Negotiating Intimate Relationships: A Study of Black African Women in New Zealand

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Abstract

Women of Black African descent are often depicted as powerless and unable to negotiate for what they want in intimate relationships. Their constraint has been attributed to deeply ingrained cultural beliefs that disadvantage African women. Recent scholarly studies on diaspora African women focus on their adjustments to western environments and suggest there is some shift in women’s adherence to African cultural norms. However, the norms that frame African women’s lived experiences of negotiations of gender and sexuality practices and their impact on gender inequality and HIV prevention have not been made explicit for interrogation of their agency in intimate relationships.

I used in-depth interviews with 22 Black African women in three cities in New Zealand to generate research data. I conducted a constructionist narrative analysis of the data using relevant literature and Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts of practice as interpretive tools, while I retained an Afrocentric worldview. The analysis focused on the participants’ dispositions towards gendered norms and their negotiations of intimate relationships.

The study revealed that there was a reliance on male-privileging gender ideologies, an acknowledgement that prevailing relationship norms were burdensome for women, and a desire for change, without becoming “unAfrican”. Gendered assumptions of roles and expectations of African women continued to retain pre-eminence as the frame of reference for participants’ relationship practices, although the lived expressions of an African identity constructed by them was not linear or simplistic. Despite what seemed like rigid role boundaries, shifting understandings of gender roles gave rise to stress emanating from the tension between the way the women negotiated norms of their places of origin and those of their Western host country.
The women employed pragmatism, marginal resistance, and dissidence as empowerment tools in complex negotiations of traditional norms in their response to the cultural power of men. While the use of pragmatism and marginal resistance involved a contesting accommodation of cultural norms without transgressing them, the use of dissidence entailed an outright refusal of aspects of African gendered norms, representing opposition to cultural competence required of women. The participants’ handicap from being ‘woman’ were reduced with their sophistry at using their internalized cultural socialization of relationships, and amassed capital, to achieve agency. What the women lacked in ascribed cultural power, they looked to social (relational) capital to gain. Participants’ cultural norms, practices and socialization were, therefore, sites of contestation. The negotiation of the conflicts fostered ambivalence towards African culture and the adoption of a third space of culture, along with its multiplicity of identities.

I argue that the past that the women in this study carry in their habitus mediates their behaviors in definitive ways, and that a quest to improve the women’s agency in health and related matters requires the recognition of their early cultural socialization to privilege male partners. Notwithstanding a habitus from original socialization, it is in the New Zealand Western space context that questions of cultural identities, belongingness, and perspectives on risk to identity, relationship and disease were mediated. The women’s perception of vulnerability to risk with respect to sexual health was mediated by their perception of New Zealand as “safe”, and as a “small pond” for relationship opportunities. The women’s approaches to negotiating the norms also impacted on their perspectives of men. The thesis brings into focus the complexities of negotiating safe and pleasurable sex, which discourses on the intersection of gender, race, age, and class tend to oversimplify for women of African descent.
The findings of this study suggest that perspectives and reception of African traditional gendered norms of intimate relationships are changing in the practices of Black African women in New Zealand, notwithstanding deeply held beliefs about the norms. Yet, the change is hindered by a focus on an “African woman identity ideal”, and its associated societal expectations as canonical principles in negotiating intimate relationships, which creates a dissonance between their beliefs and practices in the diaspora.

I argue that change is possible in the long term and should be facilitated through talks and workshops where women share their stories, because women as socialized agents, unwittingly anchor the system that maintains male hegemony. I recommend expanded choice for women in HIV prevention through developing effective flexible administration of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and investment in developing multipurpose technologies (MPTs) that combine contraception and HIV prevention strategies in one offering.

Overall, the thesis contributes theoretical and empirical boost to the body of literature on the agentic responses of African women in the diaspora to the constraints of gender inequality within the context of heteronormativity. The thesis challenges accounts of a stable African identity as an over-emphasis, arguing that significant boundary erosions enable fluid identities and agential responses to the cultural power of men. Arguing in a Bourdieusian approach, the thesis establishes that the pursuit of personal interest provides the impetus to transcend regulating norms for agentic behavior without necessarily transgressing the norms as would be expected in socialization theory.
Dedication

To Mum and Dad, Mrs Margaret Oluremi Ojuroye and Mr Solomon Ayodele Ojuroye, for the audacity to dream. To Professor Oluwatoyin Dare Kolawole for the journey together. And for Akintomiwa Samuel Kolawole, who gamely shared his mom with an all-consuming thesis during a crucial developmental stage of his life. We did alright.

