they are immersed in racial/ethnic/ conservatism. Herring (2010) reminds us that urban/rural binary is "not only a geographic marker…it should also be seen as a *social fantasy* whose cartographies are as much psychic, emotive, stylistic, and relational as they geographically or spatially realized without and within any identifiable U.S metropolis" (emphasis mine, p. 14). Rural spaces are imagined to be Indian only spaces, lacking sexual freedom. This imagination is inherently a *social fantasy* as noted by Herring, constructed and upheld by urban women. The views expressed by Anna, Lisa, Marina and Naomi construct rural Berbice and Essequibo as spaces that are intolerant of sexual differences, and through this perception, these women are able to experience and distinguish themselves from rural women. This perception of rural spaces allows middle class women to interpret, position and see themselves as having more freedom from East Indian men, being able to express their sexuality in public spaces, and having access to a consumer-based lifestyle, which serves to demarcate them from rural women.

Conclusion

This chapter mapped out a number of key areas in the lives of women in Georgetown. I argued that women claim, reject and modify their different sexual identities of LGBQ and WLW which they position against the local discourse of cauxin/cockson/coxen. Urban women claim other categories of identities as a way to resist the negative cultural understandings of cauxin and the particular gendered and sexualized meanings associated with the term. Safeguarding against gender performances that makes them visible as sexually non-conforming, the majority of women participate in what I argue is a *strategic form* of femininity. Strategic femininity, along with their racial/ethnic positioning, enables middle class women to differentiate themselves from other women who threaten to reveal them in the public realm. In a heteronormative environment, where women's bodies are always a site of violence, reading and embodying specific codes of femininity and masculinity serve to disguise and aid in their negotiation of specific queer spaces in the city. The structures of violence ingrained in their environment, I suggest, also contribute to middle-class women developing and forming a close-knit community on the move, a type of *counterpublic* that that also disrupts the heteronormativity of the city. Finally, I also argued that the rural plays a critical role in their imaginations of the construction of their sexual subjectivity. Their imagined perceptions of rural women intervene within the dominant structures of heteronormativity to create a space where urban women can visualize and experience themselves as 'freer' to explore their same-gender desires. To different degrees, urban women centralize and uphold the metronormative discourse through the axes of narratological, racial, aesthetic and temporal by situating the urban space of Georgetown as the only space where women can engage in their same-gender practices and desires.

CHAPTER 4: BERBICE: RURAL IMAGININGS OF SELF AND COMMUNITY

This chapter charts the lives of middle and working class LGBQ women and WLW in rural Berbice, Guyana, showing the complicated social, political and economic relations that they are embedded within. Depending on the women's location and positionality, LGBQ women and WLW traverse many circumstances and routes which include living in small villages, embodying multiple identities, that of race, class and sexual identity—family structures, and poverty, all the while living with their erotically charged desires for other women. This chapter begins by examining the ways in which middle and working-class women (living in Berbice) identify sexually. I also return to the metronormative narrative as discussed in the previous chapter, which upheld by the middle-class women of Georgetown, who perceive rural Berbice as oppressive. This section is a critical response to the homogenizing of rural spaces by asking, how are urban spaces experienced and imagined by middle and working-class rural women in Berbice? How does their perception of urban spaces inform their subjectivity, sense of place, and (un)belonging within their communities? In this section, I make two critical arguments: first, that the ways in which urban space is perceived by rural women depends on their mobility, class, and racial positioning. Middle- to upper class Indo-Guyanese women, through their lived experiences in places like Cuba, New York and Georgetown, engage in a comparison of their lives abroad and that of their current experiences in Berbice, characterized by constraint and a partial sense of belonging. Through migration, urban spaces such as Havana, Cuba, New York and Georgetown are experienced as spaces where their sexual subjectivity is constituted, and where they are granted the space to explore their desire for women outside of class/racial and family constrains. Their middle-upper class status and ethnic/racial identities, on the one hand, affords them the possibility to relocate, travel and study abroad while at the same time, their gendered and sexual

expressions are regulated by their families, preventing them from engaging in the politics of being 'out and proud'. Working class women on the other hand, I argue, regardless of their ethnicity and experience perceive urban spaces as a site of non-belonging and violence.

Second, in the latter part of this chapter, I argue that the ways in which working-class women experience community and belonging is contingent on factors such as age, marital status and whether or not they have children. In comparison to middle-class women in the city where the community is organized and developed based on access to private spaces and travel opportunities, working-class rural women's lives are structured through other categories such as 'being known as a good person', 'having ties to the community (children), and the 'close knit nature' of the villages (Kazyak, 2010). These allow them to perceive community and belonging differently from middle class women in the city as argued in the previous chapter. Since working class women in Berbice are integrated into their communities through the aforementioned categories, their lives are also partially incompatible with the LGBTQ visibility politics advocated by the West and in the urban space of Georgetown.

Rural Identities

In this section, I examine the ways in which women in rural Berbice make sense of their sexual identities, pointing to the ways in which they negotiate, claim, modify and reject different sexual categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual and women who love women. Participants were asked: "How do you identify?" "How do you describe your sexuality?" Out of the nine participants in Berbice, six of them identified as "loving women", with the other three identifying as gay, lesbian and bisexual. The term cauxin was not brought up, neither was queer used by these participants.

Women who love women and the discourse of lesbianism

I argue that the rejection of the term 'lesbian' and the claiming of the category "women who love women" in Berbice can be understood as a rejection of the dominant culture that marks lesbians as deviant, pathological, and outside of the appropriate ideals of respectable femininity. Similar to the resistance to the term cauxin in the urban, the women in Berbice resist the term lesbian, and perhaps to some degree are also rejecting the urban. Six women in Berbice dis-identify with the term lesbian due to the negative religious connotations that underpins the term. In other words, women in rural Berbice who 'love women' negotiate between their own subjective experiences of their sexual identities and a cultural environment steeped in religious condemnation that conveys to them that embodying particular identities makes them deviant. Negotiating these two subjective positions, I argue that this is the reason why the six women I interviewed dis-identify with the dominant cultural understanding of lesbianism by claiming the category of 'loving women.'

Natasha (20s, Indo-Guyanese) says, "people make it pathologic, I don't consider it pathologic…I consider it normal. I mean yuh don't hear anybody going around saying the straight couple so why I gotta go around saying lesbian or gay, it's normal for me". Natasha's rejection of the term 'lesbian' is reflective of people's attitudes towards the term. While Natasha is aware of the pathology associated with the term, she also exposes and challenges the heterosexual privilege that straight people are accorded, where they are not forced to disclose their sexual identities and practices. Thus, she questions why she must engage in the practice of disclosing her sexual practices and of ascribing to an identity. There is a further contradiction in Natasha's statement, that while she rejects the term lesbian because of the homophobic attitudes attached to it, she still claims it and considers it normal. Resisting a pathological discourse and

calling into question the normalizing of heterosexuality, Natasha, through her identification with 'loving woman,' carves out a space to dis-identify with the dominant perceptions of lesbianism and "considers loving woman normal." The categories of 'loving woman' and 'lesbian' then carries different connotations and is extremely significant in terms of how the women in Berbice claim sexual identities and praxis in the region. With the exception of Natasha, none of the other women I interviewed could explain their discomfort and rejection of the term "lesbian." However, when asked where they first heard the term and what it means, a common pattern became visible. Indo-Guyanese women who are Muslims or Christians revealed their discomfort and subsequent dissociation with the term as they learnt of it through religious discourses. Veronica (Indo-Guyanese, 20s), member of the Baptist Church, reveals the ways in which she learnt and perceived the term lesbian from religious discourses,

> [It] made me hate myself because I mean at least every month the sermon will say something about the evil gays and lesbian…I would get angry in the church, it's in the bible, and that's something I kinda had to unlearn later that there are different interpretations and verses they would use to tell you that you're evil…it kinda prevented me from fully accepting myself younger and once I accepted myself…I couldn't accept that anymore. I don't go to church anymore, I don't pray… I do believe that there is something but I don't subscribe to what any religion says…

Colonial discourses of non-normative sexual practices were pathologized by missionaries and the Church, and the acceptance of these categories in the region reflects that history. Wekker (2006) has pointed out how in accepting Euro-American discourses of sexual categories "means unwittingly accept[ing] the legacy of guilt, sin, disease, notions of male activity and female passivity, of the "natural" superiority of heterosexuality..." (p. 69). This is reflected in Veronica's early childhood experiences of going to church every week as a young child, where she internalized the ideas conveyed to her in Church that gays and lesbians are "evil." This

prevented her from accepting herself as a lesbian. Like Veronica, Mina (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) is

consciously aware of the negative Christian religious connotations attached to word "lesbian".

> They would call them sadomite…a woman who is involved with another woman sexually is committing a great sin, and the way in which they spoke about it told me that being sadomite is not acceptable in my family…it's just plain sinful…and I shouldn't do it. I am not religious, I am spiritual. I just believe in God.

Even though Veronica now identifies as "lesbian," Veronica had to "unlearn" the meanings

attached to the term. Describing the movie "Gia", which stars Angelina Jolie, Veronica recalls

how she re-interpreted her sexuality,

> I sat down and watch this thing, it made me cry because I had feelings towards women, …but I always thought of it as wicked and dirty and not something I should embrace or think of, …it's a movie but two women were in a relationship and it wasn't something dirty and sinful and evil, it was just normal, it was loving and caring… there was nothing wrong with it

Seeing two women in the film together, allowed Veronica to resist the dominant perception that

her sexual desires and practices were dirty and sinful. She re-interprets her desire for other

women as a normal part of her existence, that relationships with other women can be normal,

loving and caring. She reclaims the term outside of its general usage and imbues it with

normalcy. Although Veronica initially dis-identified with the word "lesbian", she also engages in

transforming the meanings of the word and thereby inhabits it differently, a similar finding that

Ghisywayan (2016) notes in her study of same-sex women who altered the meanings of the term

depending on class and religious affiliations (p. 211-212).

Indo-Guyanese women who are Muslim also expressed religious underpinnings that

influence how they perceived the term. Natasha, (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) talked about how "there

was once …when I was younger I went to Juma[34] and they talked about how it was wrong…I felt

ashamed and never returned to mosque." Jasmine (30s, Indo-Guyanese) also claimed, "I always

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[34] Juma/Jumu'ah refers to prayers that are held every Friday by the Muslim community.

like woman but rememba we ah Muslim and religion wise, yuh can't do that…this man on TV, this big Muslim man, he does preach woman and woman sleepin' togetha and man and man togetha, how yuh nah do that, right?" Since both Natasha and Vanessa point towards their religious upbringing and understandings of lesbianism through Islamic discourses, I suggest that they reject the dominant narrative associated with their sexual practices, and instead counter-identify as 'loving woman.' By claiming and identifying with the category of 'loving woman', these women across racial and class differences, have separated themselves from the dominant representations of lesbian as promulgated through institutional religion.

Even though these participants engage in an ongoing process of rejecting, re-claiming, or disidentifying all together, they are nonetheless conscious of how the term "lesbian" circulates and its symbolism. They are surrounded by religious ideologies that convey and promote a negative ideal of who a lesbian is, what the term means, and how the term is marked pejoratively through religious sentiments. Embodying the category 'loving woman' can be interpreted as a means to respond to the dominant trope of lesbianism as constituted and promoted through Christianity and Islam within the space of Berbice.

While the overwhelming majority point to religious discourses as a point of rejection and negotiation with the category of lesbian, others made sense of their sexual identities through other sexual and public narratives. Amanda (30s, mixed race) identifies herself as bisexual because of her previous marriage to a man for a number of years. Amanda does not remember where and how she learned to identify as such, but she explains why she does not identify as a lesbian. "It goes back to how yuh conduct yuhself…yuh got to conduct yourself with respect…I ain't see that in the newspaper."[35] Amanda is referring to a situation where a woman physically

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[35] See Kaieteur newspaper for an account of this story at https://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2016/10/12/lesbian-brawl-lands-one-in-jail-and-the-other-in-hospital/

attacked her partner in another region, but it was publicized in the newspaper as a "lesbian brawl."

Laura (20s, black) who identifies as 'loving woman,' says, "I don't really use the term lesbian, it's kinda like terrible sometimes, it sounds brawling and terrible, right? Yuh don't gotta halla yuh lesbian self on the road" [you don't have to publicly declare yourself as a lesbian]. Natasha also has a similar view, "they say that lesbians they are so jealous, their fighting and it doesn't work out…not all of us is like da." Amanda, Laura and Natasha engage in a politics of respectability that marks lesbians through their behaviours in the public sphere. Amanda refers to a "lesbian brawl" she read in one of Guyana's newspapers, where two women in an intimate relationship ended up in a physical dispute. [36] Amanda interprets lesbian behaviours through the lens of lacking physical conduct and self-respect, something that she distances herself from. Although I cannot say if Amanda and Laura were referring to working class or a middle-class lesbian of a particular ethnicity, Ghiswayan (2016) discusses the image of the "public lesbian" whose "embodiment of aggression more visibility transgress the norms of respectable femininity" (p. 192). Respectability politics mark middle class women with appropriate ideals of femininity and passivity and as being acted upon by a heterosexual male, and thus not desiring her own pleasure (Ghisyawan, 2016, p. 192), all the while stigmatising public display of female sexuality, particularly that of the working class (Alexander, 1997; 2005; King, 2011; Niranjana, 2006). The "public lesbian" who is of working-class background, who embodies her sexuality publicly refutes the policies of respectability associated with women's sexuality. Consequently, the public display of sexuality is interpreted as "brawling and terrible", which "invokes scrutiny, scorn and shame in the public eye" (Crawford, 2016 as cited in Ghisyawan, 2016, p. 192; Silvera

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[36] See for instance numerous articles in Guyana's newspapers on the framing of lesbians, https://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2011/03/01/woman-remanded-for-killing-her-lover/

1999; King, 2011). Given these dominant tropes of lesbians as violent, aggressive and lacking in self-respect, Amanda and Laura have chosen not to identity as lesbians, but rather as bisexual and as loving woman respectively.

Class Freedom in Urban Spaces

Middle-upper class Indo-Guyanese women such as Veronica, Mina and Natasha, though currently living in a rural area, have spent a number of years living in the U.S, Cuba and Georgetown, respectively. Their narratives suggest that their experiences of "coming out" or engaging in their same-gender desire and attraction was tied to their migration to urban spaces. This lived experience in another space informs their identities, sexual/romantic practices and overall position within the community.

> I went to Cuba 6-7 years ago. I came back last 2 years. In Cuba, I eventually start telling people [that I like women] because I met someone, my first relationship was with a Guyanese girl, she went over there to study also…I could never try that shit here [referring to dating women in Berbice]. See I grew up in Cuba, I matured in Cuba, I went through all my hard times in Cuba and I regret not one day…my *exciting* life, everything is in Cuba. There is no space or gay space in Berbice…if there was, I would have known about it and I would have been there. (Mina, Indo-Guyanese, 20s)

Mina narrates the ways in which her understanding of her sexual practices and having a relationship with another woman is tied to her experience in another space. In migrating to Cuba and having a romantic/sexual relationship over there, she sees Berbice as a space where this possibility does not exist. Therefore, Mina's perception of rural Berbice is informed by her experience of Cuba. Elizabeth McDermott (2010) in her research on how sexual identity is constructed among middle class lesbian women in the UK noted similar findings, that women often accessed other national and international spaces to "secure the freedom" to explore their sexual identities (p. 204).

Temporally, Mina imagines her life as still belonging to the space of Cuba, where there is "excitement." Kazyak (2010) in her study of rural gay and lesbian identity formations in the U.S, notes how the urban gays and lesbians are imagined to be "more exciting" versus rural gays and lesbians who are imagined to be "boring." She writes, "It is not that rural gays and lesbians really are more boring, but what is interesting is how …people utilize a dichotomy that distinguishes between the "exciting" urban and the "boring" rural gay or lesbian indicates the way that geography is embedded in meanings about those sexualities" (2010, p. 67). Mina's description of Berbice and Cuba, reflects this polarizing tendency which marks the space of Cuba as a site of freedom and excitement, where she could explore her desire for women.

Similarly, the women in Georgetown as discussed in the previous chapter, imagine Berbice as a space that is boring because it lacks spaces where individuals can express themselves as LGBQ women and WLW. Rural Berbice is experienced as a space where meeting/dating women is inconceivable, a space that lacks "gay spaces" and excitement. What becomes noticeable, then, is the ways in which Mina's embodiment of loving women is linked to and embedded within "in [a] spatial meaning that places it outside of the rural space" (Kayzak, 2010, p. 62). In other words, Mina's sexual practices and sexual relationships with other women are tied to other urban spaces such as Georgetown and Cuba, places far removed from rural Berbice. This is exemplified in her stories of meeting and dating women located in Georgetown. After meeting a woman at a bar in Georgetown, Mina started dating a woman who looked like a "stud." The term stud refers to a woman who is somewhat masculine in her gender presentation/performance, may wear make-up or dress femme at times. Although this woman was not her type, Mina said that she "wanted to try and see what it was like" to date someone who looked like a stud. A few months into the relationship, Mina realizes that her partner drinks

excessively and flirts with other "men and women." After a lot of conflict, Mina ended the

relationship. Although Mina has relationships with women, none of these relationships—at least

at the time of this interview—were in Berbice. Her sexual and romantic relationships are located

elsewhere, in urban spaces, away from the confines of her rural life.

Veronica (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) who has lived in New York for several years and returned

to Guyana, describes how her gender performances is linked to an urban environment. "I

embraced the butchness…how I look here [Berbice] is different from how I looked then [New

York]." Embracing and expressing her gender preference of "butchness" is the lens through

which she apprehends the space of New York. Her gender performance in another place is

pivotal to her understanding of rural Berbice, as a space where such a performance is

unthinkable. Through her gender performances, the urban space is experienced as a positive site

for Veronica,

> I went to the gay parade every year, they have the protest march…they call it the dyke
> march. It's all women… you were actually in the middle of people who were just like
> you and you felt normal, and afterwards there were these little social events and a dance
> thing. I met this woman there, this was my summer after my fresh man year, we started
> talking and I went home with her and all the things I had thought about, fantasized about
> and read about, [I] did some of it…

The urban space, particularly her experiences of the pride parade, the dyke march, and other

social gatherings allows her to feel a sense of community and belonging with other women like

her. The urban space is also experienced as a space where she met and had a sexual relationship

with another woman. New York emerges in this narrative as an "ideal of possibilities, pleasures,

plenitudes, and escape" (Herring, 2010, p. 3). Middle-class women such as Veronica also

participate in upholding the metronormative discourse, as detailed in the previous chapter, in

their perception of rural spaces. Spaces such as New York, among others, according to Herring

(2010) are "naturalized as the epicenter for contemporary queer life "around the world" …[the]

assumption [is] that the metropolis is the final destination point for queer kids of gender, class, race, or region" (p. 4). Belonging to and experiencing these queer events in New York leads Veronica to see Georgetown and Berbice as sites that are fundamentally different, "if I was going to live in the city, I want a proper city, [Georgetown is not a proper city] …going from New York to that, it's not a city. It's still Guyana, the same biases and stereotypes existed." After living in and experiencing queer urban culture in New York, Georgetown is seen to be a small and limited city, lacking in diversity, consumption options, and a space where prejudice continues to exist. This line of thinking assumes that biases do not exist in environments such as New York City, an uncritical perception of urban spaces. Speaking of Georgetown, she says"I would have like to meet someone there [but] [it] was kinda hard to and the reason why I visited my friends, but I didn't meet anybody there."

Middle class women like Mina reinforce the metronormative discourse, where New York is understood as a space of freedom, expression, community and belonging, while Georgetown is seen as having limited queer spaces, with Berbice having no such options. Veronica's experiences of New York allows her to construct a double binary, one between New York [read as urban] and Guyana [read as rural] and one inter-regionally between Georgetown and Berbice. Veronica further reinforces the sameness between Georgetown and Berbice,

> To me it's not that far away, and everybody in Berbice who wants to escape kinda goes to Georgetown so you kinda end up running into the same people you're trying to avoid, that's part of the problem so if you go to the clubs and anything like that, you will see it's not far enough.

Here Berbice is imagined as a space that one needs to escape *from* to find freedom. However, given the density of the region, Georgetown is still "not far away" enough for Veronica to escape to. She lacks anonymity and privacy from the people she is seeking to escape from as she encounters them in the urban space. When Georgetown and Berbice are imagined against her

experiences of New York, the epicenter of New York is normalized and naturalized as the only space wherein she can be open, uninhibited and expressive.

Although Veronica has this perception of urban spaces, this is an inconclusive and partial picture of her life in rural Berbice. Her relationships to her village, her home and her family, have a sense of relationality, interconnectedness and familiarity, but are also often ambivalent sites, uneasily navigated or not navigated at all. Needing some freedom and space from her own family, Veronica moved out of her parents' home after returning to Guyana. She met an Afro-Guyanese woman, Aisha, who at that time was married to a man. Veronica started to "sneak around" with Aisha, developing a long-term romantic/sexual relationship with her. Although Veronica indicated that she is part of the reason why Aisha and her husband were having marital issues, she also points to the many years of domestic violence that Aisha has been subjected to by her husband. After Aisha was "choked" by her husband and managed to escape, she told Veronica, "don't mek me go back, don't send meh back." Veronica said , "'I am not gonna send you back,' so she moved in with me and that was it." Even though they are living together as a couple, to the wider community of family and other acquaintances, they are "friends." Despite having particular experiences abroad and envisioning urban spaces as sites of freedom and liberation, we cannot deny that Veronica also found love, connection, belonging, and freedom to have a romantic relationship in her small village with an Afro-Guyanese woman.

Natasha (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) who has lived and studied in Georgetown for a few years before returning to Berbice eagerly wants to return. In describing Georgetown, Natasha tells me,

> Tropical Palace, Q, Revival, Boss…they are straight places, but I could be gay in them, Brass—the strip club— that was the best. I went there with my ex…the guy there like know us, cause apparently, we were like there every weekend… so we kinda got like taken back into the private room with lap dance and stuff and we could do whateva we want…I miss those things

Natasha's experience of the city is linked to particular places of leisure and consumption in the city. Tropical Palace, Q and Revival are all bars and clubs located in Georgetown, which are visited predominately by middle and upper-class customers based on my own experience of these spaces during my fieldwork. Given her class status, Natasha is able to frequent and access these places, and although she recognizes them as "straight places," or a heterosexual environment (Valentine, 1999), she indicates that she can "be gay" in these spaces. Moreover, frequenting baroom bar enables her to participate and experience some sexual desire and practices, without fear of being targeted and stigmatized by the public. Strip clubs are also spaces where women can sexually engage with other women, without being labelled. Georgetown is linked to these places—bars, clubs, strip clubs—which are seen as sites of expression, freedom and opportunity for Natasha. Through their lived experiences in urban spaces of Cuba, New York and Georgetown, middle-class Indo-Guyanese women engage in constructing a narrative of Berbice as a space that is backwards, lacking freedom and access to places of consumption. In their experience, the urban is aligned with ideas of sexual freedom, openness, and networks to build queer community. In spite of this perception of urban spaces, the women in Berbice are still integrated into their communities and are forging relationships with other racialized women.

The Constraints of Class and Family

As discussed above, for middle class rural Indo-Guyanese women, their experiences of living abroad is enabled by their economic status, mobility and ethnic/racial positioning. In this section I examine the ways in which these categories also regulate their behaviour and choices within the rural space of Berbice. For Mina, Veronica and Natasha, their experiences of Berbice, is intricately connected to their class, ethnic/racial and family structure. Unlike the narratives discussed in Georgetown, where the majority of the women expressed economic independence

from their family, the family unit emerges in Berbice as a regulatory formation that plays a role in how women negotiate their desire for other women, their decisions of wanting to remain or leave their respective villages, and to what degree they are "visible/invisible."

During the indentured period, colonial anxieties around East Indian women's sexualities were heightened due to women having unconventional relationships with Indian and other racialized men, where they sought multiple partners with better economic positions. These polyandrous relationships, occurring on the plantations, resulted in high rates of violence between Indian men and women (Mohapatra, 1995). To circumvent the growing violence and to create a stable labour force, the "Indian family" unit was reconstituted through marriage laws along specific gender, sexual and ethnic lines (Mohapatra, 1995; Peake & Trotz, 1999). Unlike enslaved Africans, indentured labourers were legally permitted to marry as a means to prevent the high rates of violence— "wife murders," on the plantations (Mohapatra, 1995). The institutionalization of marriage laws essentially curbed Indian men's violent actions against women and reallocated women's bodies and sexualities to Indian men, whereby the stable patriarchal family was (re-) established (Mohapatra, 1995). The reformulation of the "Indian family" under colonial laws and procedures meant that the social relations between indentured labourers, other ethnic groups and the state, were re-organized. Access to marriage laws and the rebuilding of the Indian family, although produced through colonial laws, is seen as a site of difference from predominately Afro-Guyanese, and on which the Indo-Guyanese community in the post-indentured period makes claims to the state (Peake & Trotz, 1999).

Writing on the ways in which Indian patriarchy was situated at the bottom of the colonial hierarchy, and the accompanying political, economic, national, educational and psychic disenfranchisement, Brinda Mehta (2002) writes that,

The post-indentured consolidation of Hindu culture provided men with the necessary defense mechanism to reconfigure and reinstate patriarchal sexual and social control over women, thereby establishing the primacy of the Hindu patriarchal model as a classic signifier of ethnic difference in Trinidad (p. 195)

The reinstatement of Indian patriarchal control over women's bodies and sexuality served to preserve ethnic differences and justify communal boundaries (Mohammed, 1998; Mehta, 2004). It is through the claiming of these differences that Indians sought to become a legitimate part of the nation building process in Trinidad (Munasinghe, 2001).

Writing on the historical conditions that produce Indo and Afro-Guyanese families as distinct, Trotz (2002) notes that "cultural differences exist—most notably at the level of the family" (p. 252). Indo-Guyanese family generally follow the "nuclear" family blueprint but are connected to sharing resources with the extended family and community (Trotz, 2002, p. 252). Indo-Guyanese women's sexuality is secured within the family unit, where its expression is only permissible within the confines of heterosexual legal and ceremonial marriages, followed by motherhood (Trotz, 2002, p. 252-263). Within Indian patriarchal and nationalistic logic, Gopinath (2005) notes, however, that the 'nonheterosexual Indian woman' occupies a space of impossibility, that is the figure of the queer woman is rendered and imagined to be existing outside of the home, community, and nation (p. 18). Gopinath (2005) successfully argues that within Trinidadian and Indian nationalistic discourses in the early twentieth century, "Indo-Caribbean women's sexuality is always and everywhere heterosexual" (p. 163). The gender, sexual, economic, and racial contestations that Indian women once engaged in during the indentured period were erased, and the alternative forms of desire that been theorized within the chutney space were characterized as vulgar and outside of proper Hindu culture by both middle-class groups in Trinidad and India (Niranjana, 2006; Gopinath, 2005).

This historical and ideological formation of 'Indian family' structures serves as the backdrop for analyzing the ways in Natasha, Veronica and Mina negotiate visibility politics, class, racial/ethnic, and family structure in rural Berbice. The narratives of Indo-Guyanese women who love women in rural Berbice disrupt this colonial and post-colonial structure of the Indian family as a heterosexual unity. Their lives contest the ideological representation of the family, and by extension the "Indian family" image in the nation. Yet, although their sexual desires for other women contest the heterosexual family image, this is merely one contestation against their family structure. Their racial and class positioning still grants them the ability to remain in their villages, have romantic and sexual relationships with other racialized women, access different career options, and engage in politics that is not 'out and proud.' In other words, one's contestation against the family unit does not mean nor imply a disruption of other axes of identities, nor is it a negation of other categories of privilege.

Natasha describes the tension between her sexual practices and its implication to her family unit, especially her father's status and reputation.

> I am moving this year and getting my apartment. I'm moving back [to] [Georgetown] cause my dad and I, we don't have a really close relationship in terms of me being [with women] and da is the thing. I want to have my place. I want to bring girls over… I rather an apartment where I can pay rent and have that piece of mind knowing that my dad is not aching cause he's not seeing it [being with women].

Two interconnected ideas emerge from Natasha's understanding of her sexuality. Her difficult relationship with her father makes her want to leave Berbice for Georgetown. Georgetown is represented by Natasha as a space where she can be free to "bring girls over" or engage in relationships with other women outside of the confines of her family structure and her father's gaze. Her class status allows her the option to leave Berbice, to find an apartment and pay rent. It is important to note that in this narrative and the two below, all three women stress their strained

relationships with the fathers as a primary reason for wanting to leave Berbice. This makes

sense, given that it is usually Indian men who are heads of household, with women being

"housewives", and men more than women or their, wives are more likely to participate in the

public sphere and to be connected to the wider community (Peake and Trotz, 1999; Trotz, 2002).

