

Reconsidering Dutty Wine: Mona Students' Views on Black Female Sexuality in Jamaica.

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This paper is based on a qualitative research project that investigates Jamaican women's diverse sexual identities and experiences. The data collected from a questionnaire sample explores respondents' perceptions about the changing meanings of Black female sexualities. The paper interrogates the manner that participants redefine new expressions of sexual desire in response to social expectations in Jamaica. Participants create autonomous self-concepts that celebrate sexual agency, pleasure and empowerment. Respondents renegotiate gender equality within intimate partnerships to develop sexual freedom within the context of HIV/AIDS, gender based violence and sex tourism.

Key words: sexuality, independence, control, gender equality

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores views on Black female sexualities that were revealed by the responses to questionnaires distributed to students on Mona Campus. Based on questionnaire data about Jamaican women's sexual attitudes it examines notions about female sexual emancipation and oppression. The paper probes tensions between the reaffirmation of and liberation from traditional female sexual identities within dancehall culture. It assesses the extent that the "dirty wine" craze is a subversive underground movement that enables women to reclaim control of their sexualities. The implications of these debates for understanding changing sexual dynamics in Jamaican society will be considered. The paper investigates the manner that women recreate their diverse sexual meanings and practices in response to societal values and popular culture in Jamaica.

'Di Dutty Wuk' (1): SEXUAL EMPOWERMENT OR LETHAL DANGER?

Since the sixteenth century the depiction of sexually aggressive breeders has contributed to present-day mythology in dancehall culture. During slavery images of Black women as super-sensual prostitutes were used to justify social control. The belief that Africans were animalistic with uncontrollable sexual appetites served to legitimate the exploitation of their labour and their abuse by white men (Marshall, 1996). It is important to consider the impact of the portrayal of immorality and promiscuity under enslavement upon the

different ways that women gain sexual fulfillment in contemporary Jamaica. Evelyn M. Hammonds argues that the racist and sexist representation of hypersexuality excludes Black women from engaging in debates about erotica. Hammonds asserts that Black women need to oppose prevalent notions about appropriate knowledge that contribute to secrecy and misinterpretation about sexuality. Hammonds explains that;

“...Reclaiming the body as well as subjectivity is a process that black feminist theorists in the academy must go through themselves while they are doing the work of producing theory. Black feminist theorists are themselves engaged in a process of fighting to reclaim the body – the maimed, immoral, black female body – which can be and is still being used by others to discredit them as producers of knowledge and as speaking subjects...” (Hammonds, 1997: 177-178)

Dancehall simultaneously generates, mediates and challenges patriarchal relations. Dancehall gives women choices of independent self expression that they were traditionally denied and also reproduces violent misogyny. Vibrant dancehall culture can be seen as a means for Jamaican women to transcend the brutal history of dehumanizing sexual alienation. Reconstructing and transcending racialised myths about oversexed Black women dancehall is a survival strategy that reinvents self-determined definitions of erotica within the context of male dominated, bourgeois and heterosexist hierarchies (Tafari-Ama, 2006).

The questionnaire responses reflect debates about dancehall culture that focus on the ways that it can be perceived as both perpetuating and rebelling against patriarchal paradigms. It is significant to query the extent that women both as DJs and as revelers in dancehalls celebrate freedom by confronting being portrayed as the sexual property of men. Working class women bring creative expressions to bear on their experiences of subordination, pain and negation. The force of their bodies embodies the refiguration and eroticization of suffering as joy. Carolyn Cooper argues that dancehall culture subverts conventional, patriarchal, elitist and religious beliefs about female respectability. Cooper states that women reassert progressive erotic roles that reclaim power over their identities, bodies and sexual prowess. Such emancipating sexual appeal satisfies both sensual desires and social aspirations (Cooper, 2004).

Natasha Barnes argues that dancehall is a form of female sexual agency and self-determination that transcends dominant and oppressive constructions of female heterosexuality. Barnes notes the constraints that are posed by and for female constructions of heterosexuality as licentiousness. Dancehall performances produce an image of women's sexual liberation while instilling the heterosexist nature of gender relations in Caribbean societies. Barnes observes that women are depicted as libidinous in a manner that reinforces male hypersexual excess. Images of women's sexual availability reaffirm masculine bravado, sexual conquest and desire for female bodies (Barnes, 2005).

I will examine the boundaries to female self actualization, fulfillment of sensual needs and sexual emancipation by querying if the dutty wine dance objectifies women.