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Abbreviations

Definitions of Acronyms

AEG  AIDS Epidemiology Group
ART  Antiretroviral therapy
ARV  Antiretroviral drug
CDC  Centers for Disease Control
FEM-PrEP  Female Pre-exposure prophylaxis
HIV  Human immunodeficiency Virus
IDI  In-depth interview
NZAF  New Zealand AIDS Foundation
PrEP  Pre-exposure prophylaxis
SSA  Sub-Saharan Africa
UNAIDS  Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
VOICE  Vaginal and Oral Interventions for Control of the Epidemic
WHO  World Health Organization
Definition of Terms

Agency: Is the power that people have to think and/or act on matters which may have an impact on their life experiences, either in the immediate term or in the future. Agency may be that of an individual or exercised through a collective group with common interests.

Culture: Is the understanding of a group about how they relate with other members and things jointly owned by them. Culture encapsulates the beliefs, traditions, norms, and practices of a people, including their food, clothing, language, artefacts and other values and cultural goods they share.

Intimate relationships: Intimate relationships refer to heterosexual partnerships in this research. It may be casual or married/unmarried long-term.

Negotiation: Is often an on-going process of finding common ground with another about issues of common interest, but which the parties may hold different views about. Clear, mutually respectful communication is crucial to the process and periodic reviews may be required. One may also negotiate contrasting views held personally.

Sexual Agency: Is the ability of a person to negotiate a desired outcome regarding their sexuality, including the ability to enjoy or refuse sex and have access to birth control strategies.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Comprises 44 countries that cover most of the African continent except the northernmost parts, which are classified among Islamic Middle Eastern countries.
We currently have limited knowledge of how acquiescence or resistance to prevailing gendered ideologies by Black African women in the diaspora contributes to shaping their intimate relationship experiences and how that impacts HIV prevention efforts. There is much literature which discusses the patriarchal nature of African culture (Amadiume, 2015; Bakare-Yusuf, 2003; Nzegwu, 1994; Oyewumi, 1997, 2002; Steady, 1987; Sudarkasa, 1996). Women are often depicted as home-makers and mothers, with little power to challenge the privileging of men in African society (Abegunde, 2014; Afonja, 1990; Gordon, 1996; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1985; Pereira, 2005; Yusuff & Ajiboye, 2014). People of influence who want to enable change often return to the same gendered expectations of women (Abah, 2008; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2006). Such essentialism, however, homogenizes the experiences of African women and denies their agency in their negotiation of intimate relationships. Indeed, some scholars have argued that African women demonstrate agency by strategically negotiating challenges within their relationships (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; O. Oloruntoba-Oju & Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2006) and there are arguments that this may or may not be more evident for women in the diaspora (Arthur, 2009; Batisai, 2016; Kastner, 2010; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2015; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014). Patten (2011) also argues that Black Africans living in Western countries may develop different worldviews from those acquired in their socialization in Africa. A change in worldview may impact intimate relationship practices.

Weber (1964) argues that the interaction of persons with one another and with systems of meanings is what constitutes society and enables social relations.
Recent controlled research with four groups by Walton, Cohen, Cwir, and Spencer (2012), for instance, shows that even the mere suggestion of a shared interest within a group positively impacts perspectives of its members. Hogan (2005) also highlights that people tend to act in agreement with social norms of their group to preserve common understandings of the group; there is therefore an element of conformism in all social groups, because of the need to preserve the culture of the group from disintegration. However, the dominant discourse(s) of what a group considers to be acceptable behaviors can also engender pressures to conform to norms that constrain in negative ways.

The observation by Combs and Freedman (2012) that the expectations and norms that make up social discourses are invisible and require conscious exploration to make them visible through narration is therefore pertinent in the current study. The existing literature suggests that intimate relationships among Africans are anchored by defined gender roles and patriarchal norms to which males and females are socialized from childhood, and, which create unequal power in intimate relationships. In this thesis, I side step the binarism of agent/ victim discourse in existing literature to focus on examining the discourses and practices of socio-cultural norms and power gradients in the narratives of participants, which may be impacting established understandings of the sexuality and agency of African woman. I examine the perspectives of participants on what guides their experiences of intimate relationships, and their perspectives of ownership of their own bodies. This approach will help to dehomogenize the experiences of the women and make occasions of resistance explicit for interrogation and use in efforts to empower women.
1.1 Background to the Study

Historically, the creation of environments that enable the domination of women in African societies has been influenced, at least in part, by practices introduced with colonization. It has been argued that the stable culture and values of Africans suffered erosion through four centuries of dehumanizing slave trade, followed by colonialism and imperialism (Falola, 1996; Osundare, 1998). The product is an unstable continent “in a cultural flux characterized by a confused interplay between an indigenous cultural heritage and a foreign cultural legacy of a colonial origin” (Wiredu, 1995, p. 33). This history is complicated by the oral nature of the traditions of Africans at the time of contact with other cultures, therefore, there were no written records of socio-cultural and historical experiences of African societies before those written by often, quasi-anthropologist Western travelers.