Consequently, the women's experiences with their heterosexual Indo-Guyanese fathers is a site

of contestation, where they see leaving their homes for another space as an option. Worrying

about her strained relationship with her father, Natasha says,

> my dad is a businessman so he's well known, we are expected to carry ourselves in a
> certain way, that's why I can't wait to move out. At the end of the day how do you think
> my dad would feel knowing I have a woman livin' there [referring to her own place in
> Berbice] wid me? I don't think he would feel happy about it, he would stress cause
> remember this is Berbice. People are so intrigued by other peoples' lives, they would
> gossip and spread news…it would spread pass. I can't put that on my parents…

Even though her middle-class status grants her the mobility to relocate to the city and pay rent,

her class status tied to her Indo-Guyanese father's position in the community, prevents her from

having relationships or having a partner. Although desiring to belong, Natasha is prevented from

behaving in ways that contradicts her father's social standing in the community, that is, she is

"expected to carry her in a certain way." The social benefits of respect and prestige accorded to

her father's profession, and the fact of him being a public figure are constraints for Natasha,

especially in regard to her sexual identity and practices.

Similarly, Veronica added,

> good people, normal people, proper people don't have gay children…I mean my fatha is
> a very respectable person in the community. I accomplish things at a very young age that
> they were proud of, but then there is this other side of me that's shameful.

Veronica's sexual practices are constrained by and tied to her father's social status and the wider

community that her family resides in. Engaging in a politics of respectability, she indicates that

"good, normal and proper [Indo-Guyanese] families to not have gay children," which begs the

question of which families can have gay children. Given the ways in which Veronica perceives her family's image in the wider community, her sexual assertions exist in tension with this dominant representation of the Indo-Guyanese family, particularly her Indian father.

Patriarchal control over women's sexualities also operates through other categories of shame and secrecy. Discussing the representation of women's sexuality, Evelyn O'Callaghan (1998) notes that, "female sexuality…is either shrouded in *secrecy* and *shame*, or a matter of casual and unfeeling acquiescence to male pressure. In most cases, it has negative consequences for the woman's economic, social, and psychological well-being." (as cited in Mehta, 2004, p. 192). Veronica's comments regarding her sexuality reflects an ongoing narrative within Indo-Caribbean history, where for some Indian women, their sexual practices and desires are understood as a source of shame that must be kept secret. Although she is a highly successful and professional woman, Veronica struggles with her sexuality given her family's structure and status in the community. Valentine et al (2003) writing on the ways in which lesbians and gay negotiate coming out with, and in, the family, noted that middle class parents often stress educational success before marriage and child-rearing (p. 493). Aware of their sexuality as being non-conforming, individuals are "motivated...to achieve…their parents' expectation…to compensate for the loss of their heterosexual visions of future family life" (Valentine et al, 2003, p. 493). As Veronica points out, she knows that her parents are proud of her accomplishments, but her sexual practice can have dire consequences for her family's identity and position in the community.

Describing her parents who are involved in politics and are members of the Church, Mina (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) reveals the following:

> Indians, well my community that I live in, if you do something, your parents, they first thing they do is hit…very violent. They are always threatening their kids…that's how

they are and that's how everybody in my village are. So, me being gay or somebody else, I would be scared to death to let my family know about that because of the things they would do to me…I have this fear even though they are Christians and even though they are elders in the church and if they ever find out I am like this…there is a probability they might be suicidal. I mean this is what I personally think or my opinion. This is one of the reason why I am so scared also because I wouldn't want them finding out that I am like this. If I am in a community, my parents is all I need. I just need acceptance from my family and I am good…I don't care about what the community says…I would choose to stay here and I would choose to stay with my family, of course. But because I can't get the freedom and da acceptance that I want, I am dying to move out to live on my own. I would prefer to move far away so my family will never have to know my lifestyle. And I can live freely without anyone in my life, just my partner and I work, I make money. I can rent and stay somewhere by myself.

Mina points to a number of constraining factors that prevents her from fully integrating herself into her community which include home, family where there are multiple incongruities and desires. As Gopinath (2005) reminds us, home is a vexed location marked as both a site of violence and as well by the desire to belong (p. 15). Even though the home space is generally perceived to be a "private" space where one finds sanctuary and is free from the scrutiny of the public, the heterosexual home can be also be a place of surveillance by the dominant heterosexual unit, where women are forced to conceal their sexual practices (Elwood, 2002; Johnston & Valentine, 1995). The potentiality of violence already exists within Mina's home space, especially if her sexual practices are made known. Mina is afraid of the potential physical violence that she might experience if her family is made aware of her "lifestyle." This echoes similar findings by scholars where the heterosexual home space can operate as a site to restrict and constrain lesbian identity and thus perpetuate violence against lesbian women by family members (Johnson & Valentine, 1995; Valentine, 1993b; Valentine & Skelton, 2003; Elwood, 2002). The potential violence from her family members within the home operates to sanction and limit her sexual expressions in her village, and at the same time it is through violence that the heteronormative culture is maintained (Atluri, 2001). This is contrary to the majority of the

women whose experiences of home in Georgetown who had economic independence, lived with their partner or alone in the city.

Mina's fear of violence is further compounded by her family's middle class and racial/ethnic status in the community. Although Mina yearns for her parents' acceptance, she is aware of her family's status in the wider community as members of the Church and the implications of these social relations on her ability to remain in that space. She is cognizant of the societal disapproval, stigmatization and shame of her sexual practices can influence her parents to commit suicide. Her family's positionality in the extended community as members of a Church, along with the societal expectations and pressures that come from holding different status in the community regulates her gender and sexual performances within the community. The blurring of lines between her private home, as a potential site of violence, and her home and family status embedded within wider the society, leads her to limit her sexual expressions and thus envision having a life elsewhere. As argued previously, class and racial/ethnic status grants women who love women the mobility to relocate and live in other urban contexts. Through the migration process, their understandings of their gendered and sexual practices are constituted, along with their experiences of "home." The same social categories that enable middle-upper class women to migrate, form relationships with other women, simultaneously regulate and limit their ability to stay put and imagine their lives in their current location of Berbice.

Middle-class women and the Politics of Being 'Out and Proud'

The common discourse of the LGBT movement hinges on acceptance and assimilation, where LGBT as identity categories are linked to political activism and the visibility politics of being "out and proud", most of which is tied to and located within urban spaces (Weston, 1995;

Halberstam, 1995; Knopp, 1995; Puar, 2002). A key strategy of the LGBT movement is the assertion of the "right to be different and to be legitimated based upon that difference" (Halperin & Traub as cited in Baker, 2011, p. 48). Kelly Baker (2011) writes that "Visibility politics draw upon this assertion and champion the "out-ness" and visibility of these differences as instrumental in achieving such legitimation and liberation" (p. 48). Critiquing visibility politics, Gray (2009) notes that the politics of visibility in urban spaces that "have come to define authentic LGBT identity, however [is] tailor-made for and from population densities; capital; and systems of gender, sexual, class, and racial privilege that converge in cities" (p. 30). They further write that this does not imply that rural spaces are "endemically hostile to or unable to make room for queer differences", rather the "reliance on family, local power dynamics, class and racial politics, and the cultural marginalization that structures these specific rural communities render them ill-suited to strategies of visibility currently privileged by the priorities of the United States' predominately middle-class, urban-focused, gay and lesbian social movement" (Gray, 2009, p. 30). Following Gray's (2009) assertion that visibility politics developed in the urban context might not neatly map onto rural spaces, or that they may be incompatible altogether, I demonstrate the ways in which the middle-class Indo-Guyanese women in Berbice see and position themselves within their respective community, and how social determinants of class, race/ethnic status regulate their capacity to be visible/invisible. In other words, regulated by their class and ethnic stratification, I argue that middle class women living in rural areas do not engage in a "politics of visibility" as demanded by the LGBT discourse. To various degrees, then, rural women contest and resist the global hegemony of LGBT movements that engages in a politics of being "out and proud."

Natasha (Indo-Guyanese, 20s), although "out to her family," discusses the ways in which her racial/ethnic and class status in the community are seen as constraints for her,

> …even if I know someone is gay, its's not like you wanna hang with them. I don't wanna hang with anybody. [In] Berbice, it's not that place, you know I am well known. But you know a lot of people know about me by now, though.

As discussed above, given Natasha's family reputation in the community and her status, she is hesitant to engage in a politics of a public "coming out." Although she is aware that people "know" of her sexuality or is suspicious, she does not disclose, nor does she openly talk about her sexuality with individuals. While the current literature suggests that LGBTQ individuals seek out other people with similar sexual identifications to build communities, emphasizing their "difference," Natasha's narrative suggests that being associated with someone else who is gay might have ramifications for her as a middle-class woman with economic and social status. Despite peoples' suspicion of her sexuality, her association with someone who is gay would serve as a basis for confirmation of her sexual identity and practices and could potentially lead to hostilities.

Mina (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) who signaled to the potentiality of violence above also said that she refuses to "come out" to her family given their social status in the community,

> they will lose respect. People will be making all sorts of remarks about them in the church and look what their daughter is, so yes…I basically don't like there because it's kinda secluded, everybody is in everybody's business, everyone talks, and I would prefer if nobody talked.

Whereas Veronica (20s) who came "out" to her family through an email said that, "I sent a very lengthily email, a very emotional email to my mom and then they called afterwards, and she didn't like really say anything, but it was like 'oh, they got it and they love me', but it we don't to this day talk about it. They don't ever ask anything about it…She just told me to 'be careful.'"

Middle-class women who have economic, social and political status in the community resist the LGBTQ discourse that prioritizes "out and proud." Natasha and Veronica, although they are "out" to their family, do not flaunt their sexual differences in their family and community. Their families are aware of their sexual practices and desires for other women, however, their economic status mediates to what degree they can fully disclose their sexuality to the wider community. Signifiers of racial/ethnic, family structure and economic status function to curb their interactions with other women and to prevent the development of communities premised on sexual identities and practices. While LGBTQ movements promote sexual identities as a site of unification over other self-identification categories, middle-upper class Indo-Guyanese women in Berbice refuse to centralize their sexual identities over other categories of belonging. In a geographical space, where there are ideological and material privileges that stem from being middle class and of Indo-Guyanese racial/ethnic background, these women to various degrees, reject a politics of visibility in order to safeguard against losing certain other benefits. Rejecting a politics of visibility ensures that they remain part of their social and economic group and have access to safety and security by choosing to remain "invisible."

Working-class Women and the Limitations of 'Metronormativity'

The dominant narrative within queer and LGBTQ scholarship, as discussed earlier, suggests that LGBT subjects are repressed in their rural communities which facilitates their migration to urban centers. As discussed above, middle-upper class women who have lived in urban spaces experienced these contexts as places of freedom away from their family. However, this experience does not apply unequivocally to all women. In fact, as I demonstrate below, the urban space of Georgetown is imagined and experienced as a place of violence and associated with the aesthetic of "fast life" by working class women across ethnic/racial markers. Working

class women do not use the language of *comfortability, okay* or *having money,* and they work in low-income jobs such as servers, food vendors, cooks, and cleaners. For instance, Amanda (mixed race, 30s) who used to live in Georgetown for a number of years said,

> I don't like the fast life, yuh spend more money there. I don't like being there. Berbice is my home town and it's cooler here, and what I mean, you could out sit down, talk to people that know you and stuff like that… all of my family is here in Berbice so I find it more comfortable here than Georgetown.

Although the general literature suggests that the city is an ideal place for rural queer individuals to explore their sexual identity and subjectivity as it offers anonymity, privacy, and community, for working class women this option is severely limited or foreclosed (Taylor, 2007). The "fast life" is a local phrase that refers to an overall faster pace of life in the city. Amanda signals to the ways in which the city's anonymity and lack of familiar community does not make her feel comfortable. Knowing the members of her community—whom she could have a conversation with—along with her family being in Berbice, makes her village the ideal space for her to live. Furthermore, Amanda is conscious of her working-class status as moving to Georgetown requires a lot of financial resources, and therefore would not be the most suitable option for her. This resonates with Yvette Taylor's (2007) study of working-class lesbians in Scotland and England, where women felt constrained by their financial circumstances and could not relocate to urban spaces, whereas others chose not to relocate because they felt "more at ease" in their working-class environments (p. 123). Unlike middle class women like Veronica, Natasha and Mina who see their immediate family and extended community as structures that regulate their sexual expressions, working class women seem to find value and a sense of belonging in their community—i.e., Amanda could sit down and engage with her neighbours.

Similarly, Jasmine (Indo-Guyanese, 30s), although never having lived in Georgetown, perceives the space of Georgetown embodying a particular lifestyle,

rememba I own meh place here …going there yuh ga rent a place and yuh ga mix…yuh ga get a really good foundation fuh go there…and when come financial wise, I can't do it, yuh know yuh ga live the *celebrity life* because yuh know deh hot up, hot up…(emphasis mine)

Jasmine, who owns land and a home, indicates the ways in which relocating to the city would mean that financially she would have to start over. She would have no foundation or resources if she moves to the city. Kazyak (2010) has demonstrated the ways in which geography (urban spaces) are constituted through class meanings as well, i.e., associated with "high-class people, mentalities, or actions" (p. 111). In Jasmine's perception, the city is constituted through a particular class association of "celebrity life" or people living in urban spaces as "hot up." Highlighting these particular behaviours that are connected to urban spaces, Jasmine resists the narrative of relocation to the urban space that would require a change in her behavior. To a certain degree, we can assume two ideas operate here, (1) that Jasmine perceives the city as a space where she would have to "mix" or be more visible in the public sphere as a woman who loves woman, or (2) she sees the city as a "mix" space, that is a racially/ethnically diverse area where she would have to interact with ethnic/racial others. Although, I cannot speak to what she means by the term "mix," both lines of thinking are important in terms of how the urban space is visualized and marked as a site of difference from Berbice. Both imaginations of the city, along with the restriction of being a working-class woman, inform her understanding of Georgetown as well as that of Berbice.

Nadia (Indo-Guyanese, 30s) says, "I don't like Georgetown, it's too fast."

P: what does "too fast mean?"

Nadia: "I live there [Georgetown] once, cause in town everybody, if they see two girls walking around holding hands, them say 'yes, them two deh,' even if they two girls nah deh, them go say so, they [people here in Berbice] would say nutting…"

The term "fast" has a unique meaning in Guyana, it is a local colloquial that refers to one being curious, inquisitive, or nosey regarding another person's affairs. In Nadia's perception, she envisions the city as a space where people would be too "fast" or intrusive if they saw two women walking and holding hands—such behaviours is the city is already interpreted through the category of sexual/romantic intimacy. Notice how Nadia does not use the categories of "gay" and "lesbian" as referent points to describe what she means, rather she describes the women as "deh together". Her narrative suggests that Georgetown is a space where women's bodies are policed and regulated, and perhaps even met with verbal comments. In her village, as she indicates, people "say nothing" which suggests that these same behaviours might not be monitored in the same way as they are in urban Georgetown, or not read through the category of intimacy.

Amanda, her partner, also suggests that in Georgetown, "you might not like the way how they approach you and stuff like that…in Berbice, nobody approaches you, nobody say anything…" People in their locality might not read the actions of two women walking and holding hands as signifying a romantic/sexual relationship. Her narrative suggests that individuals in Georgetown are more likely to approach women who hold hands together and question their relationship with each other, which may or may not lead to violent incidents. Amanda and Nadia seem to indicate that such sexual policing and potential violence does not, in their experience, exist in Berbice.

Similarly, Tara (black, 20s) expressed similar ideas of Georgetown as a violent space:

> here [Berbice] people don't really like knack [hit] them… you see the most violence happening in Georgetown, more than how it is happening here. They [referring to people in the village] might trouble yuh or say move from here, but they won't knack yuh or hit yuh…you don't really get that much violence here so it's more safe here… town is more hard because they get more hatred over there…

Tara sees the city as a space where violence is much more likely to occur against gender and sexual non-conforming bodies. Although she recognizes people in Berbice might verbally express how they feel against those who step out of their gender and sexual boundaries, she also believes that people are quick to befriend each other, "they would trouble yuh, but then say, "that's meh friend, yuh all don't trouble she…be good." Her narrative suggests that people in Berbice, while verbally expressive, might not enact physical violence against non-conforming bodies because of the close-knit nature of the villages where individuals live closely with each other. This perception of Tara's partially contradicts some of the narratives offered by middle-class women from the urban, that rural spaces are violent spaces. Georgetown may also lack some of these close-knit social relations, and which could explain some of the violence exhibited against non-conforming gender and sexual bodies in the city.

Working-class women and community belonging

In rejecting the "fleeing narrative[37]," Kazyak (2010) has found in her study, that being known as a good person, having ties to the community, and the close-knit nature of rural life inform the ways in which sexual identity, recognition and visibility occurs in rural space in the mid-west of the U.S (p. 96). In the following narratives, my findings parallel Kazyak's arguments that being known as a good person, having connections, and the close-knit nature of the community construct a different politics of identity and visibility in rural Berbice. However, I make the distinction that these alternative categories of integration and belonging emerge within specific class and racial/ethnic lines. In her work with a homogenous white sample group, Kazyak (2010) does not interrogate if being known in the community and having ties to the community is linked to different class formations. Consequently, while my findings build on her

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[37] According to Kazyak (2010), the fleeing narrative is a cultural circulating story of how queers living in rural spaces from "flee" to the city to come out, find liberation, and belonging with queer communities (p. 3).

work, I argue that being known in the community, having ties, and the close-knit environment is contingent upon one's class and ethnic/racial positions. The ways in which one is accepted into the community, whether they develop ties or not, and how they perceive the close-knit nature of the space varies according to their class and racial status.

In this section, I make two interrelated conclusions, first, it is working class women, across ethnic/racial status, who articulate their experiences through the categories of being known as a good person, having ties to the wider community, and the close-knit environment as positive aspects of living in a rural space. Middle-upper class women, for example, as argued above, perceived the ties and the close-knit nature of the community as regulative and constraining to their lives. Working class women are visible and accepted into their respective village through these aforementioned categories, as opposed to the sexual identification categories of 'loving women' or LGBQ women. Second, I argue that working class women's lives are inherently incompatible with LGBT visibility claims as they claim other modes of belonging and community, not linked to sexual identities.

Before I offer an analysis of the ways in which working class women envision themselves within their respective village, it is important to contextualize their lives. Three out of the six working class women, Amanda, Nadia and Jasmine, were previously married to men and have children with either their husbands or other men. Both Amanda (mixed race, 30s) and Jasmine (Indo-Guyanese, 30s) indicate that they are attracted to women, however, it was only after their husbands passed away, that they started to act on their desires and have sexual relationships with other women in their villages. Nadia (Indo-Guyanese, 30s), on the other hand, expressed that she left her husband after years of marriage due to domestic violence. It is also important to note that these women are considered to be "older" women with children. A

common pattern is that young women get married by their late teenage years or by their early

20s. This, however, depends on one's class status where marriage may be delayed for

educational pursuits. Given their age, previous marriages, and their children as an outcome from

those marriages and relationships, Amanda, Jasmine and Nadia are positioned and interpreted by

their communities differently than middle class women such as Natasha, Veronica and Mina,

who are younger, educated abroad, unwed and have no children.

Wekker (2006) has noted in her study of working class women in Suriname that marriage

and children are still the epitome of womanhood (p. 113-114) regardless of class and

ethnic/racial status. This has been noted by other scholars across the region too, where marriage

and motherhood are still critical signifiers for the rite of womanhood and appropriate femininity

(Mohammed, 2002; 1988; Peake & Trotz, 1999; Reddock,1985; 1994; Niranjana, 2006; King,

2014). However, Wekker (2006) draws our attention to working-class women's sexuality as

marked negatively by the upper echelons of society, where non-monogamous relationships,

multiple partners, leaving one partner for another for economic purposes, and relationships

outside of marriage are still considered to be improper (p. 158-160). While these are looked

down upon by middle class groups, Wekker (2006) sees these "negative" traits associated with

working class women as them being resourceful, "they…[have] been able to build a culture in

which they enjoyed and celebrated each other openly, in which they helped each other cope with

daily living, sharing hardships and pleasure…" (p. 28) in order to negotiate limited resources and

being placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Although stigmatized within this socio-

cultural environment, working class women's sexuality is praised for enacting its own version of

normative femininity and motherhood. Marriage and motherhood[38] accord material and symbolic

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[38] I recognize that "marriage" and "motherhood" are categories that have different gender, racial and sexual
implications as they are discursively produced in any given context.

status, confers respect, and plays a central role in the construction of women's identities (Peake & Trotz, 1999) Consequently, these ideological and material constructs continue to persist and are still operating, at least partially, to signify women's status and position in the community. Marriage, engaging in multiple relationships with men, and having children may be some of the initial ways in which the community may perceive working class women. In other words, working class women in my study are not deliberately or intentionally using their previous marriage status as a coverage, but perhaps the broader community positions and interprets them as women who were once married to men. From my perspective, their previous status of being married may actually be operating to prevent inquiry into their relationships with other women.

Amanda, for example, states, "there is community here for me. I have 3 children. They keep me grounded here. I wouldn't move back to Georgetown…I think I am more comfortable and safe in Berbice…" As I am suggesting, given her previous marriage status and having children might be the lens through which the community interprets Amanda. However, Amanda sees her children as part of her community, tied to the wider community, and her reasons for staying in Berbice. She also feels safer and more comfortable in Berbice as a space where she can raise her children with her partner. Unlike middle-class women who expressed that they feel controlled and regulated by their family status and their position in the extended community, working class women such as Amanda experience Berbice as a space of community and belonging, as also indicated in the previous except by Amanda. She further stated that,

> my mom died like 3 years now and I am the head of the family and they actually look up to me, I am there for everybody, so even though they might want to say something, they won't say it. This respect is there in the relationship…in our area people kind look up to me, respect me, it's how yuh carry yourself in the area. So, people won't say things, even though they might say things, they might not say it for me hear, but I don't know...I neva hear.

The narrative suggests that the ways in which Amanda is accepted and integrated into her family and extended community is not explicitly tied to her sexual identity and practices. Rather, it is through the categories of 'being known' and her 'ties to the wider community'. Amanda's understanding of her family's acceptance is tied to her family structure, that is she is the head of the household. She emphasises her responsibilities towards her family, offering support, and the ways in which her family treats her "with respect" are highlighted as salient ways in which her family accept her by "not saying anything." In other words, not explicitly discussing her sexuality could be a form of recognition and acceptance. Not making this aspect of her identity could also be a type of understanding and approval. Amanda, then, becomes visible and is recognized through the role she plays in her family and the wider community. Rebecca (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) made a similar point,

> I neva encounta [encounter] any problem especially living here, you don't find people who have objections against it… people respected me. In my temple, people respected me because I was this youth that got involved, you know? Like painting, electrical works, I would do it right? So, they would always call on meh…always count on meh…

Critiquing urban based politics of visibility grounded in "difference" and "out-ness", Gray (2009) argues that for rural queers, familiarity, family structure, community ties are the central categories through which recognition, respect and belonging are carried out in rural communities (p. 37). The politics of visibility in the city is organized by a diverse group with varying interests (Baker, 2011), which centers 'difference' as foundational for political activism. In contrast, Gary (2009) argues for a 'politics of rural visibility' grounded in a "strategy of sameness", where rural queers emphasise their sameness in the community, familial connections, and where "solidarity [is] expressed through blending in" (p. 38). Drawing from Gray's work,

Baker (2011) in her study on gays and lesbians in rural Nova Scotia has noted that sexual

identity is not a definitive feature of one's sense of self, rather family structures, community, and

work ethic are key organizing features for how rural queers integrate into and with their

community (p. 50-52). Echoing these scholars' work, Amanda and Rebecca's sexual identity and

practices were not at the forefront of how they saw themselves within their family and

community. Rather, Rebecca highlights her role as a youth in her temple and the respect she is

accorded within her community. While people might be aware and recognize their sexual

practices, it is not at the forefront of how the community perceives them or how they women

interprets themselves in their communities. Amanda and Rebecca's identities are produced

through and linked to family structure, roles, and activities in the community. Similarly, Jasmine

(Indo-Guyanese, 30s) who describes her interactions with her neighbours, said

> they don't show me none bad face because we gaff [talk] narmal and be narmal, me and
> meh girl ah deh around them and gaff narmal, them nah say nothing because even to the
> neighbourhood when we come out and so, *them know*…(emphasis mine)

Jasmine points to the ways in which people in her neighbourhood do not ill-treat her. She has

"normal" conversations with her neighbours, where they do not show her "bad face"—another

local colloquial term which refers to negative face-to-face interaction. Kayzak's (2010) has

found that gays and lesbians in rural communities placed value in how people interact with each

other during conversations rather than what people think of them outside of their conversation (p.

86-87). In other words, Amanda and Jasmine refer to the ways in which they are treated by their

community, and although "people might say things, it's never for them to hear." The close-knit

environment of rural spaces offers both anonymity and visibility (Kayzak, 2010, p. 89) for these

women. On one hand, these women's sexual practices and their identities are visible in so far as

their family unit and community "know" of it, yet it is not explicitly talked about nor defined

through the language and identification categories of LGBT. Second, their visibility, recognition

and acceptance in their family and community is not routed through their sexual practices and

identities, rather as suggested through other non-sexual identification categories. To an extent,

there is some anonymity, then, regarding their sexuality, sexual practices and their relationships

with their partners.

Jasmine who lives near to her aging parents said,

> them [family] done know how meh livin' home with a girl…meh don't gaff [talk] about
> it with them…they know wah is it…they see we togetha because we live just opposite
> them…so they know…

Jasmine points to the ways in which her family *knows* that she is living with her partner.

Although she indicates that her and family do not talk about "it," she expresses how they know

of her relationship with a woman, as they see her living with her partner across the road. In other

words, not openly talking about her sexual practice and her relationship with her partner might

be a form of conditional acceptance and recognition.

In the *Epistemology of the Closet,* Eve Sedgwick (1990) pointed out the ways in which

Western knowledge of sexuality is premised on a binary and oppositional framework that marks

heterosexuality as superior to homosexuality, where queer politics hinges on the practice of

"coming-out" of the "closet." The "closet" is an analytic, a metaphor, and practice where one

conceals their sexual identity and orientation, especially if one's sexuality deviates from

heterosexuality. "Coming out" of the "closet" refers to the process of self-disclosure, the naming

and marking of one's sexuality and identity. This act of 'naming' and admission has become an

everyday practice in Western queer politics and movements, that it is taken as an inherent and

natural 'truth' of one's sexuality. In contrast to this discourse of the "closet" and "coming out"

stories, working-class women in Berbice do not engage in a politics of disclosing their sexual practices with their family, friends and extended community, thereby calling into question the viability and applicability of the 'closet' and 'coming-out' in rural spaces. The analogy of the closet and the practice of coming out does apply to this particular context of Berbice. What if there was never a closet for some people? What if there is a closet, but choosing to remain in the closet is a safer option? What are the risks and consequences of being hailed into this Western paradigm of self-discourse, confession and admission? What if we do not relegate sexuality to the geographic location of the closet within the home? The actions of working-class women in Berbice calls us to re-frame sexuality as a praxis, a state of being, a "tekking up or dehing"; it is an act of resistance by choosing to live a life by self-design rather than conforming to the idea of "coming out" by Western standards. The lives and same-sex practices of the women in rural Berbice, challenge the Western discourse of "coming out" and the "closet", I suggest this action can be understood as "dehing" to "deh" a verb: to be in a sexual or romantic relation; to move in and out of relationships. To *deh* represents a type of relationality outside of the confines of the state-institutions and a linear trajectory of marriage and children. To some extent, the term signals the fluidity and movement that is granted to individuals as they transition from one relationship to another or between multiple relationships. It contests labels—whether heterosexual or homosexual categories. Unlike the closet which is dependent upon the idea of concealing one's sexuality and relationship, *dehing* does not require a concealment or confession, there is no verbal disclosure that is required in this practice as it is an unspoken or implicit type of knowing that belies the paradigm of the closet. In this sense, this knowing does not fit into Western modes of relationships. *Dehing* as a praxis departs from Western queer

modalities or existence as it moves beyond a queer temporality and the urgency embedded in "coming out".

Working class rural women are visible and recognize through alternative family structures and their extended roles and ties to the community that there is a mutual respect and "same-ness" within the community, as opposed to "difference." Amanda contradicts the "out-ness" embedded within urban LGBTQ visibility politics by stating, "it's how yuh carry ourself in this area, people know we livin' together… if we walkin' in public, me and Nadia won't hold hands and stuff like that." Amanda challenges the mainstream LGBTQ politics that centers visibility and being "out and proud" by expressing that, while people know she "deh" with her partner, it does not imply that she publicly displays her sexual differences. In this manner, although her sexuality and sexual practices are a site of difference, she refuses to prioritize and centralize her sexual difference over other aspects of self and identity. In comparison, the majority of the middle-class mixed-race women indicated that they "came out" to their family and friends in Georgetown. To some degree, middle-class women to a certain degree follow a Western paradigm of 'coming out, unlike working-class women.

