

Their story: Carnival, Women, Sexuality and Sex in the Caribbean

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Abstract

HIV and AIDS is a worldwide public health issue and the Caribbean region is included in this problem, especially during the festive Carnival period. It is the leading cause of death among males and females between the ages of 20-59 (World Health Organisation, 2014a). Women are currently contracting HIV at a disproportionate rate to men (UN Women, 2015). These trends have led Caribbean regional and local health agencies and gender associations to unite in support of reversing the HIV epidemic. The incidence of sexually transmitted diseases increases right after Carnival; and birth rates are highest nine months post Carnival on an annual basis. The paper addressed the following issues: the percept options of Carnival culture on the human psyche; the value of Carnival celebrations and its impact on the lives of professional women; whether the Carnival dress and the use of alcohol were considered conducive to increased sexual activity; whether the provocative dance movements and musical lyrics influenced sexual practices and behaviour; and lastly, whether or not professional women are considered to be at risk of STIs because of sexual practices at Carnival time.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, STIs, Caribbean, Carnival, culture, women

Introduction

I. History of Caribbean Carnival.

Carnival is an annual festivity held in most of the Caribbean islands. Carnival has been described as the festival of “colour, revelry, gay abandon [ment]...when sexual inhibitions are lowered. The ‘mas’ has also become very much a world festival” (Gilkes, 2003, ¶ 1). Caribbean Carnivals’ hypnotism attracts countless tourists worldwide. Apart from the economic gains derived from tourism, the powerful message that has spread universally is that ‘Carnival is the greatest show on earth.’ The complex historical web from which Carnival has been constructed has led to its rich diversity in terms of its significance and events. Trinidad has long been hailed as the mecca of Carnival. The National Library and Information System Authority [NALIS] (2009) claims that Carnival is the country’s most important celebration. Smaller islands, such as Grenada, have been picking up momentum with regard to the magnitude of their respective Carnivals.

Carnival was traced back to a pagan festival in the time of Saturnalia, pre-dating Christianity (Rampersad as cited in Caribbean Choice, 2010). As time progressed centuries ago, modifications were made to this costume festival, referred to as ‘carnivale’ by the Italian Catholics at that time, which meant “put away the meat” (All Ah We: Building Bridges through Culture, n.d., ¶ 2). It was a celebration that lasted two days prior to Ash Wednesday. Those two days of pomp signified a “farewell to the devil and lust of the flesh, before the period of fasting and repentance during lent” (Rampersad as cited in Caribbean Choice, 2010, ¶ 2). After growth in Italy, the festival then spread to France, Spain, Portugal and Catholic Europe (All ah we: Building bridges through culture, n.d.). The festival was eventually brought to the Caribbean by the colonial rulers in the 15th century.

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The Caribbean's political past of colonialism, slavery, revolt and liberation lies at the core of Carnival's birth. The arrival of the European colonisers, particularly the French, and the African slaves led to the creolisation of both cultures (Creque-Harris, 1994) and the eventual fusion of cultural influences from the East Indian, Chinese and indigenous Amerindians. Carnival's inception as an exclusive event in history has significantly evolved into a more all-inclusive one (NALIS, 2009). Between 1783 and 1838, this exclusivity was reserved for the white upper-class who engaged in balls and fetes. People of African and mixed descent were not allowed to take part in these proceedings. However, they did engage in their own brand of celebration. In that era, there were other forms of revelry that made it possible for African slaves to entertain themselves; they had the autonomy to hold parties with music and dancing (NALIS, 2009).

In post-colonial times, citizens have been warned about assimilating the colonial values that rob them of their own sense of value, which is needed for self-recognition. According to Thorpe (as cited in Bloom, 1997, p. 92): "Living in a society colonised by Europeans have encouraged the Afro West Indian to deny the worth of the locally-evolved culture and to seek instead to identify himself with a foreign cultural tradition." That said, the common colonialism heritage suggests that the past, together with the multicultural existence of the African, Asian and other peoples in the present, continues to unite them. Gikandi (as cited in Torres-Saillant, 1997, p. 58) articulates, "Caribbean writers cannot adopt the history and culture of European modernism, especially as defined by the colonising structures, but neither can they escape from it because it has over-determined Caribbean cultures in many ways." What Gikandi proposes is a synthesis of the historical realities and the diverse cultural legacies as a means of arriving at a new identity unique to the Caribbean experience.