Many African scholars argue that gendered role ideology is not native to Africa. Made and Mpofu (2005), for example, argue that the creation of gendered spaces in Zimbabwe emerged from the male-migrant labor system created by the British colonial authorities in Zimbabwe. This system emanated from the imposition of taxation on indigenous men and caused a depletion of local wealth resources that forced men to travel away for work to meet the obligation to pay. Men also relied on the bride wealth they got from marrying their daughters off to cushion the loss of income from high taxation. The effect was that production and formal employment became associated with men and reproduction and childminding became the role of women.

Oyewumi (1997, 2016) also contends that the chequered history of colonization in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) reflects in the identity constructing language which express the roles assigned for men and women in contemporary African societies. Using Oyo-Yoruba in Southwest Nigeria as a representative African
society, Oyewumi (2016) argues from analysis of data collected over four decades, that there is copious religious and linguistic evidence that the Yoruba society was non-gendered before colonization. She posited that the binarism of gender was imposed on African societies by Western scholars. Her analysis suggested that the traditional Yoruba society of Western Nigeria and some neighboring West African countries, were organized by relative age and seniority, rather than by the body-oriented, biological sex of persons that Western feminists interrogate. She opined that anthropologists who researched social organization and relations in African societies in earlier times may have misunderstood how Africans used language. She, therefore, advocates a rejection of the over-reliance on the role of gender in explorations of distribution of power in African societies.

However, the linguistic evidence for Oyewumi’s thesis has been substantially challenged by empirical research. Oloruntoba-Oju (2006) argues that male superiority in all spheres of life is deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the same Yoruba people at all levels of language; the people also compulsorily use words which showed their belief that men are superior in their worldview (T. Oloruntoba-Oju, 2011; 2009). Also, while Bakare-Yusuf (2004) agrees with Oyewumi that greater sensitivity is required in researching African cultures, she points to the plural nature of religious practices in the same Yoruba traditional society and “reject[ed] outright any attempt to assign a particular conceptual category as belonging only to the West and therefore inapplicable to the African situation” (p. 138). While the contestations continue, the beliefs in separate roles and societal expectations for males and females continue to structure the lived experiences of contemporary Black African women, just as for women in all societies to varying degrees. The disempowerment of women continues despite the declarations and policy
guidelines developed by organizations like United Nations and the African Union for achieving equality between men and women.

1.1.1 The New Zealand Diaspora Context of Participants

New Zealand is located in the pacific region, but is a settled Western country following British colonization of the territory from 1840 after its discovery by Captain Cook. People migrated from Britain to create a better life for themselves, because of overpopulation and a harsh economic climate for some when industrialization claimed lands and farming livelihoods in 19th century Britain (McGill, 1982; J. Phillips, 2013). The first settlers in New Zealand were Polynesians who arrived between 750AD and 1350AD (O'Connor, 1990). The relationship between the two settler groups is managed through The Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840. The treaty gave sovereignty to the Head of England and citizen rights to British immigrants and mandates appropriate considerations and compensations to Māori (J. Phillips, 2013).

New Zealand is a nation of many achievements. A most notable one is that the suffragettes movement led by Kate Sheppard first won the right to vote for women in New Zealand in 1863 (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2018). New Zealand has a land mass greater than the United Kingdom, but only about 12% has a human population on it. About 78% of the land is mostly forests and mountains (Douglas-Clifford, 2017). The population is approximately 4.9 million people spread over two main land masses called North and South islands (New Zealand Government, 2019). Intimate relationships are guided by Western mores and largely egalitarian practices of contemporary Western culture in New Zealand. There is a popular saying that a man’s life is about work, wife, and weather. Unlike its closest neighbor, Australia, there have been many marital unions between White and Māori settlers, hence there are biracial generations in New Zealand.
The inward flow of whalers into New Zealand created an industry that also culminated in the creation of New Zealand Company by Edward Gibbon Wakefield in 1837 as a colonizing endeavor that brought in 15000 British people (McGill, 1982; J. Phillips, 2013). Immigration continued to bring in more people from English speaking areas to New Zealand from 1840 to 1914. This subsequent wave of migration brought in Chinese people prospecting for gold in the South Island (Ng, 2003). Other groups of Indian origins followed (Roy, 1978). A requirement in the Immigration Restriction Act 1899 for people to complete immigration forms in English limited immigration opportunities to people of British origins, until the Immigration Amendment Act of 1920 allowed the issuance of permanent resident permits to non-British immigrants (Nayar, 2005).

The immigration system nonetheless remained exclusive of Black Africans until the point based system linked to merit came to effect in 1987 (Ho, Au, Bedford, & Cooper, 2002). Therefore, except for a few in the 1960s who stayed after study exchange programs, people of Black African descent only began migration into New Zealand in the 1980s to fill United Nations refugee quota as they fled wars and conflict in their African homelands. Others migrated into New Zealand for study and career advancement to improve their life opportunities.