My analysis so far suggests that working class women in rural Berbice recognize, accept and integrate into their communities through other modalities of being known, having ties to the community, with the close-knit nature of the space offering them community and belonging. This is not to paint a picture that rural communities are progressive and tolerant of women who love women, but rather to reveal some of the structures—the hetero-patriarchal norms of femininity and motherhood that they embody, the role of family, children and community— that makes it possible for them to exist, find belonging and community in their respective village.

"Tek a man and settle down:" Unfulfilled femininity and motherhood

And what about women who are working class, who are unmarried and have no children? Does this imply that rural spaces are homophobic and intolerant, or accepting to women who love women? Does the language of "homophobia" uphold within this space? If so, in what ways? It is important to note that working class women in Berbice never used the language of "homophobia" or saw their communities as homophobic during the interviews. For example, Tara (black, 20s) said "I don't get hate at…I get most people trouble me first and whenever they done, they say we can be friends or hang out someday…" Tara does not necessarily see her community as "homophobic" or that her community "hates" her, rather the verbal taunting and comments are seen as a playful exchange. The term "trouble" is often used as a way to describe the playful bickering and teasing of another person. Within this context, Tara described a situation when she was walking in public with her partner where someone from her village said, 'gal, wat yuh guing on with, nice nice gal like you and that's how ya'll choose to live yuh life…why yuh all don't tek a man and settle down and mek children' but we don't listen to them". While Tara might interpret this exchange as someone just "troubling" her, I suggest that the hegemonic norms of womanhood tied to reproduction is operating in this conversation to regulate women like Tara, who is not only "out" with her partner, but who has also surpassed the expected marriage age. As Gray (2009) writes, "historically an unspoken agreement operated in rural communities: queer difference was allowed to quietly exist, if not flourish, as long as it did not interfere with one's commitments to family and community" (p. 38). In other words, Tara's sexual praxis disrupts the hegemonic social order of appropriate gender, sexual and reproductive behaviours expected of all women, regardless of class and racial/ethnic lines. Consequently, by being unwed and having no children, Tara is called upon to re-align herself with the hegemonic

norms of having a male partner, settling down and having children. She is regulated differently from Amanda, Nadia and Jasmine who were previously married and have children as discussed above.

Similarly, Anita (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) said, "there is one guy, he was like "yuh know you gotta stop fuckin' women." Since this comment was made by a man, I propose that the comment reflects the heteronormative patriarchal order, where some men attempt to reinforce compulsory heterosexuality, to remind women of their place, and regulate who and in what ways she is allowed to express her sexual desires. King (2014) writing on the trope of "invisibility" i.e., that Caribbean women who love women do not exist, notes that "Caribbean women who desire other women are erased—made invisible—when their desire and gender expression cannot be absorbed by prevailing norms. When they can neither be erased nor absorbed, they are punished for daring *not* to desire men" (p. 93, emphasis in original). Unwed single women with no children who have not fulfilled any heteropatriarchal ideas of femininity and motherhood are positioned outside of the social order all together. Women such as Tara and Anita are met with a different degree of violence, or regulated differently from the women discussed above, since they have yet to embody the hegemonic heteropatriarchal norms of femininity and motherhood.

Complicities and Refusals: Race and desire

A growing body of work has examined the role of desire within colonial societies, between colonized and colonizer (Fanon, 1967; Stoler, 2002; McClintock,1995; Tinsley, 2010). However, much of the writings, with the exception of Tinsley's work, have looked at heterosexual romantic and sexual relationships between black men, women of color and white colonizers in colonial societies. Influenced by psychoanalysis, Fanon (1967) demonstrated the effects of colonization on the psyche of black men and women of color, that is the internalized

racism that leads them to love and desire whiteness. Addressing the gaps within psychoanalytic theory, Anne McClintock (1995), writing on British imperialism and the rise of commodity culture, has shown the ways in which the people who were colonized, particularly black men and women, were racialized and fetishized as commodities to be sold in the global market of goods and services. More recently, we have seen work that addresses desire between white women and women of color (Tinsley, 2010), and more broadly, between same-sex women in the Caribbean (King, 2014; Wekker, 2006, Ghisyawan, 2016; Valens, 2013), without much interrogation of the ways in which desire and eroticism are underpinned with colonial ideologies of race. Reflecting on sexual desire between white women and black women, Tinsley (2010) writes, "But what if this single-mindedly desiring white lady—like male counterparts who fathered so many children of color—were to *desire someone or something* besides a white husband?" (p. 77, emphasis mine). While Tinsley expands and reconfigures our imagination to think about the shared intimacy between white women and black women during colonialism in the Caribbean, this analysis has not been extended to looking at the ways in which, for instance, Indo-Caribbean, mixed race and/or black women desire other women of color, that is the ways in which their desire and intimacy is embodied, inhibited and expressed with the socio-economic and political landscape of the Caribbean. This part of the chapter examines the ways in which race and desire are played out; race became apparent when the women started discussing their relationship to other women in Berbice. While this is a noteworthy observation in Berbice, it was absent from my interviews in Georgetown. However, from my observation, I suggest that race/ethnicity were not at the forefront of my participants mind while courting in the city, rather class was an important factor with women wanting to date others with similar class status. This part of the chapter endeavors to examine the ways in which the enactment of *desire* is racialized and

sexualized between WLW in rural Berbice, Guyana, specifically looking at how desire unfolds between different groups of women of color.

The idea that "desire" is natural, fluid and forms the basis of our sexuality, sexual identity and orientation (Ahmed, 2006) while true, also misses other crucial ways in which desire functions. Desire take many forms, often disrupting social categories of race, class, gender and sexuality, nation, and spatial boundaries, but also operating to align and uphold heteronormative categories of belonging (Ahmed, 2006). In this section, I attempt to trace and untangle the ways in which the performing of desire is structured by racial/ethnic differences, and how these "differences" are at the basis of who some women desire—the women they choose to love, desire, have sex with, or momentarily engage in a romantic and sexual encounter with. I ask what does desire look like between women in rural Berbice? How does desire get mapped out, and get fixed to or unfixed socially constructed categories of differences? And in fixing or unfixing these categories, how does desire contribute to unequal power relations and contribute to violence that women experience in wider society? Can desire simultaneously uphold existing colonial structures but also offer us a ground from which to challenge narrow conceptions of same-sex eroticism, love and intimacy? Critiquing Freud and Lacan's phallocentric theory of fetishism[39] which locates fetishism within the domain of male sexuality, Anne McClintock (1992) writes on the coalescing between the erotic and the racialized other, forming the category of "racial fetishism." She notes that,

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[39] According to McClintock (1995), Freud's usage of the term fetishism was used to referred to different types gender and sexual "pervasions," with fixation on different objects (p. 181-192).
William Pietz (1987) argues that the term "fetish" derives from the Portuguese term 'feitico', used to describe the talismans in the middle ages. Its meanings and usage shifted over the centuries, from Marx's idea "commodity fetishism", and Freud's use of fetishism as a "sexual perversion." See Gamman, L &., Makinen, M. (1995) *Female fetishism*. New York: New York University Press, for a discussion of these aforementioned ideas, and female and food fetishism. There is also Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange encounters: Embodied others in the post-colonial.* London: Routledge, where she offers an analysis on "stranger fetishism."

> […] erotic deviance and racial deviance emerged as a necessary element in the formation of the modern European imagination. The invention of racial fetishism became central to the regime of sexual surveillance […] erotic "deviants" were figured as racial "deviants" (McClintock, 1992, p. 71).

In other words, while the term racial fetishism was used to describe the process through which colonized people were governed by and the making of appropriate racial, sexual, class and gender boundaries, the term broadly now, also refers to the ways in which people of color are desired for their race and sexuality, hence the usage of the term "exotic." Dislodging fetishism from the genealogy of male sexuality and the castration complex[40], McClintock (1995) opens up fetishism to "a more complex and variable history in which racial and class hierarchies would play as formative a role as sexuality. […] Far from being merely phallic substitutes, fetishes can be seen as the displacement onto an object (or person) of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level" (p. 184). Fetishes, then, encompass not only the erotic/racialized other, but expand to a range of objects that the subject imbues with passion and emotions.[41]

A second critique of Freud and Lacan's idea of fetishism is their disavowal of female fetishism[42]. McClintock (1995) notes that women "can be the *objects* of fetishism but never the *subjects*" (p. 193, emphasis in original). Put differently, it is only men who can enact or have fetishizing tendencies, with women lacking desire and agency to have fetishistic predispositions.

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[40] The castration complex refers to the process where the little boy movement towards heterosexual is disrupted by castration anxiety upon seeing his mother "lacks" a penis, or she is castrated by the father. Since the boy desires sexual union with his mother, the boy fears that the father will remove his penis if he continues to desire his mother. Consequently, the boy aligns himself with his father by turning away from his mother (McClintock, 1994, p. 190-192).

[41] For instance, different types of fetishes include but are not limited to: hair, shoes, flags, authority, whips, clothing (McClintock, 1995, p. 202).

[42] See, for example, chapter 4: "Psychoanalysis, race and female fetishism" in McClintock's work (1995) for a treatment on psychoanalysis and female fetishism. Also, see Elizabeth Grosz (1993) for a discussion of psychoanalysis and the emergence of lesbian fetishism.

Rewriting Freud and Lacan's ideas on fetishism, McClintock (1995) argues that the assumption

underlying their theories is the inability to accept that,

> a lesbian might choose other women to celebrate and expand her sexuality, for to admit
> such a possibility would be to endorse the refusal of heterosexuality as the only viable
> social option and to subvert the fiction of one phallus as governing all desire (p. 195)

Refusing the phallocentric narrative that locates female sexuality and agency as un-

representable; female sexuality as failed heterosexuality, and that fetishism is absent in women,

McClintock (1995) reminds us that "fetishes can be any object [or person] under the sun" (p.

185) inaugurated in the self. This process of racial fetishism is further bolstered and played out

through Kempadoo's (2003) idea of 'exoticism.' She writes that exoticism "as an approach to the

non-Western world, it is associated with the legitimatization of European conquest, control,

domination, as well as escapist fantasies and vicarious enjoyment of sex and violence by

European literary intellectuals and artists" (2003. p. 161). Exoticism marked women's bodies

and sexuality as both exotic and strange, where women's sexuality was "highly attractive and

fascinating, yet related to the natural primitives and lower order of the other cultural group"

(Kempadoo, 2003, p. 161). Although used to interpret the "East", Kempadoo writes that in the

Caribbean, particularly women's bodies, sexuality and labour was not outside of this process.

Further writing on Caribbean women's sexuality, Kempadoo (2003) poignantly highlights the

hierarchies that became established through the process of exoticism, where dark skinned black

womanhood was simultaneously represented as promiscuous and lacking decency, and mixed

raced or the "colored woman" was exotic because she "could pass for white yet retained a tinge

of color, as well as a hint of wantonness and uninhabited sexuality of exotic cultures" (p. 161).

This ideology of mixed-race light skinned women as an exotic woman continues to operate in

these narratives, where mixed-race women are still sexualized and highly desirable. Borrowing

from McClintock's (1995) idea of racial and female fetishism and Kempadoo's arguments of exoticism, I argue that the enactment of desire by some middle-class women aligns with these colonial racial fantasies of women, where light skinned women are highly racialized and sexualized. To a certain degree, the performance of desire upholds existing colonial ideologies of race, gender, and sexual formations.

Middle-upper class women—Natasha and Mina, with the exception of Veronica, indicated that their partners were Indian and/or a mixture of Black/Indian/Amerindian/Portuguese. However, when asked specifically about dating Black women, Mina (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) responded by saying,

> no I have never dated a black girl, not that I'm racial or anything but I would probably date a mix girl like Indian and black, or Portuguese and black, but I won't go for a pure black girl…I really don't know the reason being…

Natasha (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) also had a similar response, "I am attracted to red women, but I don't have a preference, but I wouldn't date a pure black... it's just not there, the chemistry." When asked further if skin color mattered, Natasha responded by saying

> ...it's what you're attracted to…I wouldn't discriminate against anybody, but I'm attracted to black women, yes, but yuh know like the light skin ones (laughs), it's crazy. It doesn't matter to me…but yeah like pure black, I am not attracted to

Working class Tara (black, 20s) also indicated that her partners have been Indian or *dougla*, but "I never date black girls." The enactment of Natasha, Mina and Tara's desires offers us critical insights into the ways in which their attraction follows racial fetishization and the racial hierarchy that is established through exoticism, that is their desires of other women are discursively produced in relation to racial, class and sexualized ideas of mixed-race women. Their desires are rooted in a deeper history of Caribbean slave societies, where beauty ideals of white skin and European facial features was the "yardstick" through which other Creole, black,

Indian and Chinese women were measured and ranked against (Wahab, 2008, p. 10). These white beauty notions also materially and symbolically represented ideas of purity, modesty, domesticity (Bush, 1990), where other women attempted to appropriate these standards of beauty. However, Mohammed (2000) observes that miscegenation produced another "aesthetic of desirability" whereby "mixed or mulatto woman[43] disrupted the notions of a Victorian purity of the white woman, and the 'hot constitution'd of black female sexuality'" (Mohammed, 2000, p. 24). Red woman is a colonial term that is used to describe women who are mixed with black and white and/or other ethnic groups (Kempadoo, 2003; Mohammed, 2000). Red "mulatto" women are fetishized through their skin color and are stereotypically positioned as more sexually desirable for their light/red skin, hair, facial, and eye features over darker skinned women (Kempadoo, 2003, p. 166). Red women or mixed-race women occupy a unique history in Caribbean societies with these beauty ideals and stereotypes continuing to impact other women's idea of femininity and desire.

In this analysis, the figure of the "red woman" is a racialized fetishized object of desire by some Indo-Guyanese women and black women, but in the next chapter though, I demonstrate the ways in which "red women" or mixed-race light skinned women also experience a particular type of racialized/sexualized violence at the hands of other women. While I suggest that racial fetishism/exoticism is at the heart of Natasha and Mina's enactment of their desire, their desire also adheres to anti-blackness structures. If their desire is racialized and eroticized, then it is through the category of skin color that their engagements with other racialized women are shaped. While the term anti-blackness is not used in Berbice, it is skin color that structures and encourages racial/ethnic hierarchies, firmly placing black/dark skinned women at the bottom of

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[43] See Mohammed (2000) for discussion on how the term red, mulatto and mixed-race changes in different countries in the Caribbean.

the social hierarchy. Although the three of them suggested that they are not "racial", a local way of saying they are not racist, they contradicted this logic by declaring that they would not date "pure black" women. In the broader culture of anti-blackness within particular segments of the Indo-Guyanese population, skin colour is the lens through which anti-blackness is articulated, manifested and upheld within the community. Ideas of racial purity connected to class stratification stemming from colonial structures (Mohammed, 2002; Niranjana, 2006) continue to inform the ways in which Tara, Natasha and Mina's sexual desires is manifested in relation to Afro-Guyanese women, specifically dark skin black women.

Veronica (Indo-Guyanese, 20s), on the other hand, indicates that her partner is a "dark skinned" Afro-Guyanese woman, and while she does not think of race to be an issue, Veronica expressed that "to everyone else we are not dating, so they don't look at us as a couple, but the fact that she is black and we are friends is a problem for people…" Veronica went on to state that family members question, "why yuh friends with her and don't bring people like that here." Although the community is unaware that she is having a sexual relationship with a dark-skinned Afro-Guyanese woman, Veronica's interactions and relationship with a dark-skinned Afro-Guyanese woman is still policed by the community. It is through quotidian interactions and conversations that anti-blackness is simultaneously normalized and apparent. Given her family's status in the community, the comments Veronica receives operate to mark which bodies she can associate with, and indirectly, which bodies she can and cannot desire. In Berbice, middle-upper class Indo-Guyanese women's sexual desires are tampering with ideas of racial purity, transgressing the heteronormative gender and sexual domains, or "refusing heterosexuality" as McClintock (1995) notes. In these acts of transgression, they also disrupt the Indo-family structure firmly established by colonial powers by opting for other women. Simultaneously,

through racial fetishism, the enactment of desires reinforces and maintain a colonial fantasy of mixed-race/red women. Their gaze fixes and essentializes mixed-race women as both highly racialized and sexualized. In this sense, while their desires are anti-heteronormative and anti-heterosexuality, their desires are not anticolonial.

Unlike the racial boundaries that exist within the narratives of middle-class women like Natasha and Mina (but not Veronica, only her family), desire and attraction for working class women is not restricted to racial and ethnic categories. Amanda (30s, mixed race) did not think that racial differences played a role in her attraction to other women. She states, "it doesn't matter because most of my family are Indians, so we don't have anything like racialism in my family." Nadia (30s, Indo-Guyanese) said "to be honest with you, I don't like Indian women." Nadia, who is Indian, did not find herself to be attracted to other Indian women, but was attracted to Black and/or mixed women, regardless of skin color. Jasmine and Anita also indicated that race was not an issue as they dated dark skinned and red women before. Working class women who are positioned at the bottom of the social, political and economic hierarchy resist a middle-class politics of racial and sexual purity. In Caribbean societies, respectability politics have seeped into gender, racial, class, and sexual formations, shaping each society. For instance, Peter Wilson (1969) discussed two opposing value systems: respectability has its origins in colonialism and reputation as arising within Caribbean societies. He equates respectability with women which emphasises marriage, sexual purity, and constrained to home-life, all of which are connected to legal and religious institutions such as the Church. On the other hand, reputation is equated with men[44]. He argues that, for example, women engage in a politics of respectability

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[44] Wilson (1969) equates reputation with men in Caribbean societies as men are encouraged to be sexually active; have many partners and children; and engage in economic competition with other men. In this sense, men seek to earn their "reputation" in the public sphere through these activities. Please see Wilson (1969) for a more detailed analysis of reputation and respectability for men and women in Caribbean societies. The neat divide between

through their social relationships of motherhood, marriage and work ethic (Wilson, 1969, p. 77).

In other words, since women are often confined to their homes; encouraged to maintain sexual

purity until marriage; remain faithful to their husbands after marriage; and bear children,

respectability is accorded through these practices and institutions. Working-class women also

partially participate in this colonial formation of respectability politics through marriage and

motherhood. Some working-class women have gained social status and standing through

marriage and motherhood, i.e., it is better to be wed than unwed and it is better to have children

than no children. Thus, some working-class women, as I argue, have met and lived up to some of

these social values and status conferred by respectability politics, that is they have fulfilled the

demands of marriage and motherhood. However, they also depart at the juncture when it comes

to racial and sexual purity. Given that they are located at the bottom of the class hierarchy, we

could assume that these working-class women who love women in Berbice do not have access to

resources, education, and other classes of women, and consequently, they enact a different

politics of respectability. Their desire and attraction interrupt existing colonial hierarchies that

seek to classify, and separate women based on artificial categories of race, gender and sexuality.

They defy colonial logics and rules, offering us a re-articulation of desire not located within

colonial racial fantasies of mixed-race women.

Conclusion

This chapter explored a number of areas within the lives of women who love women in

rural Berbice. I analyzed the ways in which the urban emerges within the lived experiences and

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respectability and reputation as discussed by Wilson, however has been challenged by a number of feminist scholars such as Christine Barrow. (1996). *Family in the Caribbean: Themes and perspectives*: Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers Ltd.

imaginations of rural women in Berbice, demonstrating that the meanings they ascribe to space is highly contingent on their family structures, racial/ethnic and class positioning. The meanings and symbolism attached to different urban spaces inform and shape their current experiences of rural Berbice—for middle class women Berbice is conceptualized as a place of restriction, but for working-class women, Berbice is a site of raising their children and forming community. In outlining these differences, I suggested that we analyze carefully the ways in which the metronormative discourse is upheld by different classes of women, that not all rural women perceive or desire the urban space as a site of freedom and liberation to explore their queerness. In fact, as I argued, it is only middle-class women who perceive some urban spaces as a site of sexual freedom, especially sites outside of Guyana. Importantly, this chapter points out the ways in which visibility politics put forward by LGBTQ discourses and movements exist in tension with other aspects of rural living. For middle-class rural women, their family structure, racial/ethnic and class status may operate as constraints, hindering their ability to be "visible" and/or operating to keep them "invisible." And while some of the women in rural Berbice engage in a politics of sexual praxis and claim different sexual subjectivities, their racial, class and family structures are also important signifiers that continuously shape and influence their decisions to *remain* in Berbice.

On the other hand, working-class women who were previously married and have children are embedded within their communities through other signifiers, which may prevent scrutiny into their relationships with other women. Following the work of Kazyak (2010), I emphasise that working-class women are integrated into their communities through other modalities of having ties to the community and being known as a good person, which also resists a politics of visibility that emphasises sexual identities. Drawing on the ideas of race/ethnicity as attached to

skin color, racial fetishism and exoticism, I argued that for middle-class women their desire for mixed race women might be anti-heterosexual and anti-normative but not anti-colonial. For some middle-class women, the desire for light-skinned mixed-race women adheres to and perpetuate colonial fantasies of racialized women, where race and ethnicity are firmly attached to light skin-color in Berbice. Working-class rural women offer us another perspective though. Despite facing structural oppressions of poverty and violence, working-class women's sexual praxis does not follow middle-class standards of racial and sexual purity. While working-class women participated in traditional ideas of marriage and motherhood thereby enacting a particular kind of politics of respectability, they have also forged other attitudes, beliefs and ways of relating that call into question middle-class perceptions of racial and sexual piety.

CHAPTER 5: A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

… when she hit me yeah…we kind of like started living together out of convenience sort of…she thought because she was like mostly the provider she …that we were together sort of…so if I go out with friends and come home late, she would lock me out and stuff but it's kind hard for me cause my parents were like…they weren't accepting of me …I kind of felt alone and she was my only option at the moment…it kinda of went on for years actually. It went for like 4 years…cause I was studying and then like we moved out cause she started building her place…we move from places to places…I mean we weren't together, but we were still like umm we would still have sex yeah… I didn't know where to go cause I was still very young and I didn't have a job yet…I was still studying so yeah and my family they weren't very supportive, I guess…I left cause I couldn't handle it anymore…I couldn't go out and we weren't together so all my stuff was still there and she destroyed some of my things… she kinda like started threatening me that if I leave she would kill the dogs and stuff, those were my dogs…and I was just one day I had enough…(Maya January, 2016)

What are the conditions and structures that keep intact physical, emotional, and sexual violence between women in same-sex relationships? Do these conditions and experiences of violence contribute to Guyana having the highest rate of suicide in the world? Women, regardless of their sexual identity, practices, orientation, racial, class, and geographical positioning in the country, are not immune to violence. Each of the thirty-three women that I interviewed had a story of violence—whether physical, emotional, sexual, self-harm, suicidal ideation, attempts, or some combination of these experiences. It is these stories that I turn to in this chapter. This chapter discusses women's narrated experiences of violence in the country. The violence that they narrate spans a continuum of different *types* of violence. I specifically examine sexual violence, that is, racialized sexualized violence within same-sex intimate partner violence, as well as self-harm incidents.[45] Throughout this chapter, I seek to map out these experiences and place them within the broader socio-political, economic, and legal contexts that the women reside in. Particularly, I highlight the ways in which the violence that is produced and

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[45] This is non-representative sample, hence the narratives of violence that I write about cannot be generalized or applied to anyone else.

experienced is inextricably linked to heterosexism/heteronormative and homophobic context that makes invisible, same-sex violence and how in the enactment of violence one can reclaim a sense of self and bodily integrity. Fanon reminds us that violence can be useful in any given context; that in the enactment of violence the subject can exercise their agency in the face of dehumanization. In this sense, the potentiality of violence lies in its creative outlet, its purpose and outcome. Cvetkovick (2003), focusing on trauma, moves to look at the intimate and everyday violations as a method not to cure traumatic feelings, but to depathologize such feelings. Trauma, then, for Cvetkovick is a way to tell the untellable; to communicate an intimate but always partial loss when violence occurs. Throughout this chapter, I will be using these insights offered by Fanon and Cvetkovick as a lens to read the narratives of violence.

Sexual Violence

In Guyana, 2005 was marked as the year in which some of the largest disasters took place in the country's history. Unprecedented rainfalls and flooding in different regions[46] of the country affected roughly 290,000 people, which is around 39% of the Guyanese population (World Bank, 2005). Along with this natural epidemic, there were heightened drug and criminal activities on the coast coinciding with plummeting sugar prices that intensified people's experiences of an already disastrous situation. Bahadur (2013) details that after Haiti, Guyana is the least developed nation in South America and the Caribbean region, and that the country's major employer—the government —which has had monopoly over the sugar estates, was almost bankrupt (p. 198). In 2005, Guyana's high poverty rate, natural epidemics such as flooding, and

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[46] Region 3 (Essequibo Islands/West Demerara), Region 4 (Demerara/ Mahaica) and Region 5 (Mahaica/Berbice) were declared disaster areas.

the nation's positioning as a hub for drug activity between Columbia, Venezuela, and Brazil produces a climate of vulnerabilities where women disproportionally face the brunt of such changes. It is within this context that Anna shares her narrative of sexual abuse with me.

> we had a robbery...this was in 2005 when the crime spree was starting up in Guyana. I don't know if you ever pay attention to it, but it basically started up in 2005, and most of the criminals came out of Buxton and Agricola at that time, so we had a break at our house and [long pause] and I was raped, and my brother was there and my mother was there…but they weren't in the room because they guys had my brother on the mattress on gun point and there was three bandits, 2 of the 3 I was raped by, so I think that was turning point for my mother and my brother because we got closer from that experience…(Anna, mixed race, 30s)

While there is no rationale or justification for rape, the political and economic structures in Guyana, produce an environment where incidents of rape are much more likely to occur. The unstable economy produces a space where men's identities as breadwinners and financial providers are eroded and undermined by lack of access to economic opportunities (Peake and Trotz, 1999; Kempadoo, 2004; Lewis, 1996; Bahadur, 2013). Bahadur (2013) points to the historical root of violence against women as being tied to unequal power relations in gender and sexual structures, created by the plantation system, where high rates of domestic violence and murders of women by their partners, often peaked during economic uncertainty (p. 204-204). These historical patterns of men losing their jobs due to economic downfalls results in a situation where they take out their anxieties and frustrations on the bodies of women (Bahadur, 2013; Peake & Trotz, 1999.) Consequently, increasing poverty levels contribute to criminal activities such as home invasions and robberies which are a normal and daily occurrence on the coast of Guyana. To mitigate the impacts of the socio-economic and political conditions on their masculinity, coupled with the ideology that women are "secondary citizens," (Trotz, 2004, p. 6) violence, and in this case, rape, becomes the primary method by which men reassert and maintain their masculinities and identities as men. Kempadoo (2004) notes that "…sex becomes

the primary means available to Caribbean men to exert control over and to inflict physical harm on women, Indian and African alike" (p. 3). Violence, especially sexual violence against women by men is considered to be a normal expression of Caribbean masculinity.

This is still an incomplete story though, and there is another part of the script that is missing. The poverty in Guyana offers us a partial insight into the coupling of masculinity, violence, and economic structures that coalesce to produce violence against women. The violence is not merely a result of poverty, but rather the coalescing of bodies in a poverty-stricken economy, embedded within patriarchal ideologies of gender and sexuality. The texture of sex is different when one chooses to engage in sex versus when one is coerced into it. Patriarchal explanations of rape do not address the textures of this violence. Violence in this situation is a series of events between bodies and their social, economic and political relationships that have resulted in rape. Women, like Anna and many others, often do not have access to economic, social and emotional resources to assist them as they navigate these horrific situations. The political environment also fuels and worsens women's experiences, where women like Anna, receive no justice for the violence committed against them. As she narrates below:

> but what haunts yuh [you] is after that robbery, I faced three other robberies after that, but not in house and there was no rape, but every other robbery after that made me freeze causing a couple months of insomnia for me cause I was robbed at my old work place… so I faced three other robberies after that and it shakes you up ….before for me I would consider moving from Guyana to go live somewhere else because I can be more open about my relationship. It's not that for me anymore, and the only reason why I would consida [consider] moving out of Guyana going to live somewhere else is the security aspect of it. Like yuh get no justice here…I've been through 4 robberies here and ask me how many money I have gotten, none, so yuh know they haven't apprehended anybody so for me now going to live somewhere else is not about getting the freedom to be open in my relationship but getting the freedom to just live and not worry about lookin' ova [over] yuh shoulder about whose gonna come and rob you, yuh know? (Anna, mixed-race, 30s)

Anna's story reflects a larger problem of Guyana's lack of judicial resources to assist and support women who have faced violence. Bahadur (2013) notes that Guyana ranks among the "fifty most corrupt countries in the bottom third of the world" (p. 199) where corruption, bribery, lack of competence and governance by the police system, lawyers, magistrates, and other officials fail to implement and uphold the law. As Anna points out above, despite being robbed four times, she has received no remedy through the law. Her perpetrators were never apprehended, and neither was she compensated for the losses she incurred in the subsequent robberies. Anna made it clear to me that migration out of the country would not be connected to her sexual identity, or lack of freedom in expressing herself in her relationship. She would move to another country as Guyana feels unsafe for her, given her experiences of violence. Her decision to migrate would be related to her lack of security and the inability of the judicial system to offer her protection. Failures in the judicial system, along with country's high rate of poverty, would influence her decision to leave Guyana and seek a better life elsewhere (Bahadur, 2013, p. 212). If the judicial system offers no justice to women like Anna, and no freedom from violence, it is not surprising then, that women like her, and many others attempt to seek migrate.