The Wikipedia dictionary explains that;

“The Dutty Wine is a popular Jamaican dance usually performed by women. It involves moving your legs like a butterfly, whilst simultaneously rotating your neck and posterior.”

Dutty wine has caused controversy in Jamaica because it is viewed as a dangerous threat to public health. It is argued that the lyrics by Tony Matterhorn command dutty winers to dance in a vigorous and strenuous manner. For instance;

“Bend your back and lift your head up
Turn side way, lift your leg up
Bend your face and twist it up
And turn true side like you know you fed up (Whoa)
Turn roun like you know roast duck
Spin around cause you know how fi wuk
Lift it up back, then you breast it up
Back it up, cock it up, my girl dutty wuk.” (2)

Consequently there are demands for the dance to be banned because it is considered to be a potentially fatal assault on bodies. It is claimed that whirlwind dutty wine contests should be prohibited due to causing grave physical harm, lifelong pain or injuries. Some doctors warn of the risks of muscle trauma and ligament damage as a result of over-enthusiastic, rapid and fierce rotation of the head and other parts of the body. In October 29th 2006 in Spanish Town, St. Catherine, Jamaica, 18 year old Tanisha Henry swung herself into a frenzy and collapsed on the floor after performing in a dutty wine contest. Tanisha was rushed to a nearby hospital where she was pronounced dead. Although the

cause of death is uncertain it is maintained that the teenager died as a result of dutty wining.

‘It Kinda Trickie’ (3): WHY DO WE HAVE A DEADLY FEMALE DANCE?

The dutty wine dance was created exclusively for women. For some it is seen as rejuvenating women in dancehall culture since most dances were designed for men. Women partake in dutty wine because the head movement and jiration of the body give a sensual appeal. They claim that the dance changes prevalent assumptions about Black female sexuality because women are in charge instead of men. The popularity of the dutty wine has resulted in the development of more female oriented dances including the “Wipe Out”, “Hoola Hoop”, “Rom Ram” and “Hot Wuk/F***”. Some students maintain that the sexually lewd and outrageous lyrics ridicule, disrespect and hurt women. They argue that rather than just being harmless fun such tracks encourage male promiscuity. These respondents claim that such songs urge women to lack self-respect, belittle themselves and to also put a price on their own bodies. For example in Dutty Wine male virility is demonstrated by the following lyrics;

One of dem, two of dem

See the crew of dem, I will wine dem

Could a three a dem, could a four a dem

Even more of dem, I will grind dem (4)

Donna Hope explains that dancehall music perpetuates male bravado, stamina and sexual conquest to the detriment of women. Male chauvinistic songs promote the degradation and exploitation of women. Violently misogynistic and sexually explicit lyrics encourage aggressive male sexual prowess. Asserting excessive male virility such tracks demean women by reducing them to mere sexual commodities and body parts (Hope, 2005).

Arguing that this phenomenon exists beyond the dancehall Reverend Devon Dick maintains that;

“The society is descending into a ‘dutty wine’ culture.” (Dick, 2006).

Reverend Devon Dick reasons that sexually explicit dutty wine competitions simulate sexual intercourse. This disrupts the stabilising boundaries of private and public spheres in Jamaican society. Dick asserts that women ‘wining’ on men should be reserved for their own secluded space. Reverend Devon Dick explains that;

“Where ‘dutty’ connotes anything derogatory and not earthy, a ‘dutty wine’ culture is one in which that which should be private or personal becomes public. There is failure in recognising and distinguishing between the private, personal and public. Such a culture is exploitative of women and it makes dis-respectful reference to that which is special and sacred.” (Dick, 2006).

Several respondents believe that breaking down the traditional divisions between public and private areas is potentially sexually liberating. They argue that this enables women to

create various self perceptions and experiences that challenge dominant notions about appropriate sexual conduct. I will later demonstrate how they disagree with Reverend Devon Dick's argument;

“Let us respect privacy and personal space and not descend into a ‘dutty wine’ culture.”
(Dick, 2006).

CONFRONTING CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS OF BLACK FEMALE SEXUALITIES

The questionnaire survey reveals students' opinions about the ways that representations of Jamaican female sexualities affect their realities. Fifty five Black women aged between nineteen and fifty three years old provide stimulating accounts of their heterosexual lifestyles. Participants express how their diverse experiences of emotional and sexual gratification combat the harsh social background of HIV/AIDS and gender based violence. Their lives are constrained by the mythology of Black women as sexually denigrated and uncontrollable that is evident in exploitative sex tourism. They are affected by imagery of inferior, exotic and corrupt Black womanhood that reaffirms the power of Western tourists (Kempadoo, 2003).