Diaspora is a dispersion from home to settle down elsewhere. It refers to people who had to leave their home due to circumstances like persecution, political and economic upheavals or as part of global movements of labor occasioned by transnational capitalism and globalization. As a movement from a place, diaspora involves the notion of multiple journeys often through different routes such that people who are migrants in a place may have gone through different trajectories although they have a common continental origin. According to Brah (1996), the concepts of diaspora, the borders they crossed and politics of location together help the analyses of the historical trajectories of movement of people and other materials of life which come together in locations she named “diaspora
spaces” (p. 181). However, Brah’s diaspora space is not only where diaspora, border and dislocation converge with other factors of the lifeworld, it is inhabited by people who are constructed as indigenous to the place as well as the migrants. Therefore, diaspora spaces transcend diaspora, being an “entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with ‘staying put’” (Brah, 1996, p. 181).

Migration to different parts of the world has been increasing since the 1980s (Brah, 1996). Recent migration due to increasing global events create relocation displacements that have adverse effects on livelihoods and life opportunities and the escape that follow make distinguishing between a refugee and a migrant problematic. In New Zealand, the practice of distinction in mode of entry, based on whether one was a refugee or a voluntary migrant has been perceived in the African community as differentiating and creating inequality because refugees are given dedicated resettlement support and training to assimilate in their new environment (Tani, 2019, personal communication). More recently, there is a move to extend some support to other culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrant categories. As it is an emotive issue, the question of mode of entry into New Zealand and its impact on the African migrants’ experience of New Zealand merits its own study and was not explored in the current thesis.

Thus, although participants’ narratives constituted a “we” in this study, the New Zealand African diaspora is differentiated and heterogeneous. For the purpose of this study, the New Zealand African population is a contemporary diaspora in the sense of Tololyan’s (1991) “exemplary communities of the transnational moment” and the word diaspora loosely overlaps with related terms like migrants, refugees, immigrants, and expatriates, that are the effect of twentieth century capitalism and subsequently, globalization inspired transnational movements.
The number of Black Africans in New Zealand is uncertain. A population based survey estimates that there are about 25000 Africans in New Zealand by 2012 (Dickson, Henrickson, & Mhlanga, 2012). However, according to New Zealand Census in 2018, there are a total of 16890 Africans who responded and there was no requirement to indicate ethnicity, hence there is no way of ascertaining how many are Black Africans or from SSA (New Zealand Government, 2019). This challenge is more problematic because Africans are lumped into a composite group of African/Middle Eastern/Latin American. There is yet no explanation for the difference in census data and survey estimates, however, there is an interval of seven years between when the data were taken and informal communications suggest that there is movement between New Zealand and its bigger neighbor, Australia. The African diaspora in New Zealand, however, reflects the diversity of the continent as 44 African countries are represented. Most African migrants are from Ethiopia, Somalia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe (Phillips, 2007 as cited in Adelowo, 2012).

The diaspora context of African women in New Zealand is, therefore, a small recent contemporary diaspora. The African community is a small immigrant community whose work of defining the complexities of its cultural identities is in its infancy, and to which the current thesis contributes. While their most visible diaspora in the US and UK are concerned with institutional racism that marginalizes black bodies, the embodied experiences of the New Zealand African may differ. The New Zealand African community, therefore, presents a unique opportunity to explore the progress of an African diaspora community’s progress with time.

Gender socialization theorists have explored how the migration experiences of Africans relate to their socialization to African gendered ideologies in African migrant families living in popular receiving Western countries like Canada (Creese, 2011, 2014; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2015); Ireland (Ejorh,

The impact of gender socialization on African migrant families has also been explored with specific health focus in more recent receiving countries like Australia (Babatunde-Sowole, Power, Jackson, Davidson, & DiGiacomo, 2016) and New Zealand (Adelowo, 2012; Adelowo, Smythe, & Nakhid, 2016; Birukila, 2013; Henrickson, Dickson, Mhlanga, & Ludlam, 2015; Tuwe, 2012). Most research shows that gendered roles are modified in the diaspora to accommodate the demands of the host environment (Creese, 2014; George, 2005; Grillo & Mazzucato, 2008; König & de Regt, 2010). However, Kastner (2010) challenges the notion that cultural values and norms change in migrant African families. Kastner observes that family values and norms in (Nigerian) migrant families stay more or less the same, and that women’s behaviors continue to be regulated by promises made to people back in their original homelands.