Another participant Janice who was also raped and sought justice from the court describes the following incident:

> Yeah I went to Court; nothing came out of the case but…I did take it to court yeah because one of the guys in question at the time when that happen was affiliated to the government of the day umm well a relative of his was affiliated…the perpetrator was related to somebody who was party of the government of the day… I went to court several times and told the same story to a court where the perpetrator never turn up, but I was still subjected to telling the same story over and over again and I actually stopped the case…I stopped the case because I mean it got to a stage where at one time the persecuta [persecutor] literally kept saying to me that 'yuh know I should probably consida [consider] not going further with the case' and that 'my particular kind of case, rape cases in general are very hard to prove but my particular case was enough more difficult to prove', right? (Janice, mixed-race, 40s).

Janice reveals how the corruption within all levels of the court prevented her from moving forward with her case. In a racialized patriarchal system, violence against women occurs where there are glaring inequalities of power—whether it is economic, political, racial or social disparities. As described by Fanon, the colonial structure is maintained by those in positions of power which often prevent women from seeking and attaining justice. Violence is often attached to unequal power relations, where women's subordinated positions are impacted by political structures and often linked to their socio-economic status. Taking a Foucauldian approach to power and violence, Oksala (2013) writes that, "…even though power relations [are] essentially fluid and reversible, what usually characterized power was that these relations become stabilized through institutions" (p. 70). In other words, power operates in multiple ways and permeate all institutional structures, but given its entrenchment within institutional bodies, power forms a rigid society, where changes take longer to facilitate (Oksala, 2013). Individuals are not outside of these power relations either, and in any given society there are hierarchical power relations between members, all who have the capacity to modify or change existing power relations and structures (Oksala, 2013).

We can observe this link between violence and power in Janice's story. Since her perpetrator had affiliations to a governmental official, and by extension police officers, judges and other administrators, he was the one who was able to obtain the rights and protection of the law. From Janice's description of the conversation between her and the prosecutor, we can conclude those who were in power were most likely paid off or that knew the perpetrator thus explaining why he never showed up in court. When men with power and influence have access to resources, and are perpetrators as well, women like Anna and Janice have limited options for getting their cases and voices heard. We can grasp the ways in which power operates through the

networks and affiliations between perpetrator and the other judicial-political bodies to prevent

Janice getting her case heard in the court. Furthermore, within a culture where victim-blaming is

the norm, where a persecutor works to deter a woman from pursuing her case, and the onus of

responsibility is placed upon the survivor to prove her rape, reflect the predominant and deep

held beliefs that women are second class citizens. These beliefs operate to sustain a culture of

violence, where rape is permissible, where violence against women's bodies and psyches are

acceptable and normalized in Guyana.

The institutional structures combined with these ideologies operate together to produce a

culture of violence, where the dominant group—racialized men— can enact violence against

women and remain invisible as perpetrators of such crimes. While violence and power are deeply

entangled and prevent women from altering the status quo, I suggest that power also performs

another function, that of *invisibility*. Power linked to political institutions, structures and bodies,

produces a type of violence which conceals the dominant group precisely through the cloak of

invisibility. In this case, the different men who inflicted the violence—the perpetrator, the

relative who had connections to the government, the persecutor—their roles, their

responsibilities, and their positionalities remain hidden and invisible in the overall narrative.

Power and violence operate on multiple levels, making visible the violence committed against

women like Anna and Janice, while making invisible the dominant social order that exercise and

uphold such violence. When women like Janice, seek to alter and make visible the violence—

rape—that was enacted by a man with power, such a conversation had to be foreclosed for the

dominant group to remain intact with all their power and privileges. The climate of corruption,

lack of judicial governance and responses, coalesced by socio-cultural ideas of violence as a

natural expression of masculinity and women as second-class subjects, creates a space where women like Anna and Janice have little possibility of getting any judicial recourse.

Is it any wonder then that mental health issues, such as alcoholism, depression, and suicide plague our community in Guyana? Could any of these elements sustain the trauma and suicide rates that currently exist in Guyana? Anna reminds us of the trauma that she continues to experience after being raped and the subsequent robberies, insomnia being just one example of the lasting impacts of being raped. Anna also indicates that she freezes after experiencing three other robberies, another form of traumatic response because of the rape. Psychologists have noted that the "freeze" stage—one of the three stages of responses to trauma—is one in which individuals experience symptoms of feeling stuck, of being unable to move. They hold their breath and their reactionary mechanisms are delayed, or stopped all together (Levine, 2005; Herman, 1997). The immobility and insomnia are common responses to rape and can be worked through with therapy, mindfulness-based approaches, and other healing practices, however, Guyana lacks these necessary resources. In a population of roughly 750,000, it is estimated that Guyana has only five locally based psychiatrists as mental health providers, three of whom are in Georgetown, and two of whom cater to patients only in region five—not to the wider public (Baker, 2014). Current social service providers such as Red Thread and Help and Shelter, are also located in Georgetown and work to address multiple forms of violence. However, most of my participants in urban Georgetown did not access these services for many reasons. In Georgetown, many of the women did not access these services because they risk disclosing their sexual orientation and relationship to social services providers; they worry about their private lives being subjected to gossiping and stand to lose their public status; they worry about

homophobia from service providers; and some of them also did not think that they need these services that they are capable of working through their problems with their partners.

These services are also inaccessible to women located in rural areas such as Berbice. The geographical isolation is further compounded by the socio-cultural attitudes which understand mental health issues as an individual problem shrouded with shame and stigma, where family structures, gender stereotypes, and lack of financial resources prevent women from getting access to the help they need. Given these multiple structures that contribute to the culture of violence in Guyana, Anna reveals to me that she has invariably turned to heavy alcohol use to cope with the effects of her trauma. Alcoholism, which is also part of the colonial legacy, is cheap, accessible, and a normal feature of social interaction in Guyana (Bahadur, 2013). It is not surprising then that women like Anna revert to alcohol use to numb their pain and silence their suffering in a culture that offers them nothing else.

Early Childhood Abuse

Violence against women also takes place in more insidious ways, especially when it occurs at a younger age. Even though there are few studies on child sexual abuse (CSA)[47] in the Caribbean, scholars have pointed that CSA is a prevalent issue in the region (Rock, 2013; Reid, Reddock, & Nickening, 2014; Jones & Trotman, 2009). Adele D. Jones and Ena Trotman Jemmott (2009) in their study, *Perceptions of, Attitudes to and Opinions on Child Sexual Abuse in the Eastern Caribbean,* have noted several intersecting factors perpetuating CSA such as family structure, shame and stigma norms, gender in understanding sex and sexual abuse, socio-economic status of women, and children lacking legal rights. Based on their study of 1,400

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[47] See the report by Jones and Trotman Jemmott (2009) for a comprehensive review of the different definitions and understanding of Child Sexual Abuse in scholarly literature and across the Caribbean region.

individuals across several islands in the region, these scholars found that 40.9% of their respondents indicated that child sexual abuse occurs in the family (p. 77), with CSA in the region having an overall estimation rate between 20%-40% (Jones & Trotman Jemmott, 2009, p. 10). In Trinidad and Tobago, Reid et all (2014) noted that in a six-month period in 2006, 165 cases of CSA were reported to officials, in which 85% were violations of girls and 16% were cases of incest (p. 258). In the case of Guyana, Help and Shelter reported that between the years 1995 to 2010, 1136 cases were reported, of which 923 were women cases. The number of rape cases reported were 376 and other types of sexual abuse was reported at 189 (H&S, child abuse data, 2010). A common form of child sexual abuse identified by Jones and Trotman Jemmot is "intra-familial sexual abuse" which refers to abuse that happens within the privacy of the family and is usually committed by fathers, stepfathers, brothers, uncles etc. (2009, p. 11). Those who are positioned in their roles of fathers, uncles, brothers, and cousins, who are ideologically understood and supposedly there to protect women, often turn out to be the very perpetrators who violate women. Bahadur (2013) writes, "…the spaces that have proven the most dangerous to Guyanese women are the private spaces inside the home, where the family stands on pillars" (p. 197). Rape and other forms of sexual abuse by family members and friends affect the lives of Guyanese women, of all ages, ethnicities, economic status and sexual identities. Sandra narrates to me the following incident of rape by her uncle,

> when I was between the age of 8-10…it was not molestation; it was rape because there was penetration by a relative. He was married to my aunt and [long pause]…I remembered it so well…I had a really hard time dealing with it… As I got older and I understood what really happened to me because at the time I was just scared…I didn't tell anyone because I felt I did something wrong and so I didn't tell anyone about it for many years and when I was in high school… I attempted suicide...I couldn't deal with it and like I said when it happened I felt like I did something wrong and I always put that pressure on myself that I did something really horrible and it sorta of….grew inside of me that …feeling of fear and disgust and disappointment and you know all the bad things

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about yourself that you're a bad person for doing this and nobody knows umm although you're old to know that it wasn't you, you still have those feeling, you know? As a child…it's still inside of you…I try...I went to school, and I took poison with me and I drank it… (mixed-race, 30s).

Several participants such as Sandra narrated stories of rape and other forms of sexual violence by some member of their family. In Sandra's narrative, we can witness the ways in which she rationalized and internalized the idea that the sexual violence that had happened to her was a result of her own actions and behaviour.[48] Judith Herman, writing on trauma, notes that "self-blame is congruent with the normal forms of thought of early childhood, in which the self is taken as the reference point for all events. It is congruent with the thought process of traumatized people of all ages, who search for faults in their own behavior in an effort to make sense out of what has happened to them" (1997, p. 103). In other words, children turn inwards to themselves looking for faults in their own behaviour to explain the violence they have experienced, especially when the violence is committed by a family member/caretaker, such as Sandra's uncle. Many of the feelings that Sandra experienced such as fear, disgust, and disappointment are all negative affective experiences that she developed as means to understand the childhood rape (Trash, Walsh & DiLillo, 2012; Trask & Walsh, 2011; Kim, Talbot & Cicchetti, 2009). A recent study conducted by ChildLink, a local child rights organization in Guyana, noted that children who have experienced sexual abuse need "trauma focused therapy and other psycho-social interventions," but in 2017 "only 30 percent of 841 children were referred, meaning close to 600 victims might never receive trauma-focused therapy" (Chabrol, 2018). The negative

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[48] There is a large body of scholarship that documents the negative effects of child sexual abuse and ongoing post-traumatic stress disorders. Please see, for example, Feiring, Taska & Lewis (2002), Feiring & Taska (1996; 2005), Talbot (1996), and Finkelhor & Browne (1985).

internalization of the rape resulted in Sandra attempting suicide[49] as a teenager, and she

continued to experience post-traumatic stress symptoms. The internalization of these messages is

sustained by the victim blaming culture and familial structures. Sandra tells me that if she

chooses to speak about her early childhood experiences or take legal action against her

perpetrator (her uncle) it would lead to further emotional and psychological distress for her.

Furthermore, it would also make her visible in the public sphere as a rape victim.

While the law criminalizes sex with a minor under 16 years old, women often do not

report this issue for several reasons such as the duration/time when it occurred, that is early

childhood. The culture of victim blaming and the lack of prosecution by the Courts are severe

barriers to women speaking about their experiences of sexual violence. Furthermore, survivors

might fear additional violence, especially if the perpetrator is someone they know, have a

relationship to, or depend upon. According to the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA)

report of 2007, "fathers, stepfathers and father-figures are responsible for over 67% of family

related sexual violence" ("Challenging sexual violence", 2017). Rape reporting cases have

increased dramatically from 150 in 2014 to 243 reported between January and July 2016, a 68%

increase in reporting statistics ("Challenging sexual violence", 2017). Despite an increase in

reporting rape incidents, the Guyana Human Rights Practices of 2016 indicated that "authorities

received 204 reports of rape and charged 36 persons. There was a large court backlog of cases

alleging rape" (U.S Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labour, 2016). The low prosecution

and conviction rates of perpetrators by the judicial system reflects one of the major barriers

inhibiting women from seeking remedy through the courts. The underreporting of rape incidents

is additionally intensified by cultural barriers of family structures, internalized shame, and

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[49] It is important to note that suicidal attempts are not reflected in the official statistics recorded by the World Health Organization.

stigmatization as noted above. Rape and other forms of sexual abuse, regardless of the age that it occurs, are still considered to be shameful and have long term emotional and psychological impacts as we can see in these narratives. While Sandra's experience of violence has its origins in early childhood sexual abuse, her attempted suicide is also a reaction to this early experience. Attempted suicide is one reaction to the pain and hurt that she experienced as a child. It is a violent reaction to an overall environment that has denied her bodily integrity and an experience that she could not personally or publicly name or discuss. Is her attempted suicide only a reaction to heteropatriarchal sexual abuse? The violation against Sandra perhaps meant that a part of her childhood, autonomy and body was robbed from her. Should her decision to attempt suicide be read an act of agency or victimhood? How do we account for her choice within this subsequent act of violence against herself in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder? Maybe in the few moments of her contemplating and attempting suicide, she was able reclaim a sense of ownership over her body. Perhaps the crux of her agency lies somewhere in between the childhood that was lost and the attempt to regain her body even through the potential of death. Violence, as I am suggesting, traverses several spaces; between bodies; between bodies and places; between the sociopolitical and individual; between one's psyche and the external environment. Violence cannot be explained *only* by heteropatriarchal structures, but must encapsulate the various actors, institutions, and psychical elements in the production of violence.

Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence

Studies in Guyana and the broader Caribbean have focused on domestic and gender-based violence, however, there are no studies on violence within same-sex relations. For instance, in 1998, Red Thread a women's NGO in Guyana, conducted a survey on domestic violence with sample size of approximately 360 women of predominantly Afro and Indo-

Guyanese within the greater urban city of Georgetown.[50] The majority of women, 76.8% said

that domestic violence was common in the family, with 65.8% reporting that they have

experienced violence of some kind (Red Thread & Peake, 2000). This information is invaluable

for its contributions to assisting local NGO's in developing campaigns against domestic

violence, counselling programs, and breaking the cultural silence on domestic violence, and

other reproductive health issues affecting women (Peake, 2000). However, much of this data is

gathered from violent domestic and intimate partner heterosexual relations and reflects the

normalizing and privileging of violence within a heterosexual and heteronormative context. The

majority of these studies, methodologically, fails to interrogate the gender of the perpetrator, and

thereby, assumes and reinforces that violence flows unilaterally from men to women (Balsam,

2001). The premise of the study, then, is built on the assumption that violence is always

exclusively perpetrated by men, and that women are exclusively the recipient of such violence.

When the studies do address women as agents of violence, it was within the context of them

being violent towards children (Peake, 2000).

While there are no studies on violence within same-sex relations in Guyana or the

broader Caribbean, violence within LGBTQ relationships in North America is gaining increasing

scholarly attention. A central focus of second wave feminism in the 1970s sought to establish

that domestic violence against women is a social problem within mainstream culture. If violence

was largely understood as a function of patriarchy, then lesbian, bisexual women, and racialized

women who were abused by their same-sex partners had to be subsumed under the broader

category of "battered woman" (Girshick, 2002, p. 11) in order to launch violence as a new social

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[50] The survey was not distributed to other regions in the interior of Guyana, where indigenous women are predominantly located, or in the other two counties of Essequibo and Berbice. The survey also did not indicate if the sample size included indigenous and mixed women from Georgetown.

problem. Feminist analyses of domestic violence have argued that violence is a gender-based

phenomenon due to the patriarchal socialization of gender/sex roles of men and women,

however, scholars have pointed out that gender-based theory have failed to explain same-sex

violence[51] (Merrill, 1996).

While sexual, class, and racial differences were excluded in these earlier discussions of

domestic violence, by the 1980s feminist scholars in the North American context broke the

silence on violence within lesbian relationships[52]. When violence is generally perceived as men

being violent towards women, then equally, the myth of the "lesbian utopia" operates to make

invisible lesbian domestic violence and abuse. "Lesbian utopia," according to Lori B. Girshick

(2002) is the inherent belief that women are nurturing, nonviolent and often experience safety in

women's spaces (p. 1503). She further writes that to add women to the "pool of potential

predators means that no place is inherently safe. Denial of this threat is a major coping

mechanism for women to feel any measure of safety as constructed in a heterosexist, patriarchal

society (2002, p. 1503). In other words, the denial of sexual violence between women is based

not only on the belief that women are non-violent, but also the ways in which women have

internalized heterosexist and patriarchal understandings of violence against women. Girshick

(2002) argues that "women's nonviolence and lesbian egalitarianism have proven to be a

formidable block to admitting and dealing with same-sex sexual violence and domestic violence

perpetuated by women" (p. 49). The dominant view assumes that since lesbian relationships lack

a male partner, and because of the shared sex/gender system, it is more egalitarian. It also

trivializes the violence between women as "cat-fights," and therefore concludes that the harm

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[51] For instance, Gregory S. Merrill (1996) argues for a synthetization of sociopolitical and psychological theory for a framework of social-psychological model to adequately address the perpetuation of same-sex violence.
[52] See the work of Paula Poorman (2001) for a comprehensive review of lesbian domestic violence across a number of scholarly fields.

inflicted is less serious (Ristock, 2002, p. 3). Given these perceptions, violence within lesbian relationships are largely ignored or seen as frivolous. There is also a growing concern over the language used to describe the violence within non-heterosexual relationships, that is using languages such as "lesbian battering" (Hart, 1986), "lesbian partner violence/abuse" (Ristock, 2002; Renzetti, 1992), needs to shift to "woman-to-woman" sexual violence (Girshick, 2002). The shift to "woman-to-woman" violence enables us to think through the ways in which women are violent toward other women, regardless of sexual orientation and identity. It also decenters the category of lesbian to be more inclusive of bisexual and queer women (Ristock, 2002, p. 4). However, it must be noted that there is no inclusion of trans-women within these studies.

More recent scholarship in the U.S., since the mid 2000s, have started to focus on violence within queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* relationships, and shifted to using the language of intimate partner violence (Baker et al., 2013; Cannon et al., 2015; McClennen, 2005; Balsam & Szymanski, 2005). These scholars located within North America offer two important critiques of the traditional feminist model of understanding violence. First, they suggest that the traditional model of violence—men act violently towards women within patriarchal structures—cannot be applied to LGBTQI relations and contexts (Cannon & Buttell, 2015; 2016; Cannon et al., 2016). This model, as noted Cannon & Buttell (2016)

> does not recognize differences (e.g. the differences that LGBTQ people face in terms of their identity, family of origin, discrimination they may face at workplaces and housing, etc.) experienced by LGBTQ people. Or, more precisely, this approach does not view such differences as being pivotal in the perpetration, experience, or treatment of (p. 968).

In other words, the marginalization experienced by minority groups such as LGBTQI individuals needs to be interrogated and problematized in order to identify and treat violence within non-heterosexual and non-heteronormative relations and situations.

A second important critique of the traditional model is how it obscures the ways in which power is deployed and experienced within same-sex contexts, as suggested by these scholars. The existing model/binary constructs men as having power over women, with women having power over children. This framing suggests that women are powerless, victims, and recipients of violence, and that power flows in a unidirectional mode from men to women (Cannon et al., 2015). For instance, a woman who acts violently towards her partner(s), is perceived as accessing patriarchal forms of power and control, but such a premise understands power as inherently "masculine" and emanates from patriarchy (Cannon & Buttell, 2016, p. 968). Making patriarchy the main site of violence against women makes visible *one type* of violence against women, while concealing or making invisible the other ways in which women experience violence, that may not be directly tied to patriarchy. There are public and hegemonic scripts for women receiving violence but not enacting violence. There are no scripts for women enacting violence on their female partner within an intimate relationship beyond internalizing and mimicking patriarchal understandings of gender and sexual ideologies and violence. We cannot merely frame violence through a patriarchal lens in same-sex or intimate partner relations, as it eclipses a part of the violence and reduces these violent acts as being an effect of patriarchy when it actually moves beyond this structure. What happens to the intensity of violence when none of the actors are male? What are the limits of what patriarchy can name for us?

Some of the violence that I describe below is partially attached to patriarchal ideals of gender roles and sexuality, but other forms of violence are organized and produced differently depending on one's social location and relations to power. Furthermore, an anti-patriarchal analysis of violence does not reveal or explain why women enact violence against other women, neither does such an approach— i.e., ending patriarchy—imply that violence will necessarily

alleviate or cease to exist altogether. Throughout this section, I use the category of same-sex intimate partner abuse to describe women's experiences of violence based on their intimate relation to other women of the same-sex. I use the definition of intimate partner violence offered by Clare Cannon, Katie Lauve-Moon and Fred Buttell (2016) as "the use of physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and/or psychological aggression by a current or former intimate partner…including relationship control tactics like intimidation, coercion, manipulating children, economic abuse etc." (p. 669). In the following section I show the different *types* of violence that the women in my study experience, such as racialized violence, psychological, non-suicidal self-harm and suicidal attempts, highlighting the particular context and power dynamics that makes possible such experiences.

The following excerpts demonstrate the ways in which same-sex intimate partner violence is produced through multiple and intersecting dimensions of heterosexism, homophobia, internalized homophobia, race, class, and gender identities. All of these are different sites that intersect to produce a particular moment of violence.

Racialized Sexualized Violence

When participants were asked if they had any experiences of violence, Jackie tells me the following narrative of violence:

> I expect people to be a bit aggressive and unnecessarily violent with me…I mean if yuh talk to these mix women, fair skin mixed women yuh expect men and women alike to sexualize yuh and to treat you as though as you're a two cent whore, that's it, yuh know? For girls that are mixed with black and white, or Amerindian and white or Amerindian and black like these mixtures in particular …people have dis impression that you're a whore. Like you're just a dirty slutty whore and yuh know you probably just fuck all the day long. I dunno where da comes from…so my first girlfriend would call me white girl, white meat and throw all these racist remarks…she was convinced that I'm straight or a bisexual and I'm just posing as a gay lady because I don't know what I want…she's always had this impression of me and she constantly tease me about it. So yeah we were in bed…She grabs me and rolls onto of me, she's quite heavy for a short woman, and she

begins to rub me really hard like yuh know grinding herself into me and I mean… I told her to stop but she wouldn't. She just told me to relax. I said okay…she shifts her weight a little bit up so her chest is pressing onto mine she's heavy and I'm having trouble breathing and I can't throw her off because she has me pinned down there and she asked me if "this is what I like? If this is what I do? if I get rough with him?" then she puts a hand around my neck… I can't really breathe properly … I began to panic …I think I got really red I dunno if I was changing color by then but right when I was yuh know my eyes were probably fluttering, she let go of me she let go of me and I got up. I just got out of the bed really fast and I asked her "what da fuck is wrong wid you? Yuh trying to kill me or something?" She laughed at me. She's like "what, I thought you like rough sex? Isn't this wa yuh did wid yuh guy? Isn't this wa all yuh straight girls do?" so then I told her to go fuck herself and I called myself a car (Jackie, mixed race, 20s)

The narrative of violence in this synopsis reveals the heterosexism, racial, gender roles/expectations, and sexual behaviours, which are tied to broader ideological frameworks of race and gender in Guyana. Nonetheless, same-sex women engage with, negotiate, and are often subjected to violence under these ideological frameworks. Jackie's experience reveals several constructs which shaped the ways in which she experienced violence. Based on her light skin color and its concomitant associations of sexuality, Jackie is aware that she is interpreted by others as hyper-sexual, and thus seen as a whore or slut by others. As discussed in chapter four, the process of exoticism and anti-blackness also structures Jackie's experiences of violence. The ideology of the mixed raced light skinned woman as an exotic woman continues to operate in Guyana, where the mixed raced woman is still sexualized and highly desirable. On the racial hierarchy, when placed alongside the two dominant racial groups of Afro and Indo-Guyanese, Jackie may have economic power and privileges as a light skinned woman. At the same time, when we look specifically at the identity markers of her light skinned mixed racial status, along with the ways in which her sexuality is marked through the prism of hyper sexuality, she is placed in a subordinated position where violence is manifested against her to some degree by both men and women.

Jackie indicates to me that her partner was an Afro-Guyanese woman, who was more "masculine" and often made her feel as though she "wasn't black enough". In Jackie's account, the violence was molded by these overlapping ideologies: her partner's racist comments of "white meat" towards her racial identity as a mixed-race light skinned woman. This racialized violence towards someone of light skin is connected to a perception of hyper-sexuality that informed and shaped the sexual violence that was inflicted upon Jackie by her female partner.

This racialized violence is further compounded by the socio-cultural environment of heterosexism, internalized homophobia, and negative stereotypes of bisexuality. Kimberly F. Balsam and Dawn M. Szymanksi (2005) note in their study of violence within same-sex relations in the U.S, that the "stress of living in a heterosexist society may be one factor that specifically contributes to the use of violence against one's partner among lesbian and bisexual women" (p. 266). Within a hetero-patriarchal environment, they suggest that "minority stress is the psychosocial stress derived from being a member of a minority group that is stigmatized and marginalized" (p. 259) Minority stress can result from several external stressors such as discrimination, homophobia, hate crimes as well as internal stressors such as discrimination within gay and lesbian communities, "coming out", and self-concealment (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005, p. 259). In their study of 250 LGB participants in the U.S, they found that 50 identified as bisexuals, of which 46.2% reported aggression from female partners, in comparison to 15.2% of lesbian identified women (Balsam & Szymanksi, 2005, p. 265). Given the negative assumptions associated with bisexuality as a state of confusion, experimental stage/transitional of sexuality, and hence not a real type of sexuality, Jackie's partner seemed to be experiencing an internal stressor of deep anxiety concerning Jackie's sexual orientation and identity as "straight or bisexual" woman. While heterosexual woman may experience violence tied to roles as mothers,

wives, or sex partners from men, Grace Giorgio (2002) notes that lesbian women might also abuse their female partners if there is fear that their partners are interested in men or be perceived as bisexuals (p. 1244). Jackie's experience of sexual violence parallels some of these findings by Giorgio, but equally, the violence she experiences is also racialized. In a heterosexist environment that marks bisexuality with skepticism, complicated by racial underpinnings and internalized biphobia by her partner, a type of racialized and sexualized violence is produced against Jackie.

The violence is also attached to preconceived ideas of heterosexism, particularly in the ways in which the partner understands hyper-masculinity as it is performed through violence. Despite their shared gender, performances of masculinities and femininities are essential in the articulation and perpetration of violence. While Jackie's partner embodies a type of masculinity in her gender presentation of herself, the narrative suggests that she is attempting to perform a dominant hyper-masculinity, which may be at odds with her own gender presentation. We do not know for sure but can assume this performance based on Jackie's experience of it. Her partner's attempts to mimic or engage in repetitive acts of hegemonic sex and gender roles in the encounter between them, may stem from internalized patriarchal ideas of masculinity and femininity. Jackie's partner's gender differences, physical strength, size, and abilities play a role in the violence produced against her (Johnson, 2009; Baker et., al, 2013). Her use of choking, along with her comments of "*isn't this what straight girls do with their guys*," signifies an attempt to re-create a certain experience of how heterosexual men treat women sexually. In this account, the partner rationalizes the violence as an activity that Jackie would normally perform with her previous male partners, and as a sexual activity/coercion that Jackie should enjoy. Jackie, then, is symbolically positioned as not only wanting rough sex through her light-skinned

mixed-race identity and its association of hyper-sexuality, but also her presumed heterosexual orientation. She is also explicitly positioned by her female partner as the recipient or the sexual object of her performance of masculinity through violence. Underlining this violent encounter are the racial, gender and sexual roles that operate together, generating a space where violence is not only imaginable but enacted. Jackie's partner reinforces and normalizes a gendered, sexual and racial identity for both of them through her use of violence. In this context, then, the violence is a result of and based on specific ideas of race, sexuality and gender.