The African traditions of masks and costuming, music and dance have had a strong influence on present day Carnival activities is well-established (All ah we: Building bridges through culture, n.d.). According to Nurse (1999, p. 661), "Carnival is theorised as a hybrid site for the ritual negotiation of cultural identity and practice by the Caribbean diaspora." Wherever Caribbean people have settled, in large cities such as Toronto, New York and London, they have taken these Carnival traditions with them. In continuation of their cultural heritage, Carnival is now celebrated in these places under the new names of Caribana, Labour Day and Notting Hill Carnivals respectively.

II. Carnival events.

A number of diverse events that occur over the Carnival season are celebrated by a multitude of people from various nationalities, ethnicities, races, religions, genders, ages, and classes. These occasions are the epitome of bacchanal in the Caribbean context. References will be made to songs in the rest of the chapter; these Soca star Destra encapsulates this intoxicating Carnival mood in her song⁴ entitled "Bacchanal:"

Is all about unity, togetherness
Carnival time we love de jamming
All ah we collectively
In de bacchanal time to start de fete'n
One thing about my country
Everywhere we go we love to party. (Garcia, 2008)

Many present day events where bacchanal is experienced have been born out of traditional happenings during colonial and post-colonial times. Events are theme based, inspired by folklore, culture and religion. Integral to the Carnival art form and to the events are the culturally significant old time characters: burroket (Figure 1), tambu bamboo (Figure 2), fancy Indian (Figure 3), jab jab (Figure 4), jab molassie (Figure 5), midnight robber (Figure 6), moko jumbie (Figure 7), blue devil (Figure 8), bookman (Figure 9), sailor (Figure 10), minstrel (Figure 11) and pierrat grenade (Figure 12). These characters enliven and provide meaning to tradition as well as creating the inescapable bacchanal spirit at Carnival gatherings.

Gilkes (2003) acknowledges that Carnival serves a dual purpose: it showcases creativity and talent; and also provides an avenue for self-expression and freedom. A variety of Carnival events provide a high level of revelry and gaiety, which cater to the diverse tastes of patrons. There are pre-Carnival events such as calypso tent shows, band fetes, boat cruises, all-inclusive fetes, queen shows, band launches and the pre-judging of Carnival competitions.

⁴Lyrics of most of the songs in this chapter and the chapters that follow were sourced from audio-visual materials, and then transcribed.

These events culminate in the Carnival weekend activities consisting of various competition finals including soca monarch (Figure 13 and 14), panorama/‘steelpan’ (Figure 15), Dimanche Gras with calypso, queen and king costume judging (Figures 16 and 17), J’ouvert/‘ole mas’ (Figures 18 and 19), Monday night mas, and parade of the bands on Carnival Monday and Tuesday (Figures 20 and 21). Not surprisingly, the festivities are accompanied by increased alcohol consumption and sexual activities. Selected lines taken from La Borde’s poem summarise the two-faced nature of the Carnival celebration:

Some say it’s just a facade
Better known as masquerade
On one side is pageantry
In splendour and artistry
Alas! On the other side
Dangers lurk far and wide
Removing the moral code
All forms of vulgarity
Blatant promiscuity
Spirit of ‘bacchanalia.’ (La Borde, 2009, ¶ 1, 2, 3).