African migrants’ adjustment of their original cultural norms to Western environments engenders a disturbance of their identity in Western host countries. Scholars observe that Africans share a collectivist socialization which entails signifying/identifying beliefs and practices that are somewhat resilient to change in the contact with other cultures (Neblett Jr, Hammond, Seaton, & Townsend, 2010; Njoh, 2006; Olusanya, Arikeju, & Olusanya, 2013; Palmer, 2000; Theron, Theron, & Malindi, 2013). However, migration to predominantly White-populated geographical regions of the world makes people of African descent visible to others (Creese, 2014). This precipitates tensions that test, and demand change to, traditional norms familiar to Africans, causing them to present themselves in ambivalent and contradictory ways (Adeyanju & Oriola, 2011; Bezabeh, 2016). Bezabeh (2016, p. 11), for example, observes that:
... [B]orders define migrant lives...the process of negotiating these borders leads to profound experiences of self-doubt, the testing and alteration of gender relations, and processes of self-evaluation and ethical self-fashioning that serve in both shaping migrant life as well as in producing forms of resistance.... [therefore] migrants are embedded in multi-layered experiences that are simultaneously personal, social, spiritual, and political.

The conflict is made more salient by the interaction of gender with ethnicity and social class, which impact health and wellbeing for migrant women; however, the impact can be reduced by empowering women (Llacer, Zunzunegui, Del Amo, Mazarrasa, & Bolúmar, 2007). Thus, scholarship by some authors invites a questioning of the contemporary understanding of the place of women in some African societies, and the almost exclusive focus on hegemonic understandings that only men have power (Amadiume, 1997; Calame-Griaule & Alexander, 1962; Denzer, 1994; Nolte, 2008; Nzegwu, 1994; Oyewumi, 1997; Sudarkasa, 1996). One challenge though, is that there are different understandings of what constitutes women’s empowerment and how it can be enhanced or promoted to other women.

1.1.2 Agency and Empowerment of Women

Most literature on women’s empowerment requires that women have the agency to hold institutions which affect their lives accountable (Kesby, 2005). The intersection of agency with identity, gender, sexuality, class and place however makes conceptualizing agency a complex undertaking (König & de Regt, 2010). Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 962) analyze the many dimensions of agency and how it interplays with forms of structure; they reconceptualized agency as:
[A] temporarily embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its “iterational” or habitual aspect) but also oriented towards the future (as a “projective” capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a “practical” evaluative capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).

In other words, agency is fluid; just as described by others (Kesby, 2005; Madhok, 2014; Sprague et al., 2016; Stern, Buikema, & Cooper, 2016) who see agency as a dynamic, elastic, partial, and unstable phenomenon that all people exercise. However, it has been argued that the focus on *agency as action taken* overlooks social contexts and structural inequities which may prevent women from taking perceivable action; an exclusive focus on *agency as action taken* also diminishes the relevance of non-action based strategies that women may use to exercise their agency according to their circumstance (Kesby, 2005; Madhok, 2014; Madhok, Phillips, & Wilson, 2013; Mohanty, 2013). There is also the matter of what promoters of women’s empowerment consider agentic. Hitherto in feminist scholarship, agency has been linked to voice, but more recent explorations posit that secrecy and silence also have relevance as agentic expression by women (Hardon & Posel, 2012; Parpart, 2013). Indeed, the recognition of non-action based agency by Kesby (2005) and others follows the argument by pragmatist thinkers like John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Alfred Schutz, who require that we consider how a person exercises agency as situational and contextual. Mead (1938) suggests that agency can be exercised by “the deliberative attitude” (p.76), wherein people evaluate probable future outcomes of any response they may make in the present by judging from the outcomes of their responses to past occurrences. Authors like Madhok (2014), therefore, support troubling the idea of agency as a person’s ability to take perceivable action; they reconceptualize agency to include internal processes that may not involve an observable
Quashie (2012) also argues that silence does not receive enough recognition and appreciation as a powerful force of Black expression.

Ammann (2016) also acknowledges that prevailing understandings of gendered norms puts limits on the agency of African women in relationships. Ammann (2016) nevertheless argues that because norms change in some form or another, gender relations among Africans are more nuanced than the literature suggests. König and de Regt (2010) highlight the challenges of everyday negotiations and struggles of contemporary African migrant families, who risk losing family and dignity in their desire to gain individual freedom and a future in Europe. König and de Regt argue that the debates around structure and agency, empowerment, and choice, as well as contested social boundaries of gender and generational ties, are central to engaging with diaspora peoples. The authors observe, though, that the complexities of conceptualizing the agency of migrant women in relationships discourage explorations of their issues by researchers, because the forces that structure the lives of migrants are often limiting and involve intractable tensions.