Psychological Violence

While the narrative above speaks to intimate partner violence tied to specific ideas of race, gender, and sexuality, below I outline other forms of violence within same-sex relations. Michael Johnson (2005) argues that partner violence is "not a unitary phenomenon" (p. 1004) and that the types of violence experienced within heterosexual relationships differs significantly. This has lead Johnson (2005) to develop and distinguish between "intimate terrorism", "situational couple violence," "violent resistance," and "mutual violent control" (p. 1006). Although Johnson used these models to addressed heterosexual relationships, I suggest these frameworks can be applied to same-sex relationship as well. Johnson (2005) outlines the four types as follow:

- Intimate terrorism: one partner can use violence and control and be in a relationship with a partner who is nonviolent or violent and non-controlling.
- Situational couple violence: an individual can be violent and non-controlling and in a relationship with a partner who is either nonviolent or who is also violent and non-controlling.
- Violent resistance: one partner can be violent and non-controlling, but they are in a relationship with a violent and controlling partner. The focus on here is on the general control by the partner.
- Mutual violent control: both partners are violent and controlling

I mobilize *intimate terrorism* and *mutual violence control* within the following excerpts to map out the ways in which violence and power get played out between women.[53] Even though these are physical acts of violence, they are deeply secured by, and intertwined with non-violent tactics and control (Frankland & Brown, 2014). I focus on the latter aspects of the controlling behaviors and the psychological coercion as it intersects with gender, sexual, racial ideologies in the following narratives

A common pattern that emerged from my interviews is that jealousy is often used as the motivation and explanation for violence within same-sex relations. In the mainstream media in Guyana, jealousy is constructed as a normal and natural response to romantic love, to imagined or real infidelity ("A woman was murdered," 2017). The use of jealousy to explain the high rates of violence and murders by different constituencies, is nothing new in Guyana. The framing of violence as a result of jealousy has its origins in the colonial and post-colonial period of Guyana, and has been extensively documented by scholars (Mohapatra, 1996; Peake and Trotz, 1999; Bahadur, 2013). In the wider Caribbean, a similar pattern is noted, where the media portrays jealousy that ends in violence, particularly against women, as an essential part of heterosexual romantic love (DeShong & Haynes, 2016, p. 91). The wounding or killing of another person—whether they are heterosexual men, women, or LGBTQ—is placed squarely within the parameters of jealousy, while the structures and institutions that fuel the violence remain invisible. Mainstream culture has extended the language of jealousy to explain the violence ("Lesbian brawl", 2016) and thus we read the violence through this lens. However, this explanation and framing is severely limited and narrowed, as I demonstrate below.

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[53] The other two categories of violence "situational couple violence" and "violent resistance" is equally applicable to the narratives offered by other participants.

Kelly is an Indo-Guyanese woman in her 20s whose partner is mixed race and in her 20s.

Speaking about their relationship she says:

> she had jealous issues….temper problem… like I hit her and it escalated from every time we fight, hitting each other…it's not something I am proud of, but I understand we were young and we weren't used to a relationship that serious, but I think…it was okay, except the part of jealousy and fighting every other day, which kinda got to a heated fight one day …we by our boss house, we worked at the same place… he invited the staff over and we were bbq'ing, we were watching the NBA playoffs…they were doing hooka and drinking and she went in between 2 guys, and she was sitting there…they're are friends, of course. I know they are friends, they are brothers, but I was …I couldn't…I got so jealous and we took that problem outside and I just like jumped over and slapped her… (February 2016).

Jasmine, an Indo-Guyanese woman in her 40s and whose partner is mixed race and in her 30s,

narrates:

> yeah, yeah we does fight…she does come visit meh but meh does normally sleep ah she house every night, and every day meh does sit down ahh deh shap [bar/shop] and wait fuh she done wuk fuh gu home…and she cheated with me and if she know she date man…she does send me home early…meh catch she at the bar with another man and meh slap up she and then she pull knife and chop meh on meh foot and then she does sarry [sorry](February 2016).

At first glance, the narratives seem to suggest that both Kelly and Jasmine are jealous

lovers, and while this may be true, this is also a simplistic explanation. Jealousy and temper are

the modes through which Kelly attempts to not only explain and justify her actions, but to also

control and police the actions of her partner. While she and her partner have been physically

violent towards each other, her narrative reveals the psychological components of control and

surveillance over her partner's body and actions in public. DeShong (2015) in writing on

heterosexual relationships in the Caribbean, notes that men often regulate the boundaries

between race, gender and space, where women's bodies in the public space are understood as

possession of men (p. 91). Men attempt to monitor and control women's behavior(s) to ensure

they "are neither trespassed nor transgress" (p. 91) by themselves nor by other men. This also reaffirms their identities as masculine men. I argue that the same-sex women in my study also engage in a similar tactic of policing and monitoring their partner's behavior(s) in public, however, I stress that the underlying motivation of these strategies differ from those of heterosexual men who perpetuate violence against women. In a heterosexist/heteronormative environment, where same-sex women are disempowered on multiple levels, I suggest that the violence enacted by women against their female partners is a response to the racialized hetero-patriarchal and heteronormative context that same-sex women currently reside in. Unlike heterosexual men who exercise violence against women for many reasons, same-sex women do not receive the same benefits from patriarchy in the same ways that heterosexual men do when they assert themselves violently against women. Same-sex women do not acquire the same social status and affirmation of their identities, power, or privilege from the violence. The question then becomes, what are the benefits of this violence? If women are not accorded the same privileges, then what purpose is the violence serving? Although, I am suggesting that there is an element of patriarchal control and surveillance to secure virtuous femininity in the public sphere as put forward by DeShong (2015), the violence by and against same-sex women is also a response to hetero-patriarchal environment. Moreover, there is an underlying performance of power, control and misogyny that is enacted through both same-sex and heterosexual manifestations of violence against women. In these encounters of violence, there is also the embodiment of toxic and violent masculinities, that are present in same-sex relationships.

DeShong (2015) writes that in the Caribbean, public spaces are where men bond and interact with each other, and while women may sometimes enter, it is largely preserved for men (p.92). Public spaces in the Caribbean such as bars/rum shops, clubs, are generally male

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dominated, and "understood to largely to be the domains of men" (DeShong, 2015, p. 92),

however, DeShong, does not speculate about whether these spaces are also sexualized spaces.

While she implicitly recognizes the gendered nature of these spaces, I extend this analysis to

suggest that public spaces are also presumed to be "heterosexual." Writing on lesbian

perceptions of spaces in England, Valentine (1992) found that lesbian women are often alienated

and are forced to hide their sexual identities from public and social spaces of work, hotels, and

restaurants—all of which "reflect and express heterosexual sociosexual relations…Lesbians can

therefore feel out of place because of the orientation of these places towards heterosexual

couples, or they are made to feel out of place by the hostility of others who identify them as

outsiders through their dress, body language, and disinterest in men" (p. 406). In other words,

public and social spaces are underpinned by gender, sexual, and racial norms. In describing the

violence against their partners and/or themselves, most women refer to the public spaces of rum

shops, bars, clubs, camping sites, hotels, pools etc., as spaces where the violence took place. The

boss's home in Kelly's narrative and the bar in Jasmine's account are not merely public spaces

understood as belonging to men but represents, for same-sex women—I argue—a *heterosexual*

male space. In both narratives, then, the home of the boss and the bar are imagined by Kelly and

Jasmine as a heterosexual public space belonging to men.

Despite sharing the same social circle, Kelly is possessive over her partner's body and

gender performance in the boss's home. From the excerpt we can see that Kelly's sense of

surveillance heightens when her partner moves to sit in-between the two male co-workers. This

is underpinned by the racial and sexual ideas of mixed-race light skinned women as discussed

before. We can speculate that Kelly's attentiveness to her partner could be further intensified if

she believed that her partner might be romantically and sexually interested in these men, which

revealed her anxiety over her partner's sexual attraction and practices. The specific space of the boss's home along with her partner's engagement with the two male co-workers resulted in Kelly slapping her partner thereby curtailing her bodily, and by extension her gender and sexual performances in the heterosexual space. By slapping her partner, Kelly establishes the physical limitations of what her partner can and cannot do in a heterosexual male space. In that moment, she also affirms her non-normative sexuality and secures herself as the dominant other.

Similarly, Jasmine who is more "masculine" presenting (her partner is femme), indicated to me that she visited the bar every night waiting for her partner to travel home together. Jasmine says that she was consciously aware that her partner does not belong to the public space of the bar. The bar/rum shop is a designated space for men, and it requires her presence to control her partner's interactions with other men in that space. Jasmine also seemed to be suspicious of her partner's sexuality, fused with her mixed raced identity which creates and sustains the image that mixed-race women are more likely to engage in infidelity, a feature noted above in Jackie's narrative as well. Since Jasmine perceived and interpreted her partner to be cheating, that when "she is "cheating" she sends her home early", Jasmine took it upon herself to create restrictions by physically intervening in the space to guard against any potential threat from other men. The violence is further exacerbated by Jasmine's insecurity over her partner's sexual orientation and racial identity. As noted above, bisexual women have reported increasing rates of violence from their female partners in comparison to lesbian women. Her partner's desire and attraction to men is a source of ambivalence for Jasmine which may have aggravated the violence. It also suggests that women like her partner are perceived as being unable to "self-regulate" their sexual desire and attraction (DeShong, 2015, p. 94), and hence she must exercise power and control to guard against and over her partner's gender and sexual performances, desires, and attractions. In both

narratives, we can see the ways in which the violence produced against Kelly and Jasmine's partners is not merely an act of jealousy. It is deeply structured and produced by heteronormative/heterosexual sites coupled with racial, gender, and sexual ideologies. In these accounts of violence, these popular beliefs of gender, race, and sexuality are re-enacted and reproduced.

However, I, cannot suggest that their partners are only passive recipients of these acts of violence and control. Violence and power in their case are permeated with acts of resistance as well. The category of intimate terrorism as outlined above can interact with and provoke violent resistance, where one can be violent and non-controlling. Both Kelly and Jasmines' partners retaliated with violence against their partner actions as well. From Kelly's account, hitting and slapping each other seems to be a common form of interaction between the two of them when they fought. In Jasmine's description, her partner is the one who "chopped" her on her foot after being confronted about her supposed infidelity with other men. While the violence is situated within a racialized heteropatriarchal context, is it also about the ways in which the women actively engage with this violence and make sense of themselves in relationships and to each other. Thus, violence, I suggest, is permutation. It is a force; an interpersonal relationship or engagement; an interrelationship that continuously attaches and detaches itself from societal structures. As noted in the introduction of this chapter, there are frameworks for women as victims of violence but what are the scripts for women enacting this violence? How are women folded into patriarchal narratives of violence? And how are they also outside of these blueprints? Rebecca, an Indo Guyanese, in her 20s whose partner is Indo-Guyanese says:

> my relationship is unjust…I don't get do anything I want to do… For instance, if they [referring to her partner] wanna go somewhere if I say no, it means that I don't get to anywhere at all…it's not like yuh know that they say "okay, it's okay, go, you know?

Just be sure that you be home such time or what time would you be back," but it's always like, "yeah, yuh go walk and do wha yuh hav fuh do …just walk out"

P: why don't you leave?

R: I am living by her…her house …

Rebecca's account reveals the more insidious forms that violence can take, that is the constant psychological behavior(s) that she must engage with and navigate. Like the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, both Rebecca and Maya reveal the ways in which their partners evoke and use psychological tactics of control and surveillance to insulate them from their family, friends, and the broader community. Rebecca's partner played upon her feelings by inducing guilt inside of her, which made her feel as though she is a terrible person for wanting to visit her friends and family. The psychological manipulation that operates to keep Rebecca at home, making her feel as though the problem lies with her behavior(s) and actions. Although Rebecca indicated that her partner and her were physically violent towards each other as well, she highlighted the use of controlling behaviours and the coercion she experienced in her relationship daily as "far more worse" than the physical (Frankland & Brown, 2014). Similarly, Maya who indicates that she was "locked out" of her home for being with her friends/family and her partner threatened to kill her dogs and destroy her stuff are other forms of exercising control and authority of her movements. Isolation from family and friends, experiencing feelings of confinement and control over one's mobility are the clearest expressions of women's power over other women/ their partners.

This type of psychological violence experienced by Rebecca and Maya is structurally sustained and reinforced by their working-class or socio-economic status, which perhaps prevents them leaving their partners' homes. This is also compounded by the fact that Rebecca and Maya are in their 20s, while their partners are in their 30s and 40s and are more

economically secure. In both cases, their partners are the primary providers and supporters of their lives, which adds another layer to why the physical and psychological tactics of violence became possible. Given the lack of support by their family members, Rebecca and Maya are unable to return to their families of origin for help and are forced to stay with their partners for financial security. This dynamic might be intensified if women like Rebecca and Maya perceive organizations that support LGBTQ people to be inaccessible to them; if they do not know what services are being offered by organizations such as the Help and Shelter; and if they are unwilling to speak of the violence they experienced due to homophobia. It has been noted in other studies that heterosexual support workers may also stigmatize same sex practices and may fear being labeled "lesbian" by association (Balsam, 2001; Giorgio, 2002) with same-sex women. On the other hand, in accessing these services, same-sex women in the city risk "coming out", which may have negative consequences on their lives depending on their socio-economic and social status in the community.

The narratives of violence discussed above stem from both locations of Georgetown and Berbice. However, I want to that highlight that women from Berbice face a number of additional challenges. They must factor in the cost and commute time to Georgetown in order to access these services. For instance, one way, it takes 3-4 hours getting to Georgetown from Berbice by a private car and by the time one would be done, it would be unsafe to return home at night. The spatial layout of the villages creates an atmosphere where there is no privacy and anonymity for women to leave without raising questions by family, friends, and neighbours. They would have to offer some explanation for their prolonged absence, which could result in more violence against them. The barriers of costs, time, and geographical layout/distance prevents women from leaving the confines of their villages to seek help. Thus, working class younger women like

Maya and Rebecca, who have limited access to resources and lack financial stability, are located within multiple structures of violence. Their partner manipulates and exploits their vulnerability to secure some material and/or psychological benefits.

Non-Suicidal Self-Harm

The World Health Organization (WHO) ranked Guyana as having the highest suicide statistics in the world, with the media designating the country as "suicide capital of the world" (Wilkinson & Fox, 2014). According to recent estimates, Guyana has a suicide rate of 42.4 per every 100,000 inhabitants (World Health Organization, 2017) which gets misappropriated by health officials, local authorities, and the media as representative of the entire population. However, a closer examination of the statistics reveals that 42.4 per 100,000 reflects the number of men who committed suicides and whose suicides are counted in the official statistics (World, Health Organization, 2017). The statistics speak to the privilege of the heteropatriarchal environment in which male suicide gets read as encompassing the entire population. Suicide by women, on the other hand, is reported at 15.5 per 100,000 individuals (World Health Organization, 2017). Overall, both categories do not accurately capture suicides rates, attempts and ideations due to many factors. Paulette A. Henry (2016) notes in her study of murder-suicide that there were 22 cases of murder-suicide between 2009-2015, with Guyanese men between the ages of 20-49 representing the majority of these incidents, with two cases involving women (p. 31-32). While men are much more likely to commit suicide, women are disproportionally the victims of domestic violence that ends in their murder by the male partners. Although the statistics are unavailable and unreliable, sources indicated that between January and June 2010, 300 cases of domestic violence were reported, with 48% being spousal abuse ("Guyanese women continue", 2016). A common pattern and representation within the media is the murder-suicide

framework (Henry, 2016), which is where, after seriously harming or murdering their female partners, men attempt or commit suicide. This murder-suicide framework is *one* common pattern of suicide, most noticeably in the media's portrayal of suicide in Guyana (Henry, 2016). This framework is perceived to be the most predominant way in which suicide is reported, addressed, and discussed at the local and governmental level (Henry, 2016). We do not know, for example, outside of this murder-suicide paradigm, how many suicides and suicidal attempts are committed by sexual minorities such as women who love women, gay, lesbian, trans and bisexual individuals. In other words, the relationships between suicide and sexual identity, practices, and orientation are not captured in the above data. Neither, do we know the relationship between non-suicidal self-harm behaviour and sexual identity, orientations, and practices.

What are the links between non-suicidal self-harm and sexual practices and identities? What are the structures in place that sustain this cycle of violence? In a space such as Guyana, where there are very limited resources, how does one make their pain credible? How is pain embodied, experienced and manifested in former colonial contexts? In Fanon's conceptualization of violence, it is violence directed towards another, an external other, which allows the subject to reclaim a subjectivity. It is violence by white colonials directed at racialized men and vice versa that instills subjectivity. Fanon's account of violence, then, to some degree is a masculine idea of violence, enacted by white colonial men directed at racialized men. His accounts of violence also contain a spatial element in that he calls for violence by the masses, a public violence aimed at removing colonial power and structures. This particular account of violence by Fanon has both a gendered and public nature. What happens when this violence is turned inward and directed at one's self? The violence that I analyze below, especially when it is committed by oneself on one's own body is not public, rather it is private, hidden, and unspoken. The violence committed

by women on their own bodies is cathartic in a Fanonian sense as it allows the women to release their pain, for example, the practice of cutting for some women perhaps is a tangible outlet for their own pain and trauma. Even though this outlet is a painful one as it creates another kind of violent infliction on the body and psyche, it is nonetheless an act that brings us close to Cvetkovich's idea of everyday experiences of violence and trauma that is not a public spectacle. How can violence be a vehicle that instills a desire for recognition and agency on the part of the subject? How can the wielding of violence against one's own body instill a sense of freedom, reclamation and ownership over one's one body?

In this section, I examine narratives of self-harm and suicidal attempts[54], some of which are connected to being a sexual minority, and some of which are connected to sexual violence or rape as pointed out in Sandra's story earlier on. Although overlapping and influencing each other, I make the distinction between non-suicidal self-harm (NSSI) and suicidal attempts. NSSI are behaviours that are "physically damaging with intent to cause harm, without suicidal reasons/motives" and "suicidal attempt [are] behaviours that causes self-injury with some intent to die", but results in a non-fatal outcome (Batejan, Jarvi & Swenson, 2015, p. 131-134). I want to stress in this section that even though women experience both physical and emotional violence in a heterosexist/heteronormative environment, same-sex women's experiences of violence, especially directed at one's self, are further exacerbated by a homophobic environment and internalized homophobia. This is not to diminish the real and serious violence that heterosexual women experience. It is rather, to highlight an additional layer that creates an atmosphere that inhibits women who love women from speaking of their marginalization, from accessing

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[54] In this category of suicidal attempts, actions and behaviors are further categorized into suicide ideations which refers to thoughts and feelings of ending one's life. Suicide ideation consist of a spectrum of feelings, thoughts and behaviours, from passing thoughts to having a plan of ending one's life.

resources, and may contribute to the high statistics rates that Guyana currently holds as noted above.

Julie, a 23-year-old mixed-race woman, tells me the following

> I started self-mutilation at 15…I was using my father's old shaving blade, I broke it and I was cutting on my hands. I do not know where I got that from because it's something learned…there was one otha person that was cuttin'…She identified as bisexual openly. I only knew that she was cutting because she liked girls…I had all of dis anger and confusion and… I need to punish myself for feeling this way [liking girls] so it was a self-punishment because I was being disobedient against religious teachings [Roman Catholic] that a woman should be with a man…but I didn't want any of the traditional conventions, so I was okaying myself to cut…

Self-harm behaviour arises within a context of heterosexism and homophobia which are inextricably connected. We can see the connections between the heteronormative environment and traumatic feelings associated with Julie's sexuality. In a close-knit environment of a high school, teenagers like Julie, engage in behavior(s) partially due to having witnessed another friend cutting herself—one who openly identified as bisexual and liking girls. Julie admits that during this time she was trying to figure out her sexual attraction and witnessing another peer who was also interested in women cutting themselves she learnt a particular behavior to cope with the social conditions of stigmatization and prejudice.

In the heteronormative environment Julie grew up in, the Roman Catholic church stigmatizes sexual minorities, and she internalized these negative messages associated with her desire for women. The psychological stress of experiencing attraction towards other women, coupled with the internalized homophobia that because of her sexuality she is stepping out of religious and gender conventions, moved Julie to cut herself. Julie further indicated that she grew up in a close-knit family and with her parents divorcing, she no longer felt she had the space to communicate with them. *"My parents were going through a divorce and that's what struck it, my parents divorcing… we grew up very close as a family to know that my parents were*

separating…So I would cut myself …" The learned behavior from seeing a peer cut herself, exacerbated by the stress of her parent's divorce might have resulted in Julie not having a space within the family structure to articulate her feelings concerning her sexuality, or how she was feeling about the divorce. Self-harm or cutting becomes a method for her to physically manage and cope within the environment of high school and within the family unit. In this case, cutting is a form of self-punishment for desiring other women. Julie's cutting is a clear example of the ways in which internalized homophobia and her Roman Catholic teachings operate to inflict self-harm by delegitimising her experience and desires. Nonetheless, Julie is exteriorizing a feeling onto her body through self-harm as a means of confronting the everyday experiences of violence.

Non-suicidal self-harm behaviors occur in an environment where youths and young adults often have no access to resources, support groups, friends, family and institutional support. While there are a few support groups in Georgetown, these behaviours are heightened in rural Berbice, where there are no spaces for youths/young adults to express their pain, anxieties, and frustrations. Mental health, especially self-harm behaviours, are still shrouded in discourses of shame and stigmatization, and largely seen as a derivative of the individual pathology. Within the educational setting, self-harm behaviours, although sometimes physically visible, are largely invisible, depending where on the body the cutting takes places. These behaviours are also not given adequate attention by institutional bodies. When attention is given to these behaviours, Rhiannon Evans and Chole Hurrell (2016) note that self-harm behaviors are often seen as "bad behaviours" or whereby teachers interpret them as disruptive and distracting to the overall learning process (p. 7), as opposed to requiring intervention. This is also compounded by an educational structure where schools lack funding and teachers lack the necessary training for addressing mental health and self-harm tendencies.

Similarly, Kelly, Indo-Guyanese, 20s, explains the following:

> I had depression, like I wasn't sure what was going through my mind… I used to cry, lock my stuff up, you know?...I was caught up in a whole lot of emotions…it was too much of pressure... in terms of what I was feeling around sexuality… I was leaning towards accepting myself for who I was but then I was like leaning towards pleasing my family, what would they think, what's going to happen…one day I just picked the razor up and I just cut and I saw blood and I was crying and I just felt happy at the same time… it released some of the pain and that was a kinda of where the addiction for cutting started..[long pause] I think anybody that cuts understands that it kinda…helps with the pain. It's stage or phase where you feel like cutting is the solution to the pain that you're feeling…that's was what I felt because whenever me in pain I cut a few times… it kinda relaxed me, you know? I felt like I needed that pain in my life, physical pain is way better than the emotional pain…

Located within multiple structures of attempting to discern one's sexuality, identity, and her role within her family structure, Kelly also turned towards cutting as way to cope. Situated in Berbice, with lack of access to mental health support groups and resources, the social pressures became overwhelming for Kelly to manage her emotional state. Experiencing depression and feeling caught between wanting to accept her sexuality and external factors of needing to seek approval from her family [her family is reputable within the community with middle class status, which might have contributed to her anxieties about pleasing them] and what might potentially happen to her after disclosing her sexuality, cutting, for Kelly, became a mechanism to release her inner pain. As Kelly admits, "*cutting is the solution…the physical pain was way better than the emotional pain.*" The internal feelings of depression and external stressors of her family cause Kelly to feel as though she is no longer in control over what happens to her and her life after disclosing her sexuality. Although it is violence turned against one's self, cutting is the process through which Kelly can actually regain control over her life. Even though non-suicidal self-harm actions are interpreted by others as negative behaviours with long term physical and mental health consequences, it is an effective strategy to cope with distressing emotions and

pain.[55] In a heterosexist and homophobic space that offers them little options to express themselves emotionally, sexually, physically, and although harmful, self-harm is the medium through which some women exercise their agency. Since they cannot turn their emotional pain outwards, non-suicidal self-harm behaviours directed against themselves must be located within their structural context. Within a space that offers little possibilities, self-harm is one of the primary coping method through which women re-claim their sense of self and attempt to regulate their affective experiences within the structures that they are located in. For instance, one study noted that non-suicidal self-harm in adolescents, although problematic, may be an affective psychosocial space that helps them cope and release negative emotions (Peterson et al, 2008). Although Fanon does not provide us with an analysis of violence committed by women aimed at their own body, the "cathartic release" that he does advocate for gets mapped out differently when enacted by women pointed at their own bodies. For both Julie and Kelly, the effects of structural violence have different effects on them. Perhaps their self-harm is an intervention into the dominant structure in which they can exercise their own violation over their body. It is perhaps a method to help them release their pain within a structure that fails them every day. At what point does self-harm become an object or site of concern? Could it be both a site of violence and freedom for the subject?

Suicidal Attempts

Suicide attempts are also linked to several intersecting structures in Guyana. There is no one casual factor that explains the high suicide rates that currently exist in the country. A number of my participants engaged in suicide attempts due to internal psychological distress and external

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[55] Please see, for example, the work of Peterson et al., (2008) for a discussion of how non-suicidal self-harm is used as an effective psychological method to cope with distressing situations.

structures. As noted in the section on rape, Sandra attempted suicide by drinking poison as a

teenager as a mechanism to deal with the traumatic effects of being raped. Other participants

such as Rebecca attempted suicide due to familial conflict. Rebecca admits to attempting suicide

on a few occasions,

> many things…the last thing left to do is jump ova board or pull a trigger on my head. I drink poison already …we [her mother and her] had a lil misunderstanding…when I wake up the nurse tell me that I was unconscious, and they give me some drops fuh drink and injections and stuff…so it was just a misunderstanding. I join this online thing…for suicide help and sometimes when things does botha [bother] me, I does text the line and somebody be there would text me, but otherwise I don't have nobody that I could communicate with that, you know?…like a counselor or whatever fuh talk or share yuh problems and they can give me their point of views of what to do or how to take the situation or whateva…(Indo-Guyanese, 20s)

At a social and cultural level, lack of family support and interpersonal conflict between Rebecca

and her mother resulted in her drinking poison. As discussed above, in the psychological

violence section, Rebecca's working-class status, rejection by her family—because of her sexual

identity and practices—and her partner's behaviours of control and coercion, have direct

implications on her mental health and physical well-being. Rebecca is keenly aware that outside

of the suicide telephone helpline, there is no individual or collective group she can turn to for

help in distressing situations. Suicide attempts, then, are her outlets from her pain.

Similarly, Amelia, a self-identified lesbian of working-class background, slit her wrist after

feeling rejection from her mother:

> I slit my wrist right in front of mommy… I was thinking that if yuh can't accept me might as well just be dead. She [mother] kept saying that "yuh gotta change, this is nah yuh and yuh gotta change" …it got overbearing for me cause I know this is me after all this time… I already accepted myself, she didn't accept me, I couldn't deal with it. I was just thinking that maybe this would finally get her to understand yuh know? Understand how hurt I am, the whole thing was just trying to get her to understand… I was thinking to myself if my own motha can't accept it, who else would yuh know?" (mixed-race, 20s).

Sonia, a self-identified lesbian of working-class background, describes the physical and psychological stress of taking care her of her ailing mother coupled with her partner leaving her, caused her to take a mixture of pills. She explains:

> My mom was very ill and at that time we didn't know whether she was going to live or die and I had my g/f … she was bi-curious or curious about her sexuality but it came to a point where she decided she wanted to date a guy and she was like "oh…I am gonna date a guy because he likes me and my parents expect that I should be with a guy and I think you should date a guy and then we can get married and have a relationship on the side"…I'm like "I'm not that type of person, I know what I am and at least figure out what you are"…it came to that point where I wasn't getting to sleep well cause my mom was sick and I was always awake and basically I wanted it to end, yuh know? yuh know my family would have been better off and then my g/f at the time who is not making the choice of what she wanted exactly so I had a concoction of mixing of pain killers and sleeping pills…(mixed-race, 20s)

Amelia and Sonia's relationship to their mothers/family played a crucial role in their mental well-being. After disclosing her sexual identity to her mother and receiving no support regarding her gender and sexual identity, Amelia's mental health was compromised. For LGBT individuals, accepting one's sexual identity/orientation, disclosure of that identity, lack of coping skills, and fear of reprisal by the homophobia environment can result in depression, chronic stress, and overall a poorer mental health and higher levels of self-harm, suicidal ideation and behaviors (Russell & Fish, 2016). In Amelia's narrative, her disclosure of her sexual identity to her mother and the lack of acceptance from her, along with feeling ostracized by society resulted in Amelia slitting her wrist to release her pain.