Figure 1. Burrokeet



Source: Chapman and Martiniuk, 2014

Figure 2. Tambu bamboo



Source: Espinet, 2014

Figure 3. Fancy Indian



Source: Traboulay, 2013

Figure 4. Jab jab, Grenada



Source: Kwekudee, 2013

Figure 5. Jab molassie, Trinidad



Source: Triniscene, 2016

Figure 6. Midnight robber



Source: Talley, 2014

Figure 7. Moko jumbie



Source: Chapman and Martiniuk, 2014

Figure 8. Blue devil



Source: Nunes, 2013

Figure 9. Bookman



Source: National Carnival Commission, 2014

Figure 10. Sailors



Source: Henry, 2013

Figure 11. Minstrels



Source: Ferris, 2012

Figure 12. Pierrot grenade



Source: Questel, 2015

Figure 13. Soca monarch performance, Grenada



Source: Spicemas, 2015

Figure 14. Soca artist with dancers, Grenada



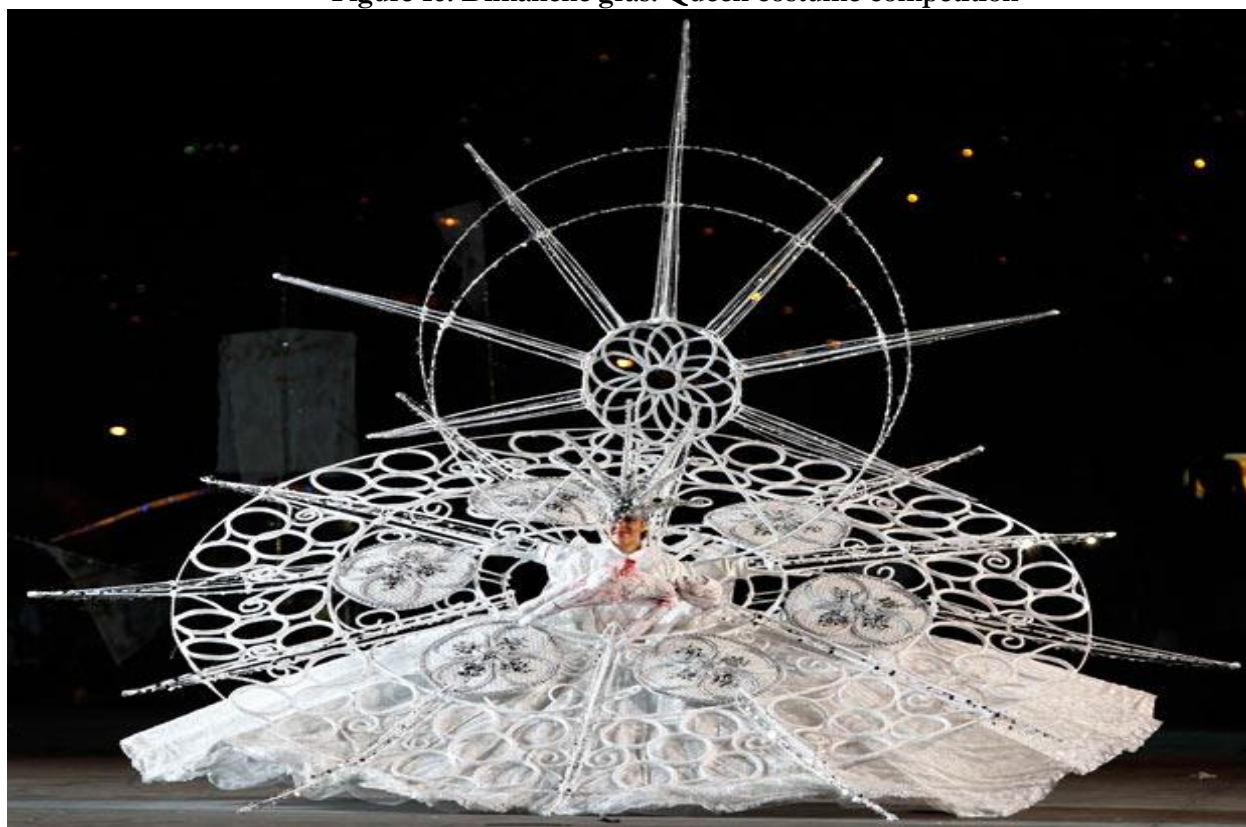
Source: Spicemas, 2015

Figure 15. Panorama/steelpan, Trinidad



Source: TriniSoca.com, 2010

Figure 16. Dimanche gras: Queen costume competition



Source: Islechile, 2016

Figure 17. Dimanche gras: King costume



Source: Islechile, 2016

Figure 18. Man at J'ouvert



Source: Getter, 2013

Figure 19. Woman at J'ouvert



Source: Anderson, 2014

Figure 20. Parade of the bands



Source:Trinisce, 2016

Figure 21. Mas band

Source: The Lost Tribe, 2016

III. Carnival, STIs and HIV.

As demonstrated in La Borde's poem, there is a dark side to Carnival. The customary elements of merrymaking, fraternising and socialising, which encourages one to 'free up,' can culminate in high risk behaviours. Tourists come for a fun-filled vacation that allows for engagement in sexual activity and substance abuse, according to Benetsch et al. (2007). Adult locals escape from their everyday realities by entering into an uninhibited world of alcohol consumption (Figure 22), suggestive dressing and erotic dancing (Figure 23), promiscuity and adulterous affairs. For the Carnival duration, younger adults are likened to the young people participating in the American spring break vacation, who, according to Apostolopoulos, Sönmez & Yu (2002, p. i) might fall prey to "the potentially lethal interaction between alcohol, drugs, and sexual risk-taking" in a contranormative setting.