The focus of the epidemiology literature on African women being defenseless against patriarchal power, and unable to negotiate heterosexual relations (Campbell et al., 2008; Physicians for Human Rights, 2007), also continues to prevent reflections on how women try to get what they want, obscuring women’s agency in intimate relationships (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). The consequence is that there is limited knowledge of how African women’s response to prevailing gendered power relations contributes to shaping heterosexual relationships and managing the associated health vulnerabilities. Jewkes and Morrell (2012), therefore, argue for engagement for a more complex theoretical exploration of women, gender relations and their agency in
negotiating their intimate relationships, as a way to understand and influence Black African women’s sexual practices within a public health context.

One of the implications of the intersection of women’s agency in intimate relationships and disturbance of identity in the diaspora is how African women deal with the specter of the association of Black Africans with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) epidemics. Research provides insight into challenges with HIV risk and prevention in SSA (Harrison, Colvin, Kuo, Swartz, & Lurie, 2015; Maticka-Tyndale, 2012). In particular, The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS] (2014b) attributes the occurrence of over one million new HIV infections annually to gendered differential power gradients in society, which limit sexual choices for women or challenge their agency in sexual decision-making, especially for women of Black African descent. Other authors proffer interventions that may help African women’s agency. For instance, Gysels, Pool, and Nnalusiba (2002) found that access to greater economic resources reduces women’s dependence on men and improves their ability to negotiate different aspects of their intimate relationships. Also, although researchers like Oke (2006) argue that continued attachment to some traditional structures of African society is problematic and change is needed, the social, behavioral and structural factors, which advantage males over females among Black Africans (Harrison, 2008; Harrison et al., 2015; Maticka-Tyndale, 2012; Physicians for Human Rights, 2007), may not be easily modified, though they impact HIV risk for women and men.

1.1.3 HIV Prevention

HIV prevention is an important global concern. The evolving epidemiology of HIV (de Cock, Jaffe, & Curran, 2012) as well as morbidity and mortality caused by it (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2011) have
been well documented. Despite concerted investments in prevention efforts, at least one million new infections occur every year (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2014a), and HIV occurrence surveillance estimates suggest that 9.4 million people who had not tested may be living with HIV in 2017 (Sidibe, 2018). Therefore, prevention of new HIV infections remains a public health and development priority globally (C. Collins, Coates, & Curran, 2008; Laga & Piot, 2012; Merson, O’Malley, Serwadda, & Apisuk, 2008; Parkhurst, 2012). HIV infection affects people of all races and ethnic groups in the world, although there is much variation in its impact. In many regions, HIV infections tend to be localized (micro-epidemics) in men who have sex with men (MSM) as well as Injecting Drug Users (IDU) who share needles for drug use. In contrast, the spread of HIV among Black Africans is mostly driven by heterosexual sex and affects the general population. By 2017, 70% of about 36.9 million people living with HIV globally were Black Africans in SSA (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2018).

In the New Zealand context, the number of people diagnosed with heterosexually acquired HIV infection gradually rose from the mid-1990s to 2013, although HIV infection is low at an estimated 62 per 100,000 population (Ministry of Health, 2014). Diagnosed HIV infections peaked in 2016 (AIDS Epidemiology Group [AEG], 2017) and the reason for the decline observed in 2017 is not known (New Zealand AIDS Foundation [NZAF], 2019). There were 197 new cases of HIV infection in New Zealand in 2017; 24 of which were acquired through heterosexual transmission and included two Africans (AIDS Epidemiology Group [AEG], 2018). Africans also tend to present for treatment with prolonged undiagnosed infection (AIDS Epidemiology Group [AEG], 2018). Africans were the only over-represented ethnic group with diagnosed HIV infection among the heterosexual population in the country until 2017,
when Asians became similarly over-represented (New Zealand AIDS Foundation [NZAF], 2019).

The statistics refer to actual diagnoses, however. Occurrence of HIV infection in the population may be higher, as infected persons may not have had an HIV test and may, therefore, be unaware that they are living with HIV. For example, Saxton, Dickson, Griffiths, Hughes, and Rowden (2012) found that one in five men living with HIV in a sample population of MSM in Auckland did not know they were infected. Dickson et al. (2012) also estimated a 5% prevalence of HIV in the Black African population in a HIV behavioral surveillance study of African communities in New Zealand in 2012. This estimated burden of HIV infection in Black African migrants in New Zealand compares to that estimated in MSM, the recognized highest risk group. Dickson et al.’s (2012) observation is similar to reports of occurrence of new heterosexually acquired infections among migrants in European countries and North America, where HIV infections were historically concentrated in MSM (AIDS Epidemiology Group [AEG], 2009; Davidson & Birukila, 2007; Geduld, Gatali, Remis, & Archibald, 2003; Manfredi, Calza, & Chiodo, 2001; Prost, Elford, Imrie, Petticrew, & Hart, 2008). Hence, the interest in promoting HIV prevention among Africans in the diaspora is well motivated.