Sonia reveals the physical demands of an ailing mother and anxiety over her partner's sexual orientation. Romantic relationships are usually a site of support, care, and belonging for same-sex women in a space where they are marginalized and stigmatized by the dominant culture. Having romantic and loving relationships are important to one's emotional and physical well-being, however, there are also the site of violence and harm for women. Sonia's partner's desire to participate in her bi-curiosity while remaining within the confines of the

heterosexual/heteronormative structures is a stressor for Sonia. Her ailing mother, the internalized homophobia of her partner, and her sexual desires were difficult barriers for Sonia to negotiate, which increased the odds of her engaging in suicidal attempts. The social, political, and economic contexts of Guyana have direct implications for the mental health and physical well-being of LGBQ women and same-sex women. The context that they reside in, from family structures, lack of legal protection, stigmatization of same-sex desires, their mental health, and socio-economic opportunities shape and, in turn, guide their options and behaviour. To keep our view of violence as a mutual category seems to require that we keep a context-dependent relationship at the forefront of our analysis, where the subject and environment continuously intersect and alternate.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for a broader conceptualization of violence as a force, where racialized heteropatriarchy operates as a mechanism to structure, sustain, and produce the violence against women, and between women who love women and LGBQ women. I argue that heteropatriarchy overdetermines our theorization of violence; where the naming of violence and the meanings ascribed to these categories are limited. To this extent, I have argued for a framework of violence that encompasses heteropatriarchal violence, and also moves beyond it, at the same time. To think of violence as a force stemming from a multiplicity of sites, is to hold the current structural sites in its view, and also to recognize the ways in which violence is situational, provisional and in constant flux.

This chapter drew attention to the different types of violence - sexual violence, including rape, childhood experiences, racialized, and psychological violence, and non-suicidal self-harm

and suicidal attempts. The narratives of violence presented and discussed draw attention to the ways in which violence is multifaceted, how it is perceived, understood, and experienced by same-sex and LGBQ women who are located within complex processes and discourses of race, gender, class, and sexual practices, identities and orientations. The violence is further embedded and exacerbated by spatial possibilities and limitations. In centering violence, the narratives demonstrate the ways in which women are direct recipients of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Others enact and interpret the violence against their same-sex partners as a natural and normal expression of their love for each other. But when we scratch the surface of these narratives, we can comprehend the ways in which the role and effect of racial, gender, class and sexual ideologies operate to produce and uphold the violence informed by racism and heteropatriarchal structures. Unlike some same-sex women who enact violence against their partners, others direct the violence towards themselves in order to cope with their own psychological limitations, to establish control, to deal with their losses, or to simply express their pain. In an environment where WLW and LGBQ women are invisiblized, where they are emotionally distant and rejected by their families, and further penalized by institutional structures that mark their bodies, identities, and practices as deviant and out of place, women are left in a position of vulnerability where violence is inevitable. The violence from the socio-political order, from others, and against one's self is normalized and seen as an everyday type of interaction. Furthermore, the violence can also be thought of a way to push back against the racialized heteropatriarchal oppression. These factors contribute to and become embedded in the culture of violence in Guyana and the broader Caribbean region.

CHAPTER 6: LGBTQ 'RIGHTS' IN THE GUYANESE CONTEXT

Across the Caribbean region and in different segments of Guyana's population, there are increasing conversations over the "rights" of same-sex individuals from different religious, political and public bodies, with each holding a different set of responses and attitudes towards sexual rights and citizenship in the country. In Guyana, same-sex sexual acts, particularly buggery (anal sex) between men, remain criminalized under the country's Criminal Law (Offences) Act. The state further disproportionally targets, punishes and imprisons gay men, men who cross dress in female attire and transgender women under the "improper purposes" clause in the Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Act. Under the Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Act Chapter 8:02, section 153 (1) (XLVII) the laws states:

> being a man, in any public way or public place, for any improper purpose, appears in female attire; or being a woman, in any public way or public place, for any improper purpose, appears in male attire

Although the "improper purpose" clause is vague, undefined and inconsistently upheld and applied, when the laws are utilized, they function to target gender and sexual non-conforming individuals, particularly men who cross dress (regardless of their sexual orientation) and transgender women. This is reflected, for instance, in cases where law enforcement officers often carry out acts of sexual violence against gay men and trans women as means of state regulation in the shoring up of heterosexuality and heteronormativity (Trotz, 2014). Writing about the case of Colwyn Harding, an Afro-Guyanese male who was sodomized by a police baton, Trotz (2014) demonstrates the ways in which state violence by police officers becomes permissible as it is underlined by notions of racialized masculinity, class inequalities, "(hetero)sexual respectability," and the victim's, Harding's, "supposed (homo)sexuality" which "disqualifies him from any claim of sexual abuse" (p. 358). This is one of many cases in which sexual

violence against gay men and transgender women is normalized through state apparatuses, informed by heteronormative ideas of masculinity, sexuality and violence. We can also see a continuation of state violence in the ways in which gay men and transgender women are repeatedly positioned as hypersexual and hyper-violent in numerous newspaper outlets in Guyana (Giles, 2014).[56] While the content of the law indicates that women who dress in male attire are technically supposed to be reprimanded by law, in reality however, women are rarely ever punished for appearing in men's clothing in the public, since it is more culturally and socially acceptable for women to be in "men's" clothing. However, by legally punishing these non-normative bodies, the law has "symbolic power" (Jackman, 2017) as it constructs a particular image of the nation as a (hetero)sexual state with cross dressers, gays, lesbians, and transgender women perceived as threats to its national citizenry (Alexander, 1994). Materially, the law has profound social, political and economic implications as it tends to reinforce a binary logic between sex and gender roles, and those who fail to conform to traditional gender roles are often denied access to employment, education, health care and protection from violence ("Consultations on anti-discrimination", 2017; Trotz, 2014).

The high levels of public violence meted out against gay men, cross dressers, and transgender women has sparked a lot of the advocacy work currently carried out in Guyana driven by organizations such as Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD), Guyana Trans United (GTU), Red Cross, and Guyana Rainbow Foundation (Guybow). Working independently and collaboratively, each organization addresses multiple issues on different fronts. The public visibility, activism and political engagement carried out by gay men and trans

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[56] http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2014/07/21/jilted-man-butchers-gay-sex-workers-kills-self/
http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2015/07/23/male-sex-worker-shot-dead-by-angry-client/
http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2017/03/11/male-sex-worker-robs-client-of-cash-wrist-watchcourt-hears/
https://www.stabroeknews.com/2017/news/stories/03/08/arrest-warrant-re-issued-marcus-bisram/

women reflects existing socio-political structures, where men already have access to political processes, and through juridical apparatus engages with the state.

To various degrees, women across racial, sexual and class lines, remain excluded from political institutions and processes in Guyana. The cultural and social acceptability of women dressing in men's attire produces an unintended effect, whereby some women can choose to remain silent, invisible and outside of the LGBTQ activism. Against this backdrop where public discourses, conversations, and activism centers the decriminalization of crossing dressing laws, LGBTQ women and WLW disappear in the law, activism, "rights" talk, and in the public imagination. Increasingly, in the region, more and more politicians, activists, NGOs and policy makers are using the language of "rights" and "citizenship," to make claims for rights or withholding rights on behalf of non-normative sexualities. Yet we know less about individuals, especially women's understandings and embodiments of rights and sexual citizenship.

This chapter intervenes in this dominant narrative to center LGBQ women and WLW voices, experiences and understandings of "rights." The majority of the narratives in this chapter stem from middle-class mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women's experience of rights, same-sex marriage, and sexual citizenship from urban Georgetown and rural Berbice. This chapter argues that the desire for same-sex marriage and sexual citizenship is largely a middle-class phenomenon in Guyana to ensure the transfer of property rights. This is not to say that middle-class women do not have erotic subjectivity, but rather that in this chapter I am exploring the erotic subjectivity of working-class women and how it is shaped by multiple factors. The erotic subjectivity of working-class women is produced differently given that they do not turn towards the state for legal recognition. In this sense, there is an element of resistance against the state and the political order by working-class women in their orientation away from seeking legal rights.

Middle-class women are still waiting for legitimization by the state. Moreover, the erotic

subjectivity of working-class women is also produced differently given that they do not

participate in a discourse of rights, access leisure trips, queer spaces and queer commodity

culture in international cities, as opposed to middle-class women who may be able to. Perhaps

for middle-class women, their erotic subjectivity lies in their ability to seek out an alternative

place of belonging, forge an identity and imagine themselves as part of a global community of

queer subjects, which is only enabled through transnational practices.

Taking the category of "erotic subjectivity," I trace the ways in which the erotic is

enacted within the discourses of same-sex marriage and sexual citizenship by working-class

women across racial categories, demonstrating the ways in which the erotic is instrumental to

women's lives amidst conditions of heteronormativity and ongoing violence.

Transnational Sexual Citizenship and Rights

What does "LGBTQ rights as human rights" mean in Guyana? What exactly does it

entail? According to whose standard? And who has the decision-making power to withhold or

implement rights? And for whom? Returning to Richardson's (2000) ideas of sexual rights as:

conduct-based, identity-based and relationship-based rights, and Murray's third understanding of

rights as legal and political equality, I examine ways in which middle-class mixed-race and Indo-

Guyanese women envision sexual rights. Cutting across both the urban and rural, I argue that

middle-class women orient themselves towards the law: envisioning legal and political reforms

as mechanisms that will include them within the nation through the granting of rights. These

understandings of 'sexual rights' are further linked to a transnational framework of sexuality in

which they are folded into an international queer community, where they experience feelings of

belonging and community as queer subjects. Working-class women challenge this legal orientation of middle-class women through erotic subjectivity.

Middle-class Perspectives

When asked about what they "thought of sexual rights as human rights", middle-class mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women in my study emphasised Richardson's identity-based rights and relationship-based claims, that is, while they note their sexual identity, they also center their relationship to the wider society. The two categories of identity-based and relationship-based rights are attached to Murray's latter formulation of what a human right means. Put differently, mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women's articulation of rights mimicked a Euro-American framework of rights in which they see themselves being denied access to rights on the basis of their sexual conduct, identity and relationship. (Richardson, 2000; 2017). Rachel (mixed race, 20s) said, "As for being a lesbian in a third world country, I want to be treated as equal as everyone else and get paid for my labour…I should be treated as equal as a straight one, I want to be judged as equal not because of my sexual preferences." Other participants such as Mira (mixed race, 20s) also stress that she wants to "be respected as a person and see we as equal." While some participants see rights as an extension to *choose* to "love whoever," (Plummer, 2003) their understandings of rights are deeply intertwined with universal ideas of human rights such as freedom from violence, freedom of speech, and equal treatment in the public sphere as per Richardson's formation of sexual rights as seeking rights from social institutions. In the following excerpts, while the women do not center their identities, they are positing the external environment—the ways in which social and political institutions inhibit their ability to access state resources; and engage in public display of gender and sexual affections.

> nobody won't be afraid to walk the road without anybody saying anything…you ain't got to worried that you can't go certain places because if you go this village people don't like gays. You must be able to walk down the road and don't got to look back, or wondering if anybody might come up and do yuh something (Tara, black, 20s)

> It means equality in all regards. In the work force, marriage equality, freedom of speech and expression. Things that all people should be entitled to. No bias, no different set of standards because you're gay. (Jackie, 20s, mixed race)

> putting gay marriage in place, legalizing it would mean that we would have equal rights like straight people do. I mean you could walk in public, hold hands and kiss, and be comfortable. (Emily, 20s, Indo-Guyanese)

For these participants "rights" are articulated in a very particular way, that is they emphasise rights through 'sameness' as opposed to 'difference'. Referring to this process as the "politics of normalization," Richardson (2005) argues that LGBT political discourse "although it too deploys ''sameness'' with heterosexuals as a central aspect of its argument, differs in that it emphasises the rights of individuals rather than ''gay rights'' and in seeking ''equality'' with, rather than tolerance from, the mainstream" (p. 516). Current LGBTQ human rights movement privilege sexual identity as a means to seek political recognition, economic access to state resources, and social legitimization by emphasizing their *difference in identities*. Rather than asserting their differences in identities as a means to claim and seek access to political and legal rights, mixed race and Indo-Guyanese middle-class women's articulation of rights centers their *rights as individuals*, as opposed to "gay/lesbian rights." This aligns with Murray's third articulation of rights as tied to an individual universal subject entitled with basic legal and political rights. Their understanding of rights is expressed as a desire to be free from public violence, and discrimination in public and state arenas.

Civil and Legal Rights

While they desire same-sex marriage, most middle-class women do not see it as an urgent goal, as Julie (mixed race, 20s) said, "I don't see it as a priority…[we need] to have more

activities to highlight the population of lgbt persons in Guyana…then bring in the right for same

sex marriage which would open access to healthcare with a spouse and adoption rights as a

couple." In other words, she suggests that LGBTQ individuals need more educational programs

and workshops to highlight and reflect the diversity of their population as opposed to fighting for

same-sex marriage. Consequently, same-sex marriage is seen as a secondary objective and a

subcategory under larger universal ideas of equality, love and freedom of liberty. For these

specific participants in my study, their understandings of 'sexual rights as human rights' do not

center LGBTQ marriage as an immediate political/legal goal or a necessary agenda that they

should be fighting for in Guyana.

In the above narratives, same-sex marriage emerges as a secondary objective. For this

group of women, as property holders, their worries are about their partner being prevented from

legally making a claim on their property and from sharing their assets as a same-sex couple.

Anna (mixed race, 30s) who is currently in a long-term relationship with her partner believes that

there are no rights for her in Guyana as a lesbian woman,

> I don't think HR (human rights) applies to me. I can't go out there and openly show my
> girlfriend that I love her. I can't go out there and be married and be comfortable in a
> common law relationship or go to a hospital and have joint benefits for us, so HR as a
> lesbian in Guyana that doesn't apply to me, maybe somewhere else, but not here. For
> example, we went to the bank to take a loan for our car…we wanted to do a joint loan,
> but the girl basically threw out the file and didn't allow it…if she [referring to partner]
> and goes to the hospital, I have no rights towards her. That makes me sad here…I
> understand the concept of human rights, but I have none here…

There are multiple and interconnected tensions and ideas within Anna's narrative. In the first

instance, she attributes having "rights" as the freedom to publicly demonstrate her love for her

partner or be "out there" or what Richardson has referred to as "conduct-based" claims. Anna

also points to the material limitations of "rights" in Guyana and the ways in which its application

falls short. Since the current laws in Guyana do not protect sexual orientation nor do they recognize same-sex relations, middle-class women are dispossessed, outlawed and excluded from accessing other state resources. Referring to a number of civil areas, Anna reveals the ways in which she is denied access to institutional resources such as in the financial sector. The desire for same-sex marriage, as an institution, is linked to its accompanying state conferred benefits such as land and property inheritance, access to health care, and legal guardianship for middle class women. While there may be a component of love and monogamous commitment to one's partner, for middle-class mixed-race and Indo-Guyanese women, this is not the underlying goal or motivation for wanting to get married.

Sandra (mixed race, 30s) was previously married to a man. She is now currently with her partner for over 10 years and does not desire marriage for its symbolic commitment.

> I was the one who got married, I am not really crazy about getting married. I think if ever that happens here in Guyana, we would welcome it with open arms, we would want to get married legally in Guyana because you live, you have stuff here, and you want to know the other person has legal rights? Like we are living together now, we are building a house, what are my legal rights if anything happens to her? What are her rights if anything happens to me? We can't just put it down on paper and say that we are a couple, you know?

In 2012, the government of Guyana passed the *Rights of Persons in Common Law Union Bill*, which granted persons in common law union for over five years, the legal right to claim inheritance after the passing of a spouse (Common-law unions, 2012). However, the amendments are specific to single women who have been living with men or vice versa. Far from being gender neutral, the amendment reinforces and maintains the heterosexual couple as the only recognizable unit and relationship in the eyes of law. Consequently, while the bill was amended to offer greater protection to women in common-law unions, the amendments did not broaden its scope to include same-sex relations or other forms of cohabitation. Although women

like Anna and Sandra are in common-law relationships, legally speaking, their relationship to their partners is not recognized by the state despite the recent changes. Other participants also did not desire same-sex marriage as a means to demonstrate their love to their partner but rather emphasised the material benefits associated with marriage.

Jackie (mixed race, 20s) articulates her desire for marriage as an expression of love and as means to benefits that are endowed through marriage laws,

> I'm in favour of it being legalized. Of course. People deserve to express their love in that way, and to gain the legal benefits of marriage as well. I'd be a happy woman knowing I'm bound to the person I love and will have a chance to spend my life with em and our kids will benefit from it etc. The house won't be seized by the bank. If I die, it would belong to my wife. Those things. Having the security there and knowing my family will be alright.

Mixed race and Indo-Guyanese middle-class women who express an understanding of sexual rights parallel Richardson's notions of rights as conduct, identity and relationship-based rights. These specific ideas of sexual rights are further interpreted as "universal" or "natural" rights as Murray noted. Access to particular rights is a means to access marriage and its associated civil benefits that stem from the institution for middle-class women across racial differences. Despite their access to power and other types of economic privileges, the above evidence suggests a deep concern regarding the ways in which their land and properties will be allocated to their partner and/or future children, and their rights to make medical and financial decisions on their partners behalf. Legalizing same-sex marriage is a concern for this privileged pocket of middle class, mixed race women who have been with their partner for over a number of years. Same-sex marriage rights/talks are starting to circulate in Guyana (Society's Intolerance, 2017), and for Indo-Guyanese and mixed-race middle-class women, marriage is already being envisioned in a *particular way*, that is as a mechanism to ensure that their land, properties and resources get

passed along to their partners and future children. Ghisyawan (2016) also noted similar findings

on the desirability of marriage and middle-class same-sex loving women, that marriage is

"designed to encourage economic stability and maintain clear lines of inheritance" (p. 231).

This model of marriage has been critiqued by Puar (2007) as part of "homonationalism,"

a process whereby mostly white gay middle-upper class men and women in the U.S are

incorporated into the nation state via the neoliberal market of consumerism and liberal rights-

based discourses (e.g., LGBT marriage laws). The legalization of same-sex marriage is currently

not at the forefront of issues in Guyana. However, transnational NGOs and regional

organizations and activists might advance a particular archetype of marriage, where following

Puar's claims of "homononationalism" LGBTQ subjects will turn to the state for inclusion,

seeking to gain legal and political acceptance in order to access state benefits, while not

necessarily challenging the state. King (2014) has already noted this shift in LGBTQ activism in

different nations in the Caribbean, where "the "threatening" homosexuals simultaneously

proclaim their difference *and* their commitment to the vision of a better nation. In these

circumstances, the organization implicitly proposes a radically different nation, one that retains

its pride and culture—but no longer demonizes, scapegoats, or disappears indigenous same-sex

sexuality…" (p. 117, emphasis in original). Put differently, LGBTQ organizing and activism in

Guyana, while they do not center on same-sex marriage laws, are positioning sexual minorities

as a central part in the development of the overall nation as a means to attain legal and political

rights. This is one particular manifestation of homonationalism occurring in Guyana.

Although there is a strong desire for same-sex marriage, some middle-class participants

such as Veronica (Indo-Guyanese, 20s) said that the legalization of same-sex marriage might

actually cause more harm to her, "I would like to get married but not in this environment…it

would actually bring more harm than anything…you would have your marriage certificate and yet everyone would look at you, what's the point? Can you live in your community after that? It's not worth it." Similarly, Lara (mixed race, 20s) noted,

> legalizing this stuff yuh need to look at the pros and cons of it because that gonna mean people gonna be out and proud, and people nah gonna like it. They gonna want to retaliate. More people gonna know who you affiliate with or who yuh is… so if dis thing do pass, everybody wan be out and proud and think they gonna be okay, but from what I see, from all these beatings and killings, now people know yuh gay and they can beat yuh and target yuh …look at the way yuh livin', see what's your everyday movements…all these things yuh gotta think about, right?

Both participants expressed concerns that the potential legalization of same-sex marriage and its accompanying visibility politics might lead to more violence in the context of Guyana. According to Veronica and Lara, legally recognizing same-sex marriage does not guarantee that the general public will endorse it or that people's attitudes will change overnight. They fear that participating in or accessing same-sex marriage would lead to increasing awareness from others about their sexuality, which could invite additional unwarranted violence. However, these participants are concerned about what such a coming into visibility through the legalization of same-sex marriage will signify for them in the context of Guyana.[57] What does visibility signify for LGBQ women and WLW? Which subjects will be forced to incorporate themselves in these structures? Who is asked to claim these modes of visibility? And who will be left out?

Anna's understanding of "rights" also exists in tension with other groups that are fighting for other *types* of political and legal rights. For example, LGBTQ activism predominantly centers on challenging existing colonial laws which are operating to target gay men and transwomen (Marzouca, 2017; Wills, 2017). Since these laws rarely apply to non-trans women, especially for middle-class women like Anna and others, as I show below, their conceptions of "rights" is a

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[57] The current movement in Guyana focuses on decriminalizing cross-dressing laws. There is yet to be a movement towards legalizing same-sex marriage

desire for queer visibility and access to civil benefits in the state. Most of them, though, are

hesitant to fight for these demands. Although there are different understandings of what "rights"

mean: what it constitutes, the ways in which it is enacted or not, and the ways in which it is

experience at the individual level, both conceptualizations of rights—the desire for queer

visibility and decriminalizing of colonial laws—are situated within a neoliberal LGBTQ equal

rights discourses and claims to citizenship (Alexander, 2005; Puar, 2007). Middle-class women

orient themselves in a transnational context, aligning and situating themselves within discourses

of the global north. The 'transnational' here signals to the existence of a LGBTQ community

elsewhere, wherein by granting specific rights, for instance, the legalization of same-sex

marriage in the U.S, Canada and Europe, middle-class women incorporate and envision

themselves as belonging to and being in conversation with an international model of sexual

citizenship and rights. Middle-class mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women noted the influence

of transnational discourses of same-sex marriage and the impact it is having in Guyana.

> if it legalized in the bigger countries it obviously goin' to be legalize in Third World countries too. I mean the community nah gunna like it, but dam man give people a chance to do what they want or be with who they wanna be with (Lara, 20s, mixed race)

> people coming up in the young generation are so much more open to what gay society is life *outside* of Guyana, so they want that for themselves as well (Roxanne, 20s, mixed race,)

> I see more and more the gay international community coming down here to change their legislations and their beliefs on homosexuality in Guyana and I really hope that this new administration try to change some of the laws in the constitution. That's why you admire countries like Canada, and especially like U.S that they actually allow you to live your life (Anna, 30s, mixed race)

Guyana has not remained outside of the global economy and discourses of LGBTQ rights as

human rights. Local organizations politics, organizing and activism are deeply interconnected

with transnational discourse of LGBTQ rights (Wahab, 2016; Gosine, 2013; Puar, 2001; Sheller,

2012). The sharing of information enabled by the media and internet has allowed local organizations to draw on and share information with other regional organizations and international LGBTQ groups (Ghisyawan, 2016; King, 2014). For instance, after the Supreme Court in the U. S legalized same-sex marriage, chief of mission, Bryan Hunt, "invited" Guyana to follow in the footsteps of the United States to legalize same-sex marriage (Rockcliffe, 2015). This moment of extending citizenship to LGBTQ subjects in the U.S has had ripple effects in Guyana as noted by Lara and Anna. Middle-class women are able to participate, uphold and conceive of themselves as part of this transnational community of LGBTQ subjects only through the granting of specific queer rights in other contexts such as the U.S and Canada. It could be said that the granting of rights in cosmopolitan cities is already having ripples effects on these women by folding them into a transnational discourse of sexual rights and freedom.

The granting of LGBTQ rights and the legalization of same-sex marriage within Western countries is often seen as a marker of modernity with the Global South remaining as if stagnant in tradition (Alexander, 2005; Puar, 2007; Massad, 2007). The West emerges not only as a space where sexual rights and freedom exist, but as a space and place in another time (Alexander, 2005). Writing on this binary between Western nations (read as modern) and Third World countries (read as traditional), Alexander (2005) notes that, "The West is presumably "here and now," while the Third World is "then and there" (p. 190). The withholding of LGBTQ rights by postcolonial nations such as Guyana is not only seen as a human rights issue, but essentially that post-colonial nations are trapped temporally and spatially, lagging behind in a linear narrative of modernity. Although problematic, middle-class women across racial differences, participate in upholding this progress narrative, where they interpret North American and Cuba as argued in chapter three, as sites of modernity, while waiting for Guyana to play 'catch up.' This circulating

discourse of 'modernity/tradition' intersects with other registers of gender, class, race, and

sexuality. The participants in my study rely on this discourse as they stand to lose many of their

social and economic privileges. Julie (20s, mixed race) expressed this sentiment,

> Some women I know who are well educated has said their lives will be uprooted if they
> step up as an activist- their jobs, their families, their girlfriends' families and her job, and
> their reputation will be at risk, because non LGBT people here in Guyana still see a
> stigma attached to LGBT people (sickness, suicide, lack of education or proper decision
> making)

Because of their social status and class positioning, and the stigmatization associated with

identifying as LGBTQ individuals, this specific group of women refuses to participate in public

conversations and debates regarding same-sex rights. Rather, they rely on other local and

international pressures to facilitate and political changes in Guyana as Lara and Anna indicated

above. Consequently, securing their social and economic privileges and ensuring their personal

safety, mixed-race and Indo-Guyanese middle-class women have refrained from engaging in a

politics of visibility and public activism, especially one that is as controversial as LGBTQ rights

and same-sex marriage.

Transnational feelings of belonging and community

Another component of the transnational is the rise of the discourse of queer visibility[58]

and the circulation of gay and lesbian consumer culture enabled by neoliberal markets since the

1990s (Hennessy, 2000). Given the lack of legal rights that barred women from participating as

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[58] The discourse of "queer visibility" refers to the ways in which globalization has and continues to a play a role in
the production of gay consumer identities. It refers to capitalistic marketing ideologies and technologies that targets
gays and lesbian as niche markets, interpolating them as legitimate mainstream consumers. See, for example, the
works of Alexander (2005), Puar (2002; 2007), Hennessey (2000), and Bell & Binnie (2004) to name a few, on
different aspects of capitalism and queer visibility.

sexual citizens, middle-class embody and perform another type of a queer neoliberal queer model of citizenship (See Alexander, 2005; Puar, 2007; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Bell & Binnie, 2004).

The middle-class women in this study view other cosmopolitan cities as spaces where they can access resources and travel for vacations, pleasure, attend other pride events, and to get married. Migration to North American cities such as New York, London, Orlando, Toronto, whether temporary, seasonal or for permanent settlement, has a deeper history in Guyana's deteriorating political and economic conditions since the late 1960s. The implementation of structural adjustment programs and the reorienting and fastening of Guyana's economy in the service of the global market, starting from the late 1980s, has only accelerated emigration out of the country (Peake & Trotz, 1999). Guyana is increasingly integrated into the global economy via different neoliberal economic, social, political and cultural networks. Bahadur (2014) has noted the social, political and economic costs that emigration has on Guyana—growing economic dependence on foreign remittances; male insecurity regarding their roles as financial providers which results in domestic violence, and the country's overall loss of human capital (p. 198). Across both urban Georgetown and rural Berbice, ethnic and class lines, visas are given out at an exponentially high rate. In 2016, for instance, 72, 000 non-Immigrant[59] and 7,000 Immigrant[60] visas were processed by the U.S embassy in Guyana, with foreign remittances estimating to be around U.S $225M a year (Gordon, 2017). Increasingly, more Guyanese people are travelling abroad due to the accessibility of visas and/or holding dual citizenship.

Against this background, middle-class women from both regions have more access to transnational spaces and cities. The distinction within the interviews between middle and

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[59] Non-immigrant visas are visas given out Guyanese citizens who seek to enter into the U.S for a temporary period and for those entering for an indefinite or permanent residence.

[60] Immigrant visas are visas given out to someone who must be sponsored by a U.S citizen or someone holding permanent resident status. Usually, this type of visas is given out through sponsorship.

working-class women suggest that middle-class women travel to visit their friends and family, for leisure, pleasure, and some with the intention of getting married abroad. Most of the women who have travelled to Canada and the United States either have citizenship or visas for one of these two countries.

For instance, Sophie (Indo-Guyanese, 40s) tells me how she spent five months travelling across "France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Holland." Anna (mixed race, 30s) has also travelled across the Caribbean and other destinations, "We have been to Tobago, Barbados twice. We went to Atlanta, New York, Suriname and Boa Vista (Brazil). We travelled a lot...We did a lot of trips together." Ruby (mixed race, 40s) vacations for 5 months of the year with her partner. Others like Sophie (Indo-Guyanese, 40s) note their experiences of LGBT community in other cities, "I was able to go to pride. I absolutely loved going to the lesbian bars in Canada." Lily (mixed race, 20s) "I left and went to Holland for 4 months. Holland is a place where yuh know the gay rights and stuff is rampant …I drank, I went to the gay pride, I went to a lot of parties, I went to a lot of joints and coffee shops. I enjoyed myself." Bell & Bennie (2000) have noted how global cities such as New York, LA, London, Amsterdam and other spaces, are important cites for queer identification and signification (p. 92-93) as they are spaces wherein LGBTQ subjects experience different degrees of freedom, constraints and possibilities.