Traditionally, Carnival has always been inseparable from sexual misconduct that results from the dangerous combination of alcohol, music and dancing. The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper (2009, ¶ 1) states, "The celebrated sensuality and freedom of Carnival inspire more sexual activity." This annual sex explosion, in Trinidad for example, creates the Carnival baby phenomenon. The Central Statistical Office reports that there is an approximately 15% increase in live births, nine months post Carnival, i.e. November and December. Thus also packaged with the Carnival season, is an exponential growth in abortion rates and STIs (Trinidad Guardian Newspaper, 2009). This has become socially accepted as a "fait accompli, part of the so-called 'Carnival culture'...the cancer of complacency [that] has penetrated deep into the moral life of our society" (Stephens, 2009, ¶ 3).

Many islands Carnival celebrations have integrated safe sex awareness and education programs around abstinence, faithfulness, condom and contraceptive use. Resource lists for the purpose of counselling and treatment facilities are also provided. Similarly, as in other Carnival locations such as Brazil, in the midst of licentious behaviour, revellers are urged to use restraint by government agencies, health authorities, NGOs, religious organisations and other interest groups. In Trinidad and Grenada massive campaigns have been carried out by the National AIDS Coordinating Committee [NACC] of Trinidad and Tobago, and the former National AIDS Directorate of Grenada. Their functions, to sensitise the public on the risks of unprotected sex, particularly around Carnival time have been absorbed by the Ministry of Health, Grenada.

Local and regional organisations have rallied around the safe sex cause by increasing free condom availability to pan yards, mas camps and nightclubs. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (2004), research conducted by the University of California on free condom distribution in Rio's Carnival in Brazil found that condoms had not been used. The researcher's lack of understanding of this culture could have led to what he considered as quizzical behaviours among Carnival enthusiasts. In spite of the high HIV and AIDS prevalence rate in the Caribbean, some churches still argue that around Carnival time, the circulation of condoms and morning after pills may promote promiscuity (Mackay, 2006). In summation, the Caribbean experience, similar to the Rio experience, demonstrates a disturbing mental resistance to condom use. Against this scenario, safe sex promotion must highlight condom use as the sensible option, the only option to protect oneself. According to Brown (as cited in Allaham, 2009, ¶ 1), "After the glitz and glamour of the Carnival season has subsided, more people will be infected with HIV and AIDS." It is imperative, therefore, that people exercise extreme caution as a means of protecting their future health and well-being.

Figure 22. Carnival alcohol consumption



Source: Trini Jungle Juice, 2016

Figure 23. Wining



Source: Triniscene, 2016

IV. Female evolution: from the field to the road.

Caribbean women have undergone, and continue to experience a catharsis from a historical past that suppressed their sexuality, yet gave them the title of 'sexual objects.' Caribbean authors often explore history, myth and memory. Coulthard (1966) informs that historians have often written about Caribbean women against a background history rooted in colonialism, exploitation, poverty and economic frustration. In spite of the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of women within the region, multiple identities and cultural indeterminacy have been important to the process of creating a collective identity. This collective identity has had to withstand similar challenges with respect to the effects of colonialism on the psyche of the Caribbean woman (Coulthard, 1966).

An evocation of the past relating to a cultural legacy of oppression in the time of slavery and indentureship, seems almost inevitable. As a starting point for this discussion on Caribbean women's history, Walker's (1983) landmark essay is useful in situating women within this socio-historical context. She explains that slavery produced a negative psychological effect on the black woman as her creative talents had been suppressed. Today, however, Walker contends that the onus is on the woman of the African diaspora to debunk the myth that the black female was "the mule of the world" because she has been handed the burdens that "*everyone* else refused to carry" (Walker, 1983, p. 237).

Mair as cited in Cudjoe (1990, p. 51), traces a piece of literary work from the first female Caribbean writer during the time of slavery. Her name was Mary Prince, who wrote "The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave." This appeared to be quite significant since during that time there was a lack of consciousness of women as thinking beings by the colonial order. The collective and historical violation of black women is used as a means of defining the female subject. In addition, given the multiple identities present in this historical setting, the female subject still manages to find meaning from this standpoint. According to Lopez (1997, p.xi): "The Caribbean is, thus, a site of permeable boundaries and multiple identities, offering continuous redefinition of self and of one's relationship to society." Holistically speaking, the preoccupation with history is because the Caribbean region suffers from a state of amnesia regarding its past. Re-visioning of history is two-dimensional: there is an attempt to recover a lost identity and to address the neglect of women's stories in the Caribbean experience. Brereton (1998) underscores the importance of reconstructing history by giving testimony to women's lives. In so doing, historians fill what Glissant (as cited in Munro and Britton, 2012, p. 13) describes as the 'opaque void of past history' by recreating (her) story.