Similar to some other population groups (Gavey, McPhillips, & Doherty, 2001), African men and women do not favor condom use during sex (Agha, Kusanthan, Longfield, Klein, & Berman, 2002; Chanes-Mora, 2014; Coast, 2007; Gausset, 2001; Maticka-Tyndale, 2012; Meekers & Klein, 2002; Plummer et al., 2006). In the absence of a HIV vaccine, the use of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs in prophylactic dosing is the most promising intervention that women can use (de Cock et al., 2012). However, in this too, research shows that cultural beliefs curtail the agency of African women. Unlike successful clinical trials with other groups (van der Straten, van Damme, Haberer, & Bangsberg, 2012), clinical trials which
recruited only Black African women did not demonstrate effectiveness of pre-
exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for preventing acquisition of HIV (Marrazzo et al.,
2013; van der Straten et al., 2014). The trials failed because participants did not
use the products as directed due to reasons linked to cultural beliefs and fear of
stigma in the community (van der Straten et al., 2014). van der Straten et al. (2014,
p. 11), therefore, observes that:

The research community needs to acknowledge, and continuously
remind itself, that new HIV preventatives will not be readily embraced
just because they are needed. Only through a better understanding of
the social and structural contexts in which these innovations are
introduced can we perhaps facilitate the successful testing and
adoption of efficacious bio-behavioral HIV prevention approaches
that can be used by women.

The observation by van der Straten et al. (2014) speaks of the research gaps
identified for this thesis. Little is known about the social and structural
contexts that impact the lived experiences of Black African women in the
diaspora. Although some recent work has been done on their adaptation
efforts in Western host environments (Adelowo, 2012; Adelowo et al., 2016;
Arthur, 2010; Babatunde-Sowole et al., 2016), few studies (Batisai, 2016;
Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014) have addressed how gender socialization impacts
intimacy between the partners, women’s agency in such relationships, and in
relation to risk of HIV (Baidoobonso, Bauer, Speechley, & Lawson, 2013;
Birukila, 2013). This is despite that women embody the cultural identity of
their groups in the diaspora (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2015). Scholars have, therefore,
called for deeper explorations of sexual decision making and relationship
practices of Black African women within public health (Jewkes & Morrell,
2012) and in diaspora contexts (Kesby, Fenton, Boyle, & Power, 2003). There
have also been calls for relevant stakeholders in Western countries receiving
African peoples to review their HIV prevention programming efforts in order to better support the needs of migrants from origin countries experiencing HIV epidemics (Henrickson, Fouché, Poindexter, Brown, & Scott, 2016).

1.2 The Focus of the Study

Cultural norms of intimate relationships impact Black African women’s lived experiences and have the potential to hamper HIV prevention efforts. The quest to empower women and eradicate new HIV infections by 2030 makes it important to understand how culture travels, and how it impacts the lives of those in the diaspora. To accomplish this, we need a greater understanding of how diaspora African women conduct intimate relationships, and the ways they negotiate norms and practices associated with being an African woman. Central to the exploration is the examination of the norms and practices by which contemporary diaspora Black African women are constrained and disempowered in African culture. In this thesis, I explore four research questions with Black African women in New Zealand:

1. How do Black African women in New Zealand negotiate intimate relationships within a changing spatial context?
2. How do Black African women in New Zealand exercise agency in their intimate relationships?
3. What are Black African women’s perceptions of safer sex methods for HIV prevention?
4. How can any identified deficit in the exercise of agency or ability to negotiate safer sex be addressed?

The examination of the responses of participants considered with relevant literature and theoretical concepts will enable me to:
1. Make explicit the gendered cultural norms that underpin the women’s negotiation of intimate relationships.

2. Conceptualize and categorize individual strategies that the women use to empower themselves in intimate relationships.

3. Examine participants’ perception of vulnerability to risk of disease and gain insights on perceptions of PrEP and its acceptability that may contribute to policy and health promotion for potential use by Black African women in New Zealand.

4. Problematize current approaches to HIV prevention and suggest ways to promote empowerment strategies for the women.

5. Show how forms of opposition to the accumulation of cultural capital gained from conformity to norms enable identification of what is valued in the social fields of Africans.