Contesting the borders of the state, middle-class mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women enact a transnational sexual citizenship based on a consumer-oriented understanding of citizenship. Given their access to visas and dual citizenship, mixed race and Indo-Guyanese middle-class women participate in a global tourist economy, where they affirm themselves as queer citizens through consumption practices in the choice of vacations and experiencing pride

events, offered by the neoliberal market. Middle-class women experience a cosmopolitan LGBTQ community of belonging enabled through migration and mobility and class privilege.

Access to transnational gay and lesbian tourism markets though, does not imply the granting of legal or political rights by the state. Puar (2007) highlights this process by stating that, "the nation benefits from the liberalization of the market, which proffers placebo rights to queer consumers who are hailed by capitalism but not by state legislation" (p. 62). Although they are denied political and legal rights as LGBQ women and WLW citizens in Guyana, women through bodily practices and material privileges are able to participate in and identify with a transnational queer model of sexual citizenship. Middle-class mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women's embodiments and performances of citizenship are no longer bound and confined to national boundaries, but rather deeply connected to their relationships to other global cities.

Since traditional conceptualizations of citizenship operate to perpetuate binaries of inclusion and exclusion in Guyana, another way in which mixed race and Indo-Guyanese middle-class women contest their non-belonging in the state as sexual subjects, is through their choices and options to get married in other spaces and places. Anna said that, "I have it planned already, got the ring already, so hopefully we'll get married in New York because we both got our visas now."

> P: Why is going to New York to get married important?
>
> A: it's something to show that we are married, so for her [partner] I think the certificate means more to her than the commitment ceremony. Like fuh me the commitment ceremony is more, because it's where we can tell of our love with our family, but it's not that for her…*it's that we can't do it legally here, but we can do it legally somewhere else*, we have the visas. I think she wants that memorabilia that 'yes', even though it's not recognized here, we can frame it and keep it and say, 'yeah its *recognized* somewhere' so maybe eventually we'll have commitment ceremony here (emphasis mine)

Although Anna emphasises that demonstrating their love and commitment to each other in the presence of their family is important to her, she highlights *legal/political recognition* as being more important to her partner. Similarly, Sandra (30s, mixed race) said, "you know we talked about it and she [partner] said, 'we'll go to Vegas next year and get married' …we were actually talking about who we would invite family and stuff." Other participants such as Ruby (40s, mixed race)

> I think we would want to be married and live just like heterosexuals, and want to share things and build together, but because of what society offer us, we just have to live like da or go to the U.S and get married. But of course, we go to the US and get married and come back to Guyana, it's still not the same. We gotta make up our minds to migrate or something like that…

The current political party in Guyana, the APNU+AFC, advances "respect" and "acceptance" for LGBT people (Singh, 2016), but to date has made no attempt to change or implement legislations that will benefit LGBTQ subjects. The lack of access to legal rights combined with the class status, cultural capital, and social mobility enabled through immigration visas means that these women travel abroad to seek out legal and political recognition that they do not back home, as noted by Anna, Sandra and Ruby. Given that the state does not offer any basic civil rights to LGBTQ women and WLW, and fails to protect women from violence, middle class women reach for a transnational model of sexual citizenship that is already established in the context of the global north. For this small group of women, sexual citizenship is no longer about a fixed stable subject seeking political and legal recognition within the rigid boundaries of the state, although it includes these dimensions. Sexual citizenship, as embodied by mixed raced and Indo-Guyanese middle-class women, transgresses national boundaries, containing a spatialized element embedded within citizenship. Their embodiment of sexual citizenship is also

underpinned by their relationship to space—in these cases their relationship to other cities—as much as it is bound up with registers of class, race and gender.

The desire for recognition and validation by middle class women as queer subjects has to be situated within and seen as a product of the discourse of queer visibility; a discourse that centers 'being out and proud' and rewards gender and sexual transgression in the public sphere. This desire for public recognition, whether legal or not, is a queer discourse that marks, identifies, and rewards a particular *type* of visible queerness enabled through neoliberal markets and LGBTQ rights and activism, leaving very little room for other conceptualizations of sexual subjectivity; sexual subjectivities and embodiments that do not follow this pattern. Cruz-Malave & Manalansan IV (2002) write on the ways in which this dominant understanding of queer sexuality homogenizes and silences other ways of being,

> While globalization is seen to liberate and promote local sexual difference, the emergence, visibility, and legibility of those differences are often predicated in globalizing discourses on a developmental narrative in which a premodern, prepolitical, non-Euro-American queerness must consciously assume the burdens of presenting itself to itself and others as "gay" in order to attain political consciousness, subjectivity and global modernity (p. 6)

In other words, the queer narrative rests on a subject self-disclosing their sexual identities and orientations as a means to attain visibility, affirm their subjectivity and be understood as a modern subject. The women participate in this framework of global queerness and desire visibility as put forward by the LGBTQ movement. However, this type of visibility of claiming an LGBTQ identity and of being 'out and proud' has not historically been a part of Guyana and the broader Anglophone Caribbean. Consequently, there is a tension between those who desire legal and political recognition and those who do not participate in or imagine themselves as queer subjects such as in the case of those who identify as WLW. Foucault (2000) has shown us how human beings are constituted as "sexual" subjects through a multiplicity of discourses—

language, science, psychology—since the late 17th century. In other words, to see oneself as a "sexual" subject and as part of one's identity is a result of different power relations, fields of knowledge and the overall production and circulation of that knowledge. The subject that recognizes themselves as a 'sexual' subject continues to be produced through these discourses and participates in the Foucauldian "act to identity telos" (Puar, 2009), where in the former one's sexual behavior and practices were not interpreted as an aspect of one's identity. The rise and shift from act-to-identity is a result of modernist thinking about sexuality but this has not been central to Caribbean imaginings of sexuality. The transnational politicization of LGBT identities and subsequent claims to "rights" has created a space where mixed race and Indo-Guyanese middle-class women desire recognition as LBTQ subjects. This group of women desire this type of LGBT recognition enabled and embedded within queer and identity political discourses.

However, recognition and validation of their identities as mixed race and as Indo-Guyanese LGBQ women and as WLW is currently not possible within Guyana's political, cultural and social landscape. The post-modern subject as Stuart Hall (1993) has observed, is "conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity" (p. 598). Identities are formed in and through social relations with the external environment, and hence there is no coherent "self" (Hall, 1993, p. 598). Consequently, according to Hall (1993), since there is no unified self, "identities are contradictory" pulling us in "different directions," and we often identify with more than one identity in any possible moment (p. 598). Having multiple fluid identities opens up different possibilities, but Hall (1993) also draws our attention to the *consequences* of having multiple intersecting identities, or "what is at stake" in our embodiment of compounded identities (p. 600, emphasis mine). What is at stake, then, in claiming a visible queer identity in Guyana? Who gets included and under what conditions? Who gets left out of

this visibility? The discourse of queer visibility has produced a space for mixed race and Indo-Guyanese middle-class to claim and assert their identities as LGBQ women or WLW. However, the very embodiment of these identities within a violent space operates to foreclose public visibility, activism and political engagement.

For this group of women who (a) already have limited access to the public political processes and structures by virtue of being women, (b) materially stand to lose their class privileges if they were to engage in public political activism, and (c) are conscious that public political engagement especially grounded in 'LGBTQ activism' brings about different levels and kinds of violence (a point which I discuss later on in this chapter), the women might instead opt to access other transnational spaces to ensure that their class privilege remains intact, but most importantly, that they remain safe from public violence. Participating in public discourses of LGBTQ activism and rights base talks/movements might actually invite further scrutiny and violence. Equally important they are also positioned in the local media as violent and aggressive women as noted in chapter five.

In such a space and place, where systematic and physical forms of violence dictate their choices and options, and where their sexuality and desires for other women are degraded, punished or appropriated by the male gaze for pleasure, looking towards other cities, I suggest, might offer them a type of ontological freedom outside of their current conditions. Identification with an "imagined [queer] community" (Anderson, 1983) enabled through the legal recognition is a type of embodied ontological freedom that women might be seeking to access in transnational spaces. Mixed race and Indo-Guyanese middle-class women might not ever need to travel abroad to seek out this type of recognition, if conditions in the country permitted them to be "out." The subject who desires some form of psychological validation and acknowledgement;

the subject who is fragmented and dislocated within their own environment turns "elsewhere" for a temporary moment of freedom, even if that elsewhere is highly problematic. In the precarious and unsafe environment of Guyana, where asking for legal and political recognition can lead to additional violence, women seek recognition in other spaces and places. Travel to places that seem less violent might function as a means to escape the heteronormative violence that women experience on a daily basis. This type of recognition offered by other transnational cities/spaces produces an affective ontological freedom and experience that we cannot dismiss.

Working Class Objections: The Power of the Erotic

Wekker (2006) notes that "marriage has not been an attractive option to most working-class women" with the region containing a diverse set of relations such as common law marriage, cohabitation outside of marriage, visiting relationships and having multiple partners (p. 135). These alternative relationships that Wekker (2006) and others such as Kempadoo (2009), Senior (1991) and Hodge (2002) have described in their respective works in the Caribbean, challenge not only the laws, norms, and our entrenched beliefs about heterosexuality in the region, but are affective relationships that are sites of resistances against the dominant social order. It is through affective connections of love, desire and pleasure that we see glimpses into the ways in which resistances to societal oppression and structures of violence and near invisibility (King, 2012) are embodied and contested. Allen (2012) posits "erotic subjectivity" as a "thinking, desiring, decision-making subject, willing to transgress. Erotic subjectivity is an alternate way of knowing, looking to one's own lived experiences and one's own intentions and desires…[a] more "authentic" way of knowing…It can be used tactically or strategically" (p. 329). The erotic encompasses not only spiritual, physical and sexual energy but it is the realm where power

resides, and social transformations can stem from. This section turns toward the erotic subjectivity of working-class women to show the ways in which they contest heteronormative ideas of marriage, sexual citizenship, love and passion.

Two out of the ten women interviewed in Berbice were previously legally married to men, with one woman having a common law marriage for over 10 years. In spite of the social, economic and political constraints on the lives of working-class women, their erotic subjectivity and agency cannot be denied or erased, though it is made near-invisible by dominant structures (King, 2012). The heteropatriarchal state and nationalistic projects propose that women be wives and then mothers which reproduces a heterosexual discourse of citizenship and of women's sexuality. Analyzing the constitution of Guyana, Robinson (2003) notes that "men remain the paradigmatic citizens in Guyana…women are excluded from citizenship, but that citizenship is conceived first in terms of women's relationship to the paradigmatic citizens, men" (p. 238). Citizenship for women, according to Robinson (2003), is formulated and extended to women through their relationship to men as wives and mothers and are key sites to determine which women are "good citizens or not" (p. 246). Women are understood as good and equal citizens insofar as they fulfill their traditional roles of being wives and mothers, and thereby transmitting culture to their offspring (Robinson, 2003). Women are incorporated into and participate in the nation vis a vis these categories, and these categories "circumscribes them with ideals of femininity (Robinson, 2003, p. 246). Working-class women who have met these criteria of citizenship are offered political and social legitimacy, but they are engaging in a different politics of erotic subjectivity and agency by confronting and disrupting the demands of compulsory heterosexuality and structures of violence. If middle-class women as discussed above orient themselves towards the law for recognition and validation as LGBT subjects, then how do

working-class women align themselves? What happens when another group of women do not seek legal redress, but instead resist claiming LGBTQ sexual subjectivities and seeking legal recognition? What are the effects and implications of these differential experiences and limited incorporation into LGBTQ rights-based movements in the country mean?

The following narratives represent my attempts to trace the subtler ways in which erotic subjectivity and agency is mobilized by working-class women. I argue that working-class women do not seek legal recognition and validation by the state, instead using erotic subjectivity as a mechanism for tracking their choices, actions and decisions. Erotic subjectivity is an anthesis to sexual citizenship as sought out by middle-class women. I detail multiple state structures of exclusion and violence that push up against working-class women and the ways in which they enact an alternative type of embodied freedom. Allen (2012) refers to these moments as the "small acts of refusal" (p. 327) that can have wide ranging consequences and bring about personal transformation. I turn to these 'small acts of refusal' to demonstrate the ways in which the erotic subjectivity/agency of working-class women gets expressed.

Jasmine (40s, Indo-Guyanese) is a Muslim woman who was previously married to a Christian man. She has a child from this marriage. She admits that she always "had feelings" for women, but "meh frighten telling them because rememba we ah Muslim, yuh living at home, yuh guh get licks [physical acts of violence] from yuh fatha, so I had to wait." Her first act of erotic agency stems from recognizing her own embodied feelings of desires towards women. It is important to note that she does not name her feelings according to sexual identification categories, but rather recognizes that such affective dispositions towards women existed within her body, and that she had to wait before she could explore such feelings. Lorde (1984) describes how the erotic is "the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding…The

erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge" (p. 56). In other words, the

erotic is that internal sense of ourselves that guides our actions and our capacity to made

decisions according to our environments. Once we are aware of this internal power,

transformations can become possible. Jasmine, although aware of this erotic capacity, the

conditions of being Muslim and living in her home with her family meant that she had to walk a

fine balance between her own sexual desires and her familial expectations of her. Fulfilling the

demands of heteropatriarchy and heterosexuality, her parents "hustle to find somebody to marry"

her off. After years within her "family life", she could not make her marriage "wuk." Despite

trying to make her marriage work and having a child, Jasmine is well aware of how these

relationships and roles grounded in marriage and child rearing could not bring her love,

happiness and sexual satisfaction,

> Yes, you could mek a child but yuh feelins' is nah there, and then yuh meet and like this
> woman and yuh end up with this woman…yuh get the *feelins*' and then yuh nah kay nah
> more, and yuh start gettin' brave and strang…

Despite conforming to the traditional heterosexual family structure and having a child, Jasmine

did not experience any romantic and sexual feelings towards her male partner. The dominant

discourse positions romantic love, sex and pleasure as a "normal" and "innate" expression of

heterosexuality, with an accompanying delegitimization of non-heterosexual love (Ghisyawan,

2016, p. 264), with laws further entrenching heterosexual relations and love in the Caribbean

(Alexander, 1994; Robinson, 2003), leaving very little space for other expressions of non-

heterosexual desire and sexual pleasure. King (2012) reminds us that the dominant discourse of

Caribbean masculinity is one that aggressively polices women's sexuality and pleasure and

attempts to keep it trapped within the confines of heterosexuality, making women who desire

women near-invisible. While this is the overarching structure, Jasmine's sexual experiences with

another woman runs counter to this homogenous narrative, "when I sleep with man like meh nah feel nice, but of the lates I start get orgasm when I been with woman." In other words, while working class women are coded as heterosexual women and remain invisible as 'women who love women,' their private desire/pleasure is a site that contests the domain social order. Her sexual experience with another woman confronts the domain social order that locates sexual pleasure squarely within heterosexual relationships as the only and ultimate site of gratification. Ghisyawan (2016) echoing the works of Crawford (2012) and Lloyd (2015) advocates separating out women's sexual pleasure from the domains of heterosexuality and reproduction to examine how other ways of loving such as multiple partnering, varied sexual behaviors, and intense female friendships by same-sex loving women in Trinidad enact a politics of resistance and embody a form of sexual citizenship in the state.

The conditions and structures that Jasmine described above shifted as she acquired some economic stability, owning her own home and being independent from her family. This led her to acknowledge her own erotic desire for women, but perhaps more importantly, reclaiming her sexuality away from compulsory heterosexuality. "If them [family] 'gree or nah 'gree [agree] meh tell them, 'no, how lang [long] meh [am I] guh [going] live me alone, it don't make sense to me beca yuh [you] living a life alone, it nah [doesn't] make no sense,' as Jasmine explained. By naming her erotic desire for women, publicly, and advocating for herself within the space of her family, Jasmine demonstrates her erotic subjectivity by refusing to remain silent, hidden or rendered near invisible in a culture that denies women their right and a space to express their sexuality. Even within the structures that promote near-invisibility, Jasmine persists in claiming and owning her agency and erotic pleasure. It is through her bodily praxis—sexual

performance—that she is able to maneuver and negotiate the wider social structures described above, producing a personally embodied freedom.

When asked what she thought of same-sex marriage, Jasmine tells me

> we married and just making we rings and pray pon it and put it on. We sit in bed and it was her birthday, and that was she request, that she need to get married on that day with me. I ask she if she sure and she say yes. We do up we rings and collect it, and the same day we collect it, the same day we sit and put it on.

As argued in chapter three on Berbice, working class women are integrated in the communities through other categories, and historically scholars have documented the rich history of an unspoken understanding and acceptance of working-class women's sexual transgression (Kempadoo, 2004; Wekker, 2006; Niranjana, 2006; Alexander, 2005). Working class women's relationships to other women stand to threaten the conventional notions of marriage, family and by extension the state (Kempadoo, 2003; Alexander, 1994; 2005). Having already exchanged rings with her partner, Jasmine expresses no desire to wait for legal, political or national recognition granted by the state, nor to travel abroad for such validation. Jasmine embodies her own understanding of sexual citizenship vis-v-via her erotic subjectivity; one that does not mimic the heterosexual citizenship model based on the granting of legal and political rights, nor does it mimic the transnational sexual citizenship model of middle-class women as discussed above. Rather, her relationship to her partner is grounded in a common-law practice as noted at the start of this section, that relationships are organized and experienced in other diverse ways outside of legal heterosexual marriages.

Negotiating the demands of womanhood, motherhood and her own erotic desire for other women, Jasmine departs—at least for now— from the demands of heterosexuality by engaging in a politics of disidentification: a break from the social relations that demands her to engage in heterosexuality and heteronormativity—and by creating an alternative space for herself. Lorde

(1984) remarks that the erotic is that aspect within each and every one of us that is unique, and thus it can mean many different things to us; it is that inner knowledge and power that informs and shapes our lives and perceptions, pulling each of us in different directions, sometimes all at once. It is that inner power and sensuality that once acknowledged, compels us to rethink and re-examine our decisions and choices to live slightly differently in a world that attempts to suppress the erotic. In Jasmine's case, it is to radically accept her erotic desire for women; to act on it and to live openly with her family.

Nadia (Indo-Guyanese, 30s) lived with a man during her early 20s. He became abusive after she moved in with him. Telling her mother that he "knocking me steady, whole day I deh home cooking, washing and cleaning for [him], and night time when [he] come home, he makin problems." He family offered her no assistance or support, telling her that is "we story" and to "wuk it out." These are local and common phrases often expressed to women who attempt to leave their husbands and male partners when experiencing domestic violence in Guyana. Domestic violence is seen as an individual and isolated problem, where women are expected to stay with their partners and labour to reform their partners through love. Domestic violence is also seen as a natural expression of how men express their love for their partners. The coupling of violence, love and masculinity are widely believed to be natural, fixed and innate (Kempadoo, 2008; Morgan & Youssef, 2006; Alexander, 2005; Peake & Trotz, 1999). After having a child with him, it became harder for Nadia to leave. Nadia started coping with the abuse for fear of losing her child. "After I coped because of meh son…then it became overbearing, I ain't able to take beating anymore, use to beat me head, kicks, kicking meh belly while my son is right there…I just gave up. " After chatting and dating a woman online on "fimi chat" –an online app—Nadia said, "I think to myself da dis make sense, and I said "yeah I going for it cause I

ain't able with beat, knack every day. I say I going for it." This moment reveals an explicit choice made by Nadia to change her life and escape from an abusive relationship. I write of this moment as an act of erotic agency as it is through her relationship to another woman in a virtual space that propelled to her question her current living situation with her male partner. According to Lorde (1984) "Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe" (p. 57). Refusing to remain within in an abusive situation, the love and connection she developed for another woman, pushed her to choose a different life. After an episode of him hitting her one night, Nadia describe how she made a "plan and run through the back gate," walking on the road and waiting for her current partner to come pick her up. She never looked back. The love, intimacy and connection that she developed with a woman online, a woman who is now currently her partner for a number of years propelled her to leave her abusive situation. The love that they found within each other, for each other, in a virtual space rescued Nadia from a situation, where human beings in her immediate environment have failed her. bell hooks (2000) notes this healing capacity of love; of love as transformation and revolutionary, "All too often women believe it is a sign of commitment, an expression of love, to endure unkindness or cruelty, to forgive and forget. In actuality, when we love rightly we know that the healthy, loving response to cruelty and abuse is putting ourselves out of harm's way" (p.137). Although her family thinks it is "wrong" for her to be with a woman, Nadia told me, "I say it's my life, I choose." Although the law does not recognize same-sex common-law relationships, Nadia currently lives in a common-law relationship with her partner and her partners' children. She is

in the process of getting her child to live with them as well. Nadia's erotic subjectivity and agency is the avenue through which she was able to recognize the culture of violence embedded in her own life, and simultaneously challenge this violence by opting for a different life.

Amanda (30s, mixed race) got married in her early 20s to an Indo-Guyanese man. He passed away a few years into their marriage. Experiencing grief, sadness and loneliness, Amanda quit her job in Guyana and went to New York for a few months. She worked in a Wal-Mart to support herself over the course of her time in the U.S. Returning to Guyana after her mother passed away, Amanda turned to alcohol to cope with all the changes that happened with a short span of time. Amanda recalls the moment her life changed, "one day, me and my sista and my brother –in- law, we lie down on the bed and we running through the website called fimi…it's not really for gays, but most gays are on the website and there was her [referring to her partner]." Their relationship grew online for a number of months, eventually exchanging "bbm pin" and chatting over the phone. Although this was not her first relationship with another woman, Amanda references this relationship with her partner as the changing point in her life. "I could talk to her about anything, she was always listening, and eventually I decided to go visit her, and is when we started dating. She came into my life and I started to re-live. I would say re-live again. I…started thinking about my future." In an environment that lacks emotional and psychological resources, Amanda was treading down a dangerous path of alcoholism. The erotic makes itself known in Amanda's life through her connection with another woman online. The erotic, as Lorde (1984, p. 56) tells us, is the bridge that connects the spiritual and political that can facilitate radical social change. In Amanda's case, it was to "re-live" again. Although Amanda and Nadia indicate that they would like to see same-sex marriage legalized in Guyana, it

did not seem to be a priority or a political imperative for them to fight for given their common-law relationship.

Middle-class Activism

> I will not say that I am not gay, but in the same breath I will not fight for those rights. (Grace, mixed race, 20s)

Why, despite recognizing the legal and economic benefits of marriage, are women not publicly organizing for these rights? Why are women not advocating to legalize same-sex marriage? What are some factors/barriers operating to prevent women from engaging in public activism against the state? This part of the chapter addresses these questions by examining the multiple factors that function to divide to the LGBTQ community in Guyana and demonstrate the ways in which activism and advocacy work is also highly fractured along registers of class, ethnicity, age and location.

> we are open with our friends and family with us being a couple, being gay, but not with society. When you're involved with those sorta organizations you have to be somewhat public, you have to interact with certain people and do this and do that. I have a business, being so open might not be the best thing (Sandra, mixed race, 30s)

Of the twenty-four women interviewed in Georgetown, twenty-one were of middle-class background. While three women designated themselves as working-class, their educational background and current occupations also signifies that they are not quite working class either. Most of the interviewed women in Georgetown work for the government or the public sector holding jobs in banking, law, teaching and other civil service occupations. Others have their own business. Regardless of the malleability of the class status, the majority of the women expressed that their class positioning influences the ways in which they engage in public activism or not. As Sandra said above, that to be a part of LGBTQ organizing in Guyana requires you to interact

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with certain people and be visible, but this visibility has an impact or a cost on her business. She further went on to tell me that,

> [we] want to be able to give our support and count, but at the same time, we have to think about the long-term effects it will have on our lives. We have been pretty comfortable living a quiet life together...being out can bring attention to you, and we don't want it to affect our life how we live right now.

Others such as Anna (mixed raced, 30s) said, "I have two minds because of my business, yuh know? Cause yuh name go out there and yuh don't know how people might react to it and I deal with different kinds of people, big organizations yuh don't know how they will react." Sophie (Indo-Guyanese, 40s) said, "I own a business and have assets here. It's a trade-off I guess, I am comfortable financially at the moment, and it requires a lot of emotional strength to be out and deal with the public negativity…it's a small place, people talk." Lara (mixed raced, 20s) also expressed a similar sentiment, that "it's like a stigma, people look at you and people talk a lot, it's a small place." In the context and space of Georgetown, a number of intersecting discourses govern middle class women—class, respectability politics, family structures and violence. I note these discourses because the above narratives speak not only to the ways in which class operates to foreclose a particular type of public LGBTQ activism, but crucially the ways in which increased visibility in public spaces also produces fear and anxiety for them. For the middle class, enacting their sexuality by partaking in public work of sexual/LGBTQ rights is a particular type of advocacy work and engagement that brings them into *more* visibility. This type of public organizing, the claiming of sexual/LGBT rights as human rights, does not align with or serve their class interests. LGBTQ activism is a relatively new phenomena and movement, with much of the activism still stigmatized in Guyana. Grace (mixed race, 20s), on the other hand, said that she doesn't want to be seen in certain spaces or do certain types of LGBTQ work as it "stamps

you as gay, as lesbian and you might not want to be stamp as gay or lesbian…you're getting

stamped as a homosexual, you gotta think about your job, your family, your friends who don't

know, and if you're ready for what that means." The effects of stigma and discrimination can

negatively impact a person if being seen as an activist discussing LGBTQ issues in the public

sphere.

Other participants such as Grace and Jackie (middle class, 20s, mixed race) also revealed

the ways in which family structures and the discourse of respectability politics govern their

choices and decision to engage in LGBTQ advocacy work. Referring to a talk she gave on

sexuality Grace said, "mom googles me, found the article and send it to me. She said, 'Why do

you have to do these public things? You don't see prostitutes walking around telling people they

are prostitutes'. I can't do that to my mom." Jackie also noted that,

> me being in the public eye, they [family] would be embarrassed and feel humiliated. I'm
> still living under their roof and I still have to go by their set of rules and yuh know I have
> to uphold those rules and yuh know try and please them…if I stay out, mom makes me
> out to be a typical whore and that goes hand in hand—whore and lesbian. If you're a
> lesbian you're automatically a whore. I don't get involved in protests, I would like to, but
> I can't deal with that stress. I prefer not to hear my parents telling me that what I'm doing
> is probably not the best thing.

Grace and Jackie noted how their families play an active role in their decisions to be publicly

active, which is also intertwined with the discourse of respectability politics. Both Grace and

Jackie highlight that engagement in any type of activism, especially public LGBTQ activism, is

associated with stigmatization from the public. Their families understand these types of public

engagement to also be associated with "promiscuous" women noted through the figures of the

prostitute and whore. Therefore, for middle class women to part take in LGBTQ activism or

advocacy work related to sexual rights in Guyana, would not only reveal their sexual

transgression in the public sphere but would also impact their class status. Additionally, to

participate in public activism would also mean that women are stepping outside of the boundaries of appropriate feminine and middle-class standards.

Challenging Activism

> I think we have different ideas about how to effect change, and I think change needs to happen on different levels. (Jenna, Indo-Guyanese, 30s)

Ghiswayan (2016) asks us "what do we mean by activism? How do we perceive and determine what we mean by activism?" And how is activism influenced by class and social status, race, gender and sexuality? Peake (1993) writing on women's organizing in Guyana since the early 1920s, notes the ways in which white and freed women organized around the category of "social work, charity, and "socially uplifting activities" (p. 110). These activities carried out by upper class women allow them to "see themselves as moral guardians of colonial society" where "women's roles were viewed as natural extensions of their caring role in the family." (p. 110-111). Particular types of activities such as social welfare programs, education, charities were seen as appropriate types of activism that middle-upper class white and black women engaged in during this time period (Peake, 1993). These types of activism were seen as "traditional activism" and as appropriate types of activism and advocacy work that middle-class women engaged in during this time period (Ghisyawan, 2016). Influenced by anti-colonial sentiments, for instance, the Women's Political and Economic Organization (WPEO)[61] was established and sought to educate women on their political and economic rights, across class differences, but political differences within the organization led to its demise (Peake, 1993). Other women's

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[61] Established in 1946, the WPEO aimed to "ensure the political organization and education of women in British Guiana in order to promote their economic welfare and their political and social emancipation and betterment" (Peake, 1993, p. 114). Also see Peake (1993) for an overview of women's organizing in Guyana, and the rise of different women's organization in Guyana.

organization such as the Women's Progressive Party (WPO)[62] and Women's Revolutionary

Socialist Movement (WRSM)[63] sought to mobilize women voters, organized domestic workers

in rural areas, and improve women's lives in a number of economic, political and social areas

(Peake, 1993, p. 116; Tortz &Peake, 2001) However, racial tensions within Guyana's political

parties, changing socio-economic status in the country, and conservative gender and sexual

ideologies ensured women's participation and objectives remained subordinate to patriarchal

political goals (Peake, 1993; Peake & Trotz, 2001). Trotz and Peake (2001) note how "women's

movements fell captive to the exigencies of racialised claims to power, with the WRSM and

WPO both relying on recruitment along partisan and ethnic lines […] such polarisation has

remained one of the primary problems for feminist organizations…" (p.90). Caribbean women

are also influenced by the women's movement of the 1970s, as Mohammed (2003) remarks,

drawing on the slogan "the personal is political" Caribbean women developed a "gender

consciousness"[64] that "has filtered through society" (p.6) where women began to examine how

their intimate private lives were affected by social and economic policies (Reddock, 1989). But

in the case of Guyana, racialized political elections have stifled and limited women's movements

(Tortz & Peake, 2001). Additional issues such as structural adjustment programs in the 1990s,

outward migration, high rates of employment, urban and rural divisions, and entrenched gender

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[62] According to Trotz & Peake (2001), the WPO was an "arm of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), […] [and] has addressed questions of poverty and gender equity, helping to push through legislation of abortion and domestic violence" (p. 88). See Trotz & Peake (2001) for a discussion on how the WPO evolved and the reasons as to why the organization demised.