As alluded to earlier, there has been objectification of women's bodies [portrayed through an exotic and sexual lens. According to Kempadoo (2000, ¶ 7), "few women in the colonies escaped [the] exoticising, sexualising gaze." There was a two-fold consensus among Europeans about black femaleness: the first dealt with her being naturally born a slave, and the second as her being sexually promiscuous (Kempadoo, 2000). Morrissey & et al. (as cited in Kempadoo, 2000) further described the perception of black Caribbean females as lacking in morals and decency. This characterisation was an attempt to maintain social order and denigrate women during slavery. Commodification of women was evidenced by Morrissey (1989, p. 147) when she affirmed that the Caribbean was deemed "as a land of sexual opportunity for European males" where all black women were considered "sexual property" and used to satisfy men's sexual appetites.

The black/brown woman's body possessed an ethereal beauty that cast a magnetic spell, thereby wielding power over men. In slavery times, women used the body as a site for obtaining material gains. Henriques (as cited in Kempadoo, 1999, p. 7) writes, "There was...everything to be gained by becoming the mistress of a white man... Prestige, preferential treatment...freedom for herself and her children." Beckles (as cited in Kempadoo, 1999, p. 8) confirms, "Sexual alliances were one of the few devices that slave women could employ to achieve their freedom." In the final analysis, the woman's body held transformative power to manipulate an oppressive situation into one that was economically and socially empowering (Kempadoo & Dunn, 2001).

Despite the image created of the black Caribbean female during slavery, she bore and continues to bear testimony to the qualities of survival and self-sufficiency. The struggles of Caribbean women resisting the flattening of their multidimensionality and agency by the colonial structures have been unmistakable. According to Wilson (1992, p. 180), "The woman is a figure of strength and resistance and the island a positive space, not a restrictive enclosure." In this context, these women represented resilience and were placed at the epicentre of limitless possibilities which were either life giving or life threatening.

Caribbean women fought the colonial influences, which sought to perpetuate the enslavement of their minds, and render them voiceless (Gikandi, 1989). The struggle for liberation continues up to today.

Reddock (1986) argues that feminism, nationalism and the early women's movement have been interconnected in the struggle to address the subordination and exploitation of women. As well, the liberation of women will translate into the liberation of all Caribbean people (Reddock, 1986). It's probable that individual expressions of consciousness act as powerful tools that lead to a collective, nationalist consciousness. The strong opposition of women against forces that have traditionally sought to stifle their personhood has enabled them to regain their voice and visibility by defining their own 'subject hood' on their own terms. They take up the hooks' (1981, p. 96) challenge: "We are clearing a part for ourselves and our sisters. We hope that as they see us reach our goals- no longer victimised, no longer unrecognised, no longer afraid, they will take courage and follow."

Caribbean women and carnival.

Since the onset of Carnival, Caribbean women have played pivotal roles in the celebrations as organisers, entertainers, bandleaders, competition judges, pannists, fete goers (Figures 24, 25, and 26), masqueraders and spectators. There has been female participation in Carnival since ancient times. According to John (1999), during 19th century slavery, there were female calypsonians like Boadicea and Piti Belle Lily who addressed women's issues through the art form. After the abolition of slavery, women were often sung about by male calypsonians (John, 1999). For example, in calypsonian Mighty Sparrow's song "Jean and Dinah," women and prostitution in post-colonial times was the focus. Ahye (as cited in John, 1999, ¶ 4) said of Jean and Dinah: "[It] was left for them to put body and soul together. They were abused from slavery so it was part of their lives; they had no escape but they had guts and they were the salt of the earth people."