Sexual power operates at different levels whereby both men and women assert social control. Students describe divergent self concepts of sensuality and power struggles for male dominance and female independence in the sexual realm. Carole Vance asserts that sexuality is an ambiguous and complex site of power relations. Women experience

restriction, repression and danger. Pleasure in the form of agency, exploration and safety is also evident. Vance contends that women internalise conventional cultural norms of acceptable sexual attitudes and behaviour. Women who do not conform to coercive expectations of heterosexuality, marriage and motherhood are deemed as 'bad' women. This legitimates stigma, violation and punishment by the State, religion, medicine and public opinion (Vance, 1984). Agreeing with this assessment a student observes;

“Though men largely may dictate, whether directly or indirectly, the fashion, dance moves, popular sexual positions, I still believe that women control their own sexuality. On the other hand men have created competition between women, “who fling it up better me will keep!”

Respondents resist being sexually objectified by creating autonomous self-definitions and striving to be treated as equal partners. Their responses demonstrate a multiplicity of female sexual desires and practices that challenge male control. They stress the importance of improving cultural awareness about women's sexual demands as these comments show;

“I think social expectations can be changed but first women need to change the ways that they interact with or respond to men so that they will begin to respect them and see them in a different light.”

“Yes by women standing up for themselves. Not accepting the notion that they are sex objects, nurturers and housewives.”

“This can be changed by educating men about the increased sexual satisfaction they would feel if women played a more active role.”

Molly Thompson expounds that it is imperative that Black women counteract the erasure of self actualization to reconstruct and transcend restrictive images that denigrate Black womanhood. Reinventing alternative and self-determined approaches that increase knowledge of the richness and depth of sexual yearning is essential. Thompson writes;

“I shall argue that neither silence nor evasion can counteract myth, and, unless the silence is interrupted and broken more frequently in all types of representations (literary or otherwise), black women’s sexuality will always be misperceived and misinterpreted. By black women representing themselves in the sexual discourse, rather than collude with a narrative that has sought to reduce her body to essentialist categories, she can inscribe the fullness and complexity of her sexual desires, pleasures and fantasies anew.”

(Thompson, <http://www.emsah.uq.edu.au/conferences/of/abstracts/Thompson.html>)

Participants claim that in general Jamaican women are asserting themselves more to have their own erotic desires met. They state that they do not conform to mainstream cultural values about submissive or wanton femininity because they express their needs for sexual freedom. Fulfilling their sexual appetites is described as necessary in a secure, passionate and equal relationship. The following statements indicate the orgasmic requirements of female students;

“To be taken on a sexual journey leading to profound heights in climatic explosion.”

“A partner who is willing to try stuff without being influenced by societal views of wrong or right.”

“I need a man to put it on and mek mi feel it.”

“We are both moving on the same path.”

“The man penis is too sweet.”

Black women’s viewpoints demonstrate prevalent ideas about the ways in which their sexual attitudes and behaviours are regarded by Jamaican society. Participants’ describe their perceptions of the manner that dominant definitions of Black female heterosexuality influence their self concepts and intimate relationships. Patricia Mohammed criticizes the rigid ordering of Caribbean societies whereby women are defined as seductive temptresses who need to be controlled by men. Mohammed states that although female sexuality is regulated by religion, popular culture and language to satisfy male pleasure women are negotiating their sexual needs (Mohammed, 1992).

Students’ testimonies indicate how Jamaican women incorporate, resist and redefine denigrating stereotypes that have existed since enslavement. Respondents challenge derogatory racialised myths about rampant and exotic sensuality. Black women

rearticulate their sexualities in forms that refute patriarchal control, hegemonic masculinity, heterosexist knowledge and capitalist power inequalities. They defy the historical construction of Black female sexuality to renegotiate and reinterpret strategies for erotic freedom. Participants confront oppressive gender ideologies and expectations to counteract controlling models of sexuality. Understanding how racialised heterosexist fantasies and realities both repress and liberate Black women they subvert controlling images and develop unique models of sexuality. This supports Kamala Kempadoo's view that;