[63] Evolving from the Women's Auxiliary of the People's National Congress (PNC), the WRSM "saw its functions as that of a vanguard organization which sought to make women aware of their role in the development process and the success of socialism" (Trotz & Peake, 2001, p. 87). The organization largely supported PNC policies, and eventually declined to do "political and economic crisis" (Trotz & Peake, 2001, p. 81)

[64] Using the metaphor "like sugar in coffee" Mohammed (2003) describes the ways in which a gender consciousness has filtered through Caribbean societies, which may not have necessarily been a "feminist" consciousness. She describes "gender consciousness" as "the self-awareness and confidence of one's rights and privileges as 'female' or 'male' in society as well as the limits or oppressiveness which being male, or female still imposes on the individual to realize their potential" (p. 6)

and sexual ideologies continue to inform and shape women's capacities to be political in Guyana. Currently, there exists only one women's organization in Guyana, Red Thread[65], which seeks to "transcend the boundaries of racialized ethnicity and challenges traditional male-dominated structures […] making connection "between the private and political, the household and the economy, the local and global." (p. 89). Centrally located within Georgetown, Red Thread also grapples with racial and class divides (Trotz & Peake, 2001, p. 89,) and regional limitations.

Given these issues, twenty-one women who are not very politically active in the public sphere in my study are middle class mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women located in urban Georgetown. The three working class women also indicated that they were not very active politically in Berbice. Very few middle-class women say that they were active in LGBTQ advocacy work given their class status and other barriers noted above. Navigating a fine line between their class status and public visibility, some women, especially younger women, are more socially and politically engaged. These younger women, across different racial categories, note the ways in which they participate in and support other women's issues and rights, following Ghisyawan's idea of "traditional activism." Marina (mixed race, 20s) who volunteers for a women's group talked about "offering counseling to women…we fight for women's right, we offer help to those women who are in abusive relationship, and we also getting the men involved so our main or one of our main objectives is the women." Similarly, Kiara (Indo-

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[65] According to Peake (1996), "Red Thread was launched in 1986 by seven Georgetown based women. The organization was created and designated to serve the needs of women and their communities. It was a response to the growing improvement of the workforce and the decline in the capacity of most women to respond to the deepening economic crisis […] The elements of Red Thread's multi-faceted approach to development are income-earing, skills-training, health education and consciousness-raising (p.149-150). See Peake for a more in-depth discussion for the work of Red Thread. Also see the in-depth article on Red Thread by Andaiye: 'The Red Thread Story" in *Spitting in the Wind: Lessons in Empowerment from the Caribbean* edited by S. F. Brown. Ian Randle Press, 2000.

Guyanese, 20s) who works for a non-profit organization in the city and offer services such as counselling, HIV testing, and gender base violence support to a diverse group of individuals (LGBTQ included) said, "for me it is about this idea of doing what is right and creating this environment where persons can really be themselves, and it's really important for me for persons to be able to express themselves, be themselves… to help create an environment where persons can live and really live. Not just exist, but live."

Others such as Julie (mixed race, 20s), who is not out at her workplace, still discusses pushing for sharing a newsletter on LGBTQ discrimination in her work place. She said,

> What I did is ask someone in my department to address the LGBT anti-discrimination act in the work place and share on a bulletin within the organization. I didn't directly say these words, but I said, 'hey why not focus on this, because it's the government seem to be focusing on it right now' so they person went ahead, and she also shared views on LGBT rights. It was well received.

While Julie may not publicly be fighting discrimination laws in workplace, she does indicate that "I would always support and share their [local organizations events] information on my social media." Online spaces are sites that can act as a buffer where women such as Julie can disseminate LGBTQ information and ensuring her physical safety by not outing herself. Lisa (mixed race, 20s) who also volunteers for a local organization framed her activism as a means to breakdown the stigmatization associated with LGBTQ people,

> our participation in civil society [is] to assist those who are most vulnerable, so that puts us in a light of not being just LGBT but being humans who are very concerned about the development of our society and people tend to react to that in a positive light when they see you helping other people. People will respond to that and they see that as it's commendable, they see us in a positive light, that we are not just sexual beings, we're a lot more than that.

Activism, for Lisa, focuses on helping and assisting other LGBTQ people by shedding light on some of the issues that LGBTQ individuals face. Lisa aims to redirect people's attitudes and

mentality that LGBTQ people are not just sexual beings, but they are equally concerned with the

growth of the community and society. She went onto discuss how through her activism she was

able to reconcile and solidify her multiple identities,

> I see myself as a feminist activist, a lesbian, a proud lesbian however I choose to define it. Before I never wanted to go out and protest, but if there is something to protest, I would go now, because I am more secured in myself as LGBT person, as a feminist, as an activist...I understand the importance of visibility and me being out there assisting in the struggle…I love being a part of the change that I am seeing

Being labelled a feminist in early 1990s in the Caribbean, had many negative connotations such

as accusations of being "closeted lesbian" and "man-hating" (Mohammed, 2003). Mohammed

(2003) writes that, a "declared feminist, unless otherwise known and proven to be a heterosexual,

is assumed to be a lesbian" (p. 18), is one the ways in which stigmatization operates to prevent

women from claiming feminist identities. However, these ideas might not pertain as much as

today, a couple of decades later, as younger women such as Lisa and Kiara publicly reclaim and

embody these intersecting identities of feminist, activist, and lesbian, to facilitate change and

create awareness of the issues facing LGBTQ people.

Other middle-class women such as Sidney, Nicole, Sandra, Sophie, and Roxanne, across

racial categories, expressed that their activism is tied to going to SASOD's film festival that is

hosted in the month of June commemorating pride worldwide. Although there is no pride march

in Guyana[66], a majority of the women indicated that they show up to support the films, but are

very conscious of the days, timings, who they attend this event with, and how long they choose

to stay at the festival. They risk outing themselves by remaining in that space for too long or

being associated with other publicly known LGBTQ individuals.

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[66] At the time of writing this chapter, there were no pride marches in Guyana. Guyana's first pride parade was hosted in June 2018. See Caribbean news now for a discussion of this event.
https://wp.caribbeannewsnow.com/2018/06/18/guyanas-lgbt-community-hosts-its-first-ever-gay-pride-parade/

Other women such as working-class Jenna (Indo-Guyanese, 30s) and Janice (mixed race, 30s), who are somewhat more visible in the community and engage in policy work, also emphasise their grassroots work and organizing.

> we also have to work to change some of the attitudes, because even though you wanna change the law, society continue to see our community in a certain light. Some of the real issues is that people from our community are struggling, they can't get job, they face discrimination on a daily basis, can't get housing…we intervene directly with family issues and relationship issues, all these kinds of things and yuh know, for us, we see that as some of the more immediate things that people need. (Janice, mixed race, 30s).

> I enjoy working more at the grassroots level. I totally understand the need for policy and advocacy and I do some amount of that but I just wanna spend my time not so much on policy and more kind of tangible direct interactions with people in the community. Not pushing a human rights agenda, but just trying to be an example of an alternative female in Guyana, you don't have to be married, long hair, make up and heels, and do whatever I can possibly to make people realize that there is diversity and that's not a bad thing…(Jenna, Indo-Guyanese, 30s).

While local organizations are advocating for legal and political changes, participants such as Janice and Jenna also highlight the need for more local grassroots work to engage with the general public to create changes. These participants stress the more immediate and pressing issues such as lack of housing, jobs, and family issues that LGBTQ individuals face. More importantly, both Janice and Jenna signal that their work seeks to change the overall culture and climate stigmatization facing LGBT people, to create an environment of tolerance and acceptance of differences. Activism, especially in relationship to women's rights, issues and LGBTQ advocacy work, is engaged in by middle class mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women. Consciousness of their environment, racial and class status, they participate in broader ideals feminist ideals, without subjecting themselves to public scrutiny.

Barriers within the LGBTQ Community

This section examines the various divisions within the LGBTQ community and their activism in Guyana, highlighting the ways in which the community is simultaneously fractured and structured along different axes of class, gender and regional differences. Within the LGBTQ community in Guyana, gender expressions tied to class also operate to structure the overall community itself. Gender performances, especially in the public sphere, also operate to foreclose coalition building between gay men, transgender women and LGBQ women /WLW. Gender expression is an important marker, delineating who has access to public space and resources; who can be visible and who can seek public recognition.

> The lesbians don't always dress like men, ahh we have a lot of gay man here that cross dress …for me, a gay woman, I don't act like a man or talk like a man or carry myself like a man, but most gay man here they tend try to be like a woman and I guess that is why it's look down upon from other people? I guess I don't like the whole vulgarity aspects of it, and I think we get a lot of that there and that's why maybe it's more tolerated when women display certain affections more than men…I don't believe we're all the same because we don't behave that way. I guess the mannerism and the displays like a lot of the gay men here are very flamboyant for a lack of better words, their mannerisms, not polite (Anna, mixed raced, 30s)

> fuh me I do not like flamboyant gay men. I'm not discriminating but I do not like people who like to draw attention to themselves, and I find many flamboyant gay men just love to draw attention to themselves, they will pick a fight with somebody in the street, so they can just be like rawwwrr yuh know? (Sonia, mixed race, 20s)

> they're other gay women that see trans women as being fake or trying to be extreme in their sexuality. They don't see it as a person is now identifying with a social structure as in changing your entire sexuality to now be as a woman, yuh dress as a woman, you operate as woman. They just see it as if yuh like men, just have sex with men, why do you have to dress as a woman? So gay women are negative towards trans women just see it as a way of gathering attention…(Julie, mixed race, 20s)

Anna makes a clear distinction between the ways in which she, as a gay cisgender woman, does not transgress the gender hierarchy and the performances of that hierarchy,

whereas gay men who cross dress and transgender women, violate the prescribed norms of masculinity. Anna highlights how the ways in which gender performances align with hegemonic femininity, unlike gay men and transwomen who transgress the norms of masculinity by "be[ing] like a woman." Gay men and trans women who disobey the gender norms are not simply stepping outside of their prescribed gender rules, rather their new/different gender performances are stigmatized. As Anna, Sonia and Julie indicates, what sets lesbian women apart from gay men and trans women is their particular behaviours of "vulgarity, lack of mannerism, and the flamboyance" which results not only in violence, but also the women separating themselves from these two groups of gay men and transgender women.

Sophie reveals that she stays away from LGBTQ organizing because she "doesn't feel like the issues relate to my own experiences." In other words, for Sophie most of the local organizing and community work centers the experiences of gay men and transgender women, and not necessarily issues pertaining to her as a lesbian woman.

As I demonstrated above, factors of class and gender performances together function to create boundaries, barriers and division within the LGBTQ community. Additional barriers such as accessibility also divide the community. Referring to an event held in Georgetown that she wanted to attend, Sonia, for example, notes that most spaces in city are inaccessible

> I said I am not gonna come cause it's not accessible, but I'm the type of person if I cannot access your building, I'm not going…it's a very risky thing to do to have a person with a wheel chair be carried up, because those steps are not just steep, but the way it's positioned…we have the community that works around LGBT and human rights, but there is still a fight for persons with disabilities and having them be realized and respected in the community because they still have that problem, yuh know?

Conversations around disabilities, whether they be mental, physical, intellectual, and/ or cognitive impairments, are new in Guyana. Issues of disability are yet to be prioritized within LGBTQ politics and activism in the city as indicated by Sonia.

These divisions affected by the registers of race, class, gender, age and disability are also further compounded by women's geographical positioning. Most of the women in Berbice, with the exception of two, Veronica and Natasha (middle class), were unaware of LGBTQ organizing and activism in the city. The geographical distance and isolation from the city have translated into a lack of flow of information on LGBTQ issues into smaller rural parts of Berbice. Women in rural Berbice, while they have access to mass media (YouTube, LGBTQ websites, what's app, Facebook etc.,), do not have access to LGBTQ politics, activism and information originating in urban Georgetown. For example, most of the women interviewed in Berbice were unaware of the work that SASOD, Guybow, GTU, or Red Thread were actively pursuing. The women also did not necessarily look towards Georgetown for information nor did consider the city as a site where they would want to travel. Most of them named other cities that they have traveled to such as Suriname, Barbados and New York for work and/or visiting family members. A few women indicated that they watch lesbian shows such as "stud life" on YouTube. The interviews overall indicated that through social media and travel, rural women also access and participate in a transnational sexual citizenship discourse in which they are accessing LGBTQ content but not necessarily connected to political rights and activism in Guyana. Women in Berbice, similar to middle class women in Georgetown, also do not look to the city for 'sexual freedom.'

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have outlined the varied and nuanced conceptualizations of what "rights" means; how it is understood and experienced by LGBQ women and WLW women in Guyana. By employing an intersectional analysis, I have argued that middle-class mixed race and Indo-Guyanese women envision rights based on conduct, identity and relationship-based claims, tied to liberal universal ideas of equality and freedom. Some middle-class women

emphasised their 'sameness' with the general public as a means to assert their desire for fair and equal treatment; to be free from violence. Others though, especially those with property, strongly saw and communicated 'rights' as a medium to ensure clear lines of property inheritance and wanting to access/share in their partners' processions. This chapter further revealed that given their material privileges, middle-class women enact a politics of transnational sexual citizenship where they can access same-sex marriage, and travel to cosmopolitan cities—to participate in a global queer community. However, I argued that their ability to engage in a transnational discourse of sexual citizenship, while enabled by their class status, should also be understood as type of embodied freedom. With their experiences within the space of Guyana—violence and loss of status—middle-class women often turn to cosmopolitan cities as means to embody and find belonging as LGBQ women and WLW. These two factors of violence and class status also complicate the ways in which as well as the degree to which middle-class women engage in activism. Their involvement in the public sphere is largely connected to broader women's issues of domestic violence, fight for gender inequality and workshops offering sensitization on LGBTQ and WLW related issues. Middle-class women, depending on their personal level of comfort and position in Georgetown, largely did not center LGBTQ issues as work they should be involved in. This is reflected in the structure and fragmentation within the overall LGBTQ community, where gender, age, racial, sexual and regional differences impact and further complicate the type of activism one chooses to be involved in or not.

This chapter also included the lives of working-class women. By turning to the lives of working-class women (across racial differences) in Berbice, I examined how, through erotic subjectivity, they contest in small ways the dominant social orders of religion, heteropatriarchal family, violence, loss and grief. Taking the erotic as an analytic, I argued that working-class

women enact and resist a politics of sexual citizenship as desired by middle-class women. Working-class women are integrated into their community through other categories of belonging, as argued in chapter four, and because of this integration, I suggest that they do not participate in an urban or cosmopolitan rhetoric of LGBTQ rights, neither do they seek to be part of this community. In subtle ways, perhaps in ways that are generally invisible to our eyes, I have shown how through erotic subjectivity working-class women are able to make alternative choices and re-chart their lives. In a heteropatriarchal culture, where they lack social, economic and political resources, working-class women have employed and deployed their erotic potential to find safety, love and pleasure amidst many levels of violence.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have told a story. Although limited, fragmented, partial and incomplete, I have attempted to grapple with a simple question of what it means for women to love other women in space where their existence is never acknowledged. The overwhelming desire of this question served to move me in a direction where I have attempted to explore this question theoretically. In scholarly literature, we catch momentary snippets of women who love women, but never a nuanced analysis of their being. We have seen partial reflections of women who love women in academic pieces, fictional works, media imaginings, and cultural spaces such as *Matikor,* but never a text that centers their experiences and voices in the Guyanese context. Interdisciplinary, drawing on the fields of Caribbean feminist thought, Queer theory (especially queer geography), and feminist theories of violence, this study has endeavored to illuminate the lives of women who love women in Guyana, traversing two regional spaces of urban Georgetown and rural Berbice. This dissertation focuses on a group of women whose lives were foreclosed and partly missing in contemporary scholarship.

Drawing on thirty-three in-depth interviews, existing scholarship, governmental laws, documents, reports, and newspapers, this dissertation has examined the voices of LGBQ women and women who love women (WLW) and their lived realities in Guyana. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that a racialized heteropatriarchal state and a heteronormative discourse of the sex/gender binary operate to influence and shape the lives of LGBQ women and WLW. These structures thus affect women's gender and sexual expressions but more intimately, their experiences of violence and matters of citizenship. Taking an intersectional analysis, I have demonstrated the ways in which women's identities are fluid and porous, embodying a multiplicity of positionalities. The identities that this dissertation chart troubles the dominant

understandings of identity politics embedded within queerness. That is, how identity is embodied, communicated, expressed and experienced outside of the west or the global north. In the space of Guyana, the women's self-identification and the claiming of their sexual identities, at times, disrupt western queer models of sexual identification, and at other times, local discourses such as in my analysis of why these women claim 'LGBQ' against the discourse of 'cockson' in the city.

Although sexual identity and subjectivity are fluid, they also have uneven and contradicting effects on the lives of LGBQ women and WLW. This is reflected in my analysis of participants' lives in Berbice, which offers us another perspective on how space and place intersect with race, class, and sexuality to shape women's choices. In chapter 4, I discussed the ways in which most of the women from Berbice have claimed 'WLW' as praxis (rather than a sexual identity) against the local discourse of lesbianism as proliferated by religious bodies within Guyana. The claiming of the category 'WLW' exists in tension and is incompatible with LGBTQ sexual identities and orientation originating in the west. This also impacts women's abilities to affiliate themselves with local LGBTQ rights organizing in the city, which mimics a western paradigm of sexual rights. This regional discourse deeply shapes the ways in which women make sense of, claim, or reject their praxis and sexual identities. How, then, do local movements and organizing attempt to bridge and address these discontinuities in the population they are seeking to represent as 'LGBTQ' subjects? How would LGBTQ organizing in the city connect their politics to, for example, women in rural Berbice?

When we attempt to theorize queer existence and life in other spaces from only western standpoints and theoretical orientations, we inevitably end up reinforcing western conceptions of sexuality, identities, and practices, maintaining a narrative of who fits and who does not fit into

the global narrative of queerness. We become the guardians of these narratives and boundaries.

This dissertation disrupts these commonplace ideas of life for women who love women outside of the west by showing the ways in which markers of race, class, gender, sexuality, and regional locations hold significant and different meanings and values. Depending on the configuration of these markers, the women in this study, as I have demonstrated, are complicit with heteronormative structures at moments such as in their embodiment and regulation of gender expressions in the city. I have referred to this as "strategic femininity" that while colliding with heteronormative ideas of femininity, allows some women to mitigate violence. At the same time, I also argued that "strategic femininity" becomes subversive when it departs from the demands of heteropatriarchy. In other words, the women's agency lies in their capacity to know when to collide with, resist, reject or subvert the goals of heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Femme-ness need not necessarily be a negative embodied experience, rather its purpose, direction, and objective should be at the center of our analysis. What end goals does it serve?

In chapter three and six, I have elucidated the ways in which class privilege operates in the city, across the country, and internationally, granting middle-class mixed-race and Indo-Guyanese women the ability to participate in queer culture and consumerism. Participation in a global queer culture enables middle-class women to engage in a transnational discourse of sexual citizenship, where they envision legal rights to ensure property inheritance. Additionally, this class privilege enables them to conceive of themselves as belonging to a global queer community, where through tourism and consumption they articulate their sexual subjectivity as queer women, as noted in chapter six. This privileged group of women is able to access international spaces allowing them to remain somewhat distant and disengaged from local politics. Access to global sites provides women with a space to negotiate violence in Guyana by

keeping themselves safe and maintaining their material privileges. While they seek these privileges elsewhere, some women in my study do participate in LGBTQ rights-based initiatives in Guyana but they are extremely conscious of their material positioning and self-regulate the degree to which they participate in these discourses.

If local organizing also centers "visibility" politics, how does this affect women's capacity to engage in the city? The convergence of gender, class, and race influences their ability to be "visible/invisible" in urban spaces. Thus, while western frameworks center being 'out and proud' as a mechanism for legitimatizing one's self and accessing political and civil rights, these positionings, in the Guyanese context, not only determine what kinds of rights, activism, community engagement and public "visibility" they can afford to engage in or participate within but might altogether hinder their ability to fight for legal rights. Would these women even want to fight for these rights if they could? To this extent, the women in the city also opt to remain invisible in the public sphere when advocating for rights and civil benefits.

Middle-class women in the city of Georgetown have developed an insular, small, tight-knit community amongst themselves. Economic independence from their families has enabled certain conditions and opportunities, where the women in the city can foster a queer life and existence away from the gaze of their families. In Berbice, however, my analysis revealed the ways in which racial and class positioning are interpreted as constraining elements for middle-class Indo-Guyanese women. The confines of race, class, gender, and space produced an environment where, for middle-class women, although they are sexually transgressive, they constantly self-regulate their own sexual expressions as it intersects with their public life. These determinants also grant them the privilege and option of remaining in their respective villages. So, while their sexual praxis disrupts heterosexuality and heteronormativity, their racial and class

privileges make it possible to also carve out space, community and belonging in a way that does not reflect LGBTQ discourses of 'coming out.' As I have shown, most of the middle-class women from Berbice have indicated that their families "know." What does it mean to "know" in the space of Berbice? The act of "knowing" is interwoven within the praxis of "dehing". How does an unspoken and silent acceptance of sexual difference offer us a different genealogy of queerness in rural spaces?

Focusing on the erotic subjectivity of working-class women in Berbice, I present another perspective on queer life in a rural space. Increasingly, poverty and limited access to economic opportunities have translated into a life that does not reflect middle-class sensibilities in the region, and more broadly; a life that also does not resemble western modalities of queerness. Across racial differences, working-class women in Berbice have forged a community of belonging and integration with their partners and children through other communal affiliations and orientations. This integration into their rural community necessarily also challenges the LGBTQ discourse of visibility politics, which seeks legal and political rights as well. Through decentering sexual identifications, I have offered a distinctive discussion of the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, class, and family structures function differently in the lives of working-class women, given that they are situated in their communities through alternative categories of belonging. If their economic status changes, would their representation and embodiment of sexuality also change? Would working-class women want to participant in LGBTQ discourses? Would they want to claim sexual identities in the future? Would it be possible for them to even participate given their economic status? How will they align themselves within these movements? How would all of these shifts impact their current integration in their communities and that of their children? For both groups of women in Berbice, their geographical and spatial

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distancing from city and LGBTQ talks/rights movements has translated into these women orienting themselves towards North America. The transnational flow of information, queer culture, and media access have meant that women do not necessarily look towards Georgetown for information, but rather through technology, they access a more global version of queer life and content. What are the implications of this?

While their economic positioning might be foreclosing, working-class women's desire moves across and in-between racial boundaries. Through their erotic capacity, women are simultaneously reinforcing and displacing racial hierarchies. Writing on the perennial relationship between the erotic and the sacred, Alexander (2005) noted that, "desire is expressed most fundamentally where change takes place, at the root of our very Souls, the base of the internal source of our power, the internal source of our yearning—the yearning and power we have been taught to fear" (p. 284). Working-class women have bridged these three realms of desire, yearning, and power through their spiritual commitment ceremonies to each other which is at the forefront of their lives. Despite the lack of same-sex marriage laws in Guyana, the women exist in common-law relationships with other racialized women, offering us a counter-narrative to the racial fragmentation embedded in Guyana's colonial history. While the hegemonic and dominant perception is that Guyana is racially divided, this is not a monolithic representation of people's lived realities and their experiences on a day to day basis. The stories and experiences of LGBQ women and WLW mapped out in this study instead offer us another reality, one in which women's lives actually do not reflect the dominant story told of Guyana as one of racial tension.

I mapped the ways in which women across both spaces are breaking down racial ideologies and stereotypes through developing intimate inter-racial relationships. Transgressing

not only sexual and gender norms, but women are also defying the racial discord embedded within Guyana's history by having loving relationships with other women. Yet it must be said that even though these women are having inter-racial relationships, there are still sentiments of anti-blackness embedded in their perceptions and desire of mixed-raced women, especially in my analysis of the women's relationships in Berbice. Consequently, as I argued, love and desire for other women might be anti-heterosexual and anti-heteronormative, but it need not necessarily be anti-colonial. The heteronormative and psychic colonial structures inherited by these women are made clear in their relationship and desire towards mixed-race light skinned and black women.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to push against feminist theories of violence. Taking a Fanonian perspective, I argued for a broader conceptualization of violence as a force wherein everyone participates in the normalization of violence in Guyana to different degrees. Bahadur (2014) asks us to consider "can history be held to account for current intimate partner violence in Guyana?" (p. 201). If so, how do we interrupt this history? How do we shift our narratives of violence? What is our role as we experience, and bear witness to violence? How are we implicated in an economy of violence that extends beyond the binary of perpetrators and victims? How do we grapple with the normalization of violence in Guyana? Violence is never discrete. Throughout chapter five, I explored the organization, production, and experience of violence as it is filtered through the structural determinants of heteropatriarchy, class, race, sexuality, and gender. Same-sex relationships are not without their own levels of violence. A common misconception is that violence occurs only in heterosexual relationships, making it virtually impossible to recognize violence within same-sex intimate partnerships. A combination of internal and external stressors perhaps means that the rate of violence is higher in same-sex relations; a subject matter yet to be discussed in Guyana and in the broader region in feminist

thought and Caribbean sexuality. Violence though, as I have shown in this dissertation, also manifests in more insidious and uncharted ways. This is reflected in the ubiquity of anti-blackness in Guyana's history and culture, producing racialized-sexualized violence within same-sex relationships. A central part of this chapter focused on the ways in which women are active participants in the enactment of violence against their female partners. When the violence is not directed at their female partners, it is turned inwards at themselves. At what point does violence become negative? When does it become a site of concern? Fanon emphasized that we conceive of violence not as an inherent negative action, but rather through violence, one can access a sense of freedom, agency, recovery, and ownership of their body. He reminded us of this productive capacity of violence. How, then, do we problematize the very real and serious impacts of violence and the lingering sensations in its aftermath, while holding this potentiality of violence for some marginal subjects?

In spite of the many layers of ongoing violence, the women continue to live, act, and negotiate from a sacred place that transforms their lives and ensures their daily survival. While I tracked the erotic subjectivity of working-class women, I do not deny that all of the women have the capacity to act, cope and change. This capacity cannot be understated, erased or denied. Seeking solace within a heteropatriarchal culture, structures, violence and abuse, the women engaged in small acts of refusal and resistance by grounding themselves within their desires and feelings towards other women. It is in the small act of simultaneous refusal and affirmation that LGBQ women and WLW have carved out spaces of belonging. As Alexander (2006) noted, "We can continue to hold onto a consciousness of our different locations, our understanding of the simultaneous ways in which dominance shapes our lives, and at the same time, nurture the erotic as that place of our Divine connection, which can in turn transform the ways we relate to

one another" (p. 283). The stories presented in this dissertation of LGBQ women and WLW, in all their multiplicities, reflect attempts to hold onto heteropatriarchal structures that govern their lives. At the same time, I also charted their experiences of love, violence, community, and rights. So, what does it mean to love women in Guyana, as I asked at the start of this dissertation? What does it look and feel like to love a woman in a heteropatriarchal space? I am not sure that I have an answer to this question or that there can be a singular answer to this question. To attempt an answer using the words of one of my participants Jackie, a mixed-race woman in her 20s, "loving women for me…it's like standing in a jungle and breathing fresh air. And even if it gets sour, and there's heartache, you appreciate it for what it had been and how it made you feel." Metaphorically and practically, perhaps loving a woman, amidst the jungle of violence and hardship, means to remember to breathe and continue to survive.

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