In modern times, there have been female calypsonian and soca stalwarts in the persons of Singing Sandra [Trinidad] and Lady Cynthia [Grenada] from the 1970s; and more recently, Alison Hinds [Barbados] and Denyse Plummer [Trinidad] in the 1980s; and Destra Garcia and Faye-Ann Lyons [Trinidad] in the 1990s. The fusion of ethnicities, cultures and races gave rise to a new genre of soca music called chutney soca which incorporated East Indian elements of song, music and dance into the mainstream calypso and soca art form. Female forerunners in this arena included Drupatee Ramgoonai [Trinidad] in the 1980s. It is worth noting that Calypso Rose was the first female to be victorious in the National Calypso Crown, which, according to Ferguson (1999), enabled the ground-breaking change from calypso king to monarch. Women have certainly been making their mark in competitions as they sing on an array of subjects: nationalism; pro-women advocacy; empowerment of women; and relationships. Celebration of women in soca climaxed in Trinidad in 2009 with Faye-Ann Lyons-Alvarez winning the soca, groovy and people's choice monarchs, and the road march title.

Female bandleaders like Trinidadian Rosalind Gabriel have been making great strides in costume production and masquerade portrayals since 1989 (Rosalind Gabriel Carnival Productions Ltd., 2015). Women occupy the lion's share of masquerade spots in the majority of Carnival bands (Figures 27, 28, and 29). From Superblue's 1980 Road March title called "Soca Baptist" which sounded the alarm for "the power of women playing mas" more and more women were seen parading the streets during Carnival (Mason, 1998, p. 134). From all indications, the adage that 'woman is boss' has proven true as women have been a force to be reckoned with in the production and portrayal of mas and overall, participation in, and management of the Carnival celebrations.

Figure 24. Men at fete



Source: Triniscene Gallery, 2016

Figure 25. Women at fete 1



Source: Triniscene, 2016

Figure 26. Women at fete 2



Source: Trini Jungle Juice, 2016

Figure 27. Female masquerader



Source: Triniscene, 2016

Figure 28. Costumed woman dancing on stage



Source: Questel, 2015

Figure 29. Conservative female mas costumes



Source: Norton, 2002

'Wining' and singing to her own musicat Carnival.

The act of wining is deeply entrenched in the psyche of the average Carnival lover. Wining and song are significant to this review because this body of work delivers commentaries on sexuality and sex, central to the research. Wining holds multiple meanings for self and social and sexual relationships, some of which will be explored in this section. The obsessive compulsion to wine can cause people to lose all inhibitions and give way to sexual temptation. It is purported by Carnivalistas that 'wine and jam' songs propel the life of a party and cast hypnotic power on their participating subjects. The song "Down de road" shows the potency of the wine, "Ah jamming down de road...and ah wining like ah crazy" (Montano, 2007). As expressed earlier, wining movements can easily provoke sexual feelings that individuals may or may not choose to act upon. As it relates to women, wining is quite significant. It is striking that women in slavery, according to Ahye (as cited in John, 1999¶ 9), "would be carding the wool and winding, so this became a hypnotic thing which again has to do with the movement of the body. When they came out of there this was like part of their expression." Ahye is contending that this historical experience of female bodily movements act as a means of raising sexual consciousness (John 1999).

In modern times, however, this abovementioned sexual consciousness is often misconstrued, and women end up being objectified. Soca king Machel (Figure 30) in "Down de road," makes some daring statements: "Any girl ah want ah wining, any girl ah wine ah taking, any girl ah take ah working, any girl ah work ah jamming" (Montano, 2007). The 'girls' in this song are seen as automatons for the male gaze; as objects for male gratification owing to their privileged positions. Blazer's song also exemplifies what some perceive as a degrading to women when he commands them to "wine it high, wine it low, hands on the ground, in a wheelbarrow" (Blazer Dan, 2007).

Wining on the part of the woman is twofold: she may use it as a means of self-liberation and self-gratification, and/or as means of enticing the opposite sex. As much as the latter has been recognised to be true, the former has often been misunderstood. Alison Hinds's popular song "Raggamuffin" intelligently demonstrates the power of a woman's wine, while giving historical significance to the female body as a canvas for self-expression. The soca diva signals the woman to, "push it [buttocks] back, right back, right back." According to Hinds as cited in Springer (2008, p. 111-112), to "push it back" is a subversive act to give women visibility, "not just an individual protest...[but] a defiance of a historical tradition that degrades black women's bodies." Hinds hopes to correct this historical injustice by refashioning a positive image of the women's body as a subject with ethereal beauty. Wining as a means of seducing the opposite sex is shown in the song "I Dare You." The woman's desire to entice a man by way of the wine, will also enable her to showcase her wining skills:

Yu say ah have de wine dat yuh longin for
I kno dat yuh anxious, and yuh cyah wait no more
Man give me everyting dat yuh have in store
Dis is de chance dat yuh have been waitin for
Tonight I'm in de mood,
Ah want to wine and behave rude
So anyting yuh want to do, I dare you. (Garcia, 2008)