“...Sexuality stands as a central prism for viewing racialized colonial oppression and domination and the refashioning of race, as well as for reading Caribbean struggles for emancipation, both historically and contemporarily. Racialized sexuality in the Caribbean is at once a colonial discourse inscribed upon the bodies of the colonized and the ground for empowerment and freedom for many Caribbean women and men. In its complexities, I argue here, Caribbean sexuality also offers a potential for producing new challenges to contemporary sexual regimes of power and knowledge...” (Kempadoo, 2004: 51)

bell hooks argues that Black women embrace diverse self perceptions and relationships based on equality, mutual respect and lustful fulfillment that transform their lives. hooks writes;

“...we need an erotics of being that is founded on the principle that we have a right to express sexual desire as the spirit moves us and to find in sexual pleasure a life-affirming

ethos. Erotic connection calls us away from isolation and alienation into community. In a world where positive expressions of sexual longing connect us we will all be free to choose those sexual practices which affirm and nurture our growth..." (hooks, 2000:92)

Students' opinions vary about the contention that the dutty wine dance reinforces female submission to male ideals of heterosexuality. Respondents describe the ways that the style of Jamaican creole is sexually explicit in Tony Matterhorn's song. They state that the hardcore language effectively reaffirms machismo, male infidelity and heterosexual prowess. Participants claim that the lyrics reflect the manner that men give women instructions about where and how to have sex that women obey. In the following lyrics Matterhorn boasts about his ability to have sex in different locations and exemplifies students' views;

So fuckin inna wata, fuckin inna sea

Fuckin inna bushes, and fuckin inna tree

If you fuck pon di bed your not fucking me

Fuck pon di floor, fuck pon di t.v.

Fuck pon di dresser, and bruk up figurine

Fuck pon di fan, no gyal no finga me (5)

Some participants believe that the dutty wine segregates women so that those who are unable to perform the dance are marginalised. These women are dismayed because they feel excluded due to their inability to dutty wine. Students regard the dance as being both

oppressive to women and encouraging them to be independent. They maintain that dutty wine allows men to control women's sexual practices while encouraging women to redefine and experiment with the possibilities of alternative sexual identities. Most respondents state that the dance opposes conventional and restrictive expressions of sexualities. By rejecting sexual confinement female dutty winners are empowered to enjoy sexual and social emancipation they claim.

The confident and assertive sensual appeal of respondents negates subordination to sexual repression in various ways. Jamaican women oppose stereotypes to develop exciting self-affirmation and sexual awareness. Participants emphasize the necessity of re-education to transform traditional attitudes and celebrate passionate creativity.

Asserting the valorization of independent female sexual agency respondents explore their erotic desires. Black women claim recognition, sexual gratification and negotiation of safe sex practices. As a respondent states;

“...I see myself as beautiful, sexy, and I also see myself as having control of my sexual desires and also have the right over my self to chose my sexual partner if so desired; but I won't let a man control or dominate my sexuality in whatever form of desire.”

Audre Lorde explains that sensuality has personal, socio-economic and political power. Lorde examines the ways that women's love, creative energy and knowledge have more far reaching consequences than our intimate choices. Such joy, harmony and cooperation offer radical ways of being that enhance all aspects of our lives. Audre Lorde urges

women to transcend suppressive portrayals of femininity, reclaim erotic inspiration and discover feminist activism. Lorde writes;

“...Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.

For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.”

(Lorde 1984:59)

CONCLUSION

Jamaican women’s defiance against historical images and control of their sexual self concepts and experiences are considered in this paper. The questionnaire survey interrogates independent self-definitions that are based upon transforming notions of female subordination, liberation and self-respect. Participants examine pleasure and egalitarian sexual relationships. They explain the cultural restraints to expressing women-identified concepts of self-love and sexual desire.

Respondents believe that the dutty wine dance both suppresses and enhances female empowerment. Dialogue and further investigation is necessary to query the degree to which DJ Tony Matterhorn’s lyrics promote sexual emancipation. Dutty wine advocates that women conform to hegemonic male fantasies and as such does not break down

sexual barriers between men and women or between people with diverse sexual preferences. It would be interesting to consider how to develop our understanding of the multiplicity of sexual identities and experiences in ways that effectively tackle sexism, heterosexism, racism and class bias. This may enable us to surpass sexual phobias and embrace Matterhorn's command;

When mi see di hot gyal dem dat a trigga me

Fuck any where, let fuck be free. (6)

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2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*
4. *ibid.*
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