The study also responds to the call for women to explore and give voice to the different, lived experiences of women, to emphasize the multiplicity of female expressions without collapsing the differences into a unitary identity (Tong, 1989). The findings from the study will be of interest to researchers and policy makers seeking to address health inequities and improve health outcomes for African women in the diaspora. The rest of the thesis is organized as set out in the next section.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In Chapter Two, I present a comprehensive review of the literature, highlighting current knowledge and the gaps to explore. Chapter Three addresses the epistemology, theoretical framework, and methodological approach to the thesis. I provide detailed explanations of the research methods, sampling, data collection and the approach to data analysis. I also provide participants’ profiles and information on my positionality as a researcher in the thesis.
I discuss the findings of the research in three substantive chapters. Chapter Four is an exploration of the participants’ perspectives on the sociocultural expectations and practices of their original African homelands for women and men in intimate relationships. In chapters five and six, I draw from elements the women constructed in chapter four to examine, first in chapter five, the complexities of their perspectives and practices as migrant African women in New Zealand. I also interrogate the empowerment strategies they used to respond to conflict in their intimate relationships. Secondly, in chapter six, I relate the women’s practices to their perspectives on risk, including vulnerability to the risk of HIV and the relevance of known prevention approaches to them. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the relevance of the findings to current knowledge and gaps about how migrant African women negotiate their cultural beliefs about intimate relationships, sexual decision making and risk of HIV. I also problematize the unhelpful assumption of oneness in the practices of a group that outwardly appears to be homogenous.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Women of sub-Saharan African (SSA) descent are challenged in intimate relationships, because of their socialization to conform to an acceptable African female identity. The associated culturally approved gendered norms and expectations confine women’s sexuality to the private zone, restricting their ability in sexual decision making. In contrast, men are allowed to explore their sexuality and be unabashed in talk about sex and sexuality (Reddy, 2010; Reddy & Dunne, 2007, 2008). Sexual behaviors therefore occur within social and economic contexts of long established expectations and constraints, and not by personal will alone (Campbell, 2003). The gendered private/public dichotomy in expressions of sexuality for women and men perpetuate embedded relations of power in intimate relations, which are often considered to be normal in African societies. This dichotomy also continues the marginalization of women and increases their vulnerability to the risk of HIV infection (Campbell, 2003; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, Simbayi, & Cloete, 2009; Physicians for Human Rights, 2007; Reddy & Dunne, 2007, 2008).

An evidence-based report, which explores factors that limit women’s agency in intimate relationships, emphasizes the role of cultural beliefs that are maintained by customary laws in entrenching women’s inferior status in relation to men in all spheres of life in Botswana and Swaziland, the two African countries most impacted by HIV in 2007 (Physicians for Human Rights, 2007). The report highlights that such laws remain unaffected by modern reforms to civil laws. Equally significant in the report is the observation that women tend to endorse, or act in accordance with expectations of such discriminatory beliefs and
customs, with a negative impact on interventions to empower women and to contain the HIV epidemic. Physicians for Human Rights writes:

Deeply entrenched gender inequities perpetuate the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Botswana and Swaziland, the two countries with the highest HIV prevalence in the world. The legal systems in both countries grant women lesser status than men, restricting property, inheritance and other rights. Social, economic and cultural practices create, enforce and perpetuate legalized gender inequalities and discrimination in all aspects of women’s lives (Physicians for Human Rights, 2007, p.1).

The discomforting cultural norms reported in the study by Physicians for Human Rights (2007) form the bedrock of beliefs and practices that disadvantage Black African women. They are thus said to be powerless to negotiate what they want in their intimate relationships.

The anchoring of intimate relationship practices on cultural norms is not limited to African women who live on the African continent. For example, Henrickson et al. (2015) observe that married women in the African community in New Zealand believe that they have no right to refuse sex with their partners, even when they feel at risk of HIV. Nevertheless, culture and practices of social relations are not static (Bourdieu, 1990a; Warmoth, 2001). Warmoth (2001, p. 1) notes that “culture as a symbolic medium of communication is neither static nor homogenous”, and its intersubjective character means that:

...culture begins with the deep programming of the psyche in the areas of language, assumptions and expectations about the structure and dynamics of human relationships (including assumptions about nature and about the self), moral and aesthetic values, and iconographic allegiances. It continues as our shared, intersubjective matrix of symbolic systems of which we become increasingly self-aware and capable of manipulating with maturation and education.
In other words, cultural beliefs are social constructs cultivated into what is perceived as social reality over time; they are also amenable to socialization that re-orientates one’s understanding of them.

In this chapter, I review the literature on the key thinking about the place of women in African traditions and societies along with critical discussions on researchers’ engagement with the issues. The discussions are organized into nine sections. In the next section, I introduce the challenge of living as a migrant and the stresses associated with relating in two places with differing cultural norms. I then discuss the socialization of Africans to do social relations based on gender role differentiation and the privileging of males, which is disempowering for women. In the fourth section, I discuss the African gendered roles and their contestations. In the fifth section, I discuss origin of gender inequality. I thereafter discuss how the patriarchal norms are woven into social and political life, setting the identity of women as primary homemakers subordinate to men. In the sixth section, I examine the practice of African gendered roles in the diaspora. I thereafter examine scholars’ response to the disempowering of women. A discussion of Bourdieu’s theory of practice as my interpretive lens and his theorization in relation to socialization in gender scholarship conclude the chapter.

2.2 The Challenge of Migrant Living in Public Health Discourse