Destra clearly underscores female self-confidence; celebration of talents; and symbolically, the many possibilities available to her. Female soca artists generally have a pro-feminist stance; they address issues of women's empowerment. Once again, Allison Hinds's champions the cause of women in her highly acclaimed song "Roll It Gal:"

Independent and ya strong gal
Fit and healthy living long gal
Liberate yaself and live gal
Go to school gal, and get ya degree
Gal ya work hard to mek ya money
Neva let dem abuse ya body
Show it off gal and let di world see
Roll it gal, roll it gal [wining]. (Hinds, 2005)

Springer (2008 p. 120) reiterates that this Caribbean women's anthem is highly "uplifting [and] supports the independence, longevity, and strength women possess." The song also speaks to the importance of women developing sisterly bonds:

"Free yasef gal, you got class and you got pride, come together cuz we strong and unified" (Hinds, 2005). Undoubtedly, these types of songs encourage Caribbean females to glorify their achievements, while working together to uplift one another.

Male-female relationships are revered in many songs by Caribbean women artists. At the same time, men are discouraged from pursuing women with little interest in them. In the case of the latter, female calypso monarch Sandra issues a stern warning to male employers who wish to take advantage of female employees. She sings, "You [male bosses] can keep your money, I [female employee] will keep my honey and die with my dignity" (Singing Sandra, 2008). Sandra cautions that a woman's self-respect should be beyond reproach, no matter how difficult her economic situation may be.

In consensual male-female relationships, Trinidadian Nadia Batson claims that the Caribbean woman adores her man because he succeeds in bringing out her 'Caribbeaness.' In "Caribbean Girl," Batson sings:

You bring out the Trini in mih [me]
 You bring out the Bajan in mi
 You bring out St. Lucian in mih
 You bring out the Jamaican in mih
 Your Caribbean girl. (Batson, 2007)

The sexual tension is also apparent in her longing to keep her man. She continues:

You feel so good and I would never wanna let you go
 You feel so good baby rock back on me and give me more
 You feel so good I wonder which part you come from
 Blow my mind
 Baby your Caribbean girl. (Batson, 2007)

There is a clear motif in the/this song that renders the woman almost inseparable from her man. Unmistakeably, there is admiration, love and respect for the man. Patrice Roberts addresses infidelity issues in her rendition of "Sugar Boy:"

Sugar boy, don't play with my head
 Sugar boy, please understand
 Don't ever give my dinner to another woman
 Do me what you want, you sweet magician
 My body catching a fire while I'm wrapped in your arms
 I'm going crazy every time we caress
 Just don't leave me honey, you are the best. (Roberts, 2007)

Clearly, she idolises the man's sexual magnetism, and demonstrates a great dependence on him for her happiness and well-being. This emphasises the reality that relationships have the potential to be simultaneously life giving and debilitating depending on its long term outcome.

Caribbean professional women and Carnival.

Carnival has often been described as a melting pot of all sorts. The distinctions in the ways women of various racial, ethnic, class and educational backgrounds engage in the Carnival events is minimal. In this research study, professional women like all women, are exposed to the same Carnival experiences. Although professional women as a group at Carnival has been under researched, it is evident that the all-inclusive fetes (Rankin Production, 2016) and mas bands, which carry hefty price tags, tend to attract folks like professional women, with the wherewithal to fund them.

Figure 30. Machel Montano soca performance with female dancers

Source: MacLeod, 2015

V. Caribbean women, Carnival, STIs and HIV.

As mentioned earlier, Caribbean Carnivals have had a shared history of increases in STI cases following the celebrations. In a fit of self-abandonment, factors such as alcohol abuse, sexy clothing and revealing mas costumes (Figure 31, 32 and 33), lewd songs, and suggestive dancing can act as stimuli for poor moral judgment. This in turn can lead to unsafe sexual engagement. Carnival has been blamed for providing ample opportunity for unfaithfulness. According to Moe (2009, ¶ 5), “The normal mores of the society become distorted and many people use the festival as an excuse to ‘take ah horn’ and engage in infidelity. All common sense seems to miraculously disappear from the human brain.”

Some soca artists sing songs that endorse this behaviour, while objectifying and disrespecting women in the process. For example, two soca hits for Grenada Carnival, 2009 included Fatman George’s “Outside Woman” and Randy Isaac’s “More gyal.” The first expresses that the ‘outside woman’ is better than the wife, while the other sends out subliminal messages on the pleasures derived from having many women. Trinidadian Shal and Kerwin’s 2008 rendition of “Gyal Farm” also invites male listeners to heed a call to seek out several women at the same time. Whether consciously or unconsciously, people may give in to the atmosphere of licentiousness, and/or follow the instructions given in these songs. Increased multiple partnering among the population intensifies the STI and HIV risks, particularly to women, as explained in the previous chapter.

Substance abuse, especially in the form of liquor, is rampant as the festival calls on all its aficionados to ‘drink ah rum’ throughout the season. Even in olden times, alcohol and festivity were inseparable. According to John (1999, ¶ 11), “The [Greek God of wine and intoxication] freed the women to assert themselves [by drinking wine to] experience multiple joy and forget their woes and their problems during that period of time and celebrate their femaleness.” It is no coincidence therefore, that during the Carnival period, alcohol sales increase, with supplies even running short at some fetes. High demand for alcohol is also enhanced through effective marketing and promotion; tunes that glorify its consumption; and the growing popularity of drinks-inclusive fetes and bands. Once again, these copious amounts of alcohol tend to cloud good judgment making it easier for unsafe sexual dealings.

Calypso and soca music continue to be at the centre of the controversy regarding its role in increased risky sex at Carnival. There are two sides to the lyrics of calypso and soca music. On one hand, there is positivity and up liftment exemplified in “Light it up:”

Lights of love
 Show me the lights of peace
 Leh we shine through any weather
 Tell dem to leh go de rope
 We say, leh we jump and break away
 Now leh we light it up like it was Independence Day. (Roberts & Montano, 2007)

These lines are not faintly doused with sexual vice, when compared to the majority of other songs. Instead, they highlight the fun-filled nature of the Carnival experience. On the other hand, the popularity of several artists is hinged on the sexual innuendos of their lyrics, which vividly explore the female anatomy, and the sexual act. Boodan (2009, ¶ 2) sums up what could potentially be the result of partaking in such salacious songs: “Some people may even become aroused from the music and may be tempted to have sexual encounters.” Such encounters, oftentimes partaken of in a fit of passion, have the potential to occur without appropriate safe sex protection.

Women, in particular, are continuously urged to protect themselves. As previously stated, the use of condoms as has been minimal despite broad media publication and mass distribution of condoms by relevant agencies. The result has been high STIs among women, increased pregnancies, and overwhelming usage of the morning after pill. In Trinidad, there has been a campaign around use of the female condom. Boodan (2009) informed the public that these female condoms are readily available from the One Overcomers Club [VOCC]. Boodan (2009, ¶ 6) reported that VOCC’s head insinuated that, “asking an intoxicated man to use a male condom was like having a drunk person drive.” Additionally, Maharaj, (2009) urges women to pay attention to how they allow themselves to be treated during the Carnival season. Bad treatment, in the form of disrespectful comments by men, is often ignored, and this can have repercussions for women in their everyday lives (Maharaj, 2009). The general message promoted during Carnival is that the celebration can be an occasion for safe, clean, fun and all persons should lead sexually responsible lives.

Figure 31. Female ‘Rio-styled’ pageantry, Trinidad



Source: Anderson, 201

Figure 32. Man in mas parade



Source: Triniscene, 2016

Figure 33. Man playing mas



Source: Nath, 2015

VI. Conclusion

It is common knowledge that regardless of a woman's socio-economic or educational standing, there are commonalities among all Caribbean women with regard to self-identity as a Caribbean female, exposure to mainstream culture, interactions with Caribbean men and finally, potential susceptibility to HIV. At the same time though, the disparities among these same women are large. In the Carnival setting, generalisations cannot be made about male-female relationships. The effect of Carnival culture on women of a particular Caribbean nationality, educational background, and socio-economic class cannot conclusively be made. Each Caribbean woman is unique, and her behaviours are guided by the sum total of her experiences and the personal choices she makes at any given time.

How professional Caribbean women have been, and continue to be affected by STIs and HIV during Carnival time has been a virgin territory of research. What is known, is that like other women, they have been exposed to the Carnival culture at various points of their development. Decisions to indulge in unsafe sex are dependent on numerous factors this research has sought to explore. Awareness and education might be perceived as an asset for these professional women but it does not necessarily guarantee safe sexual practices and/or immunity from HIV.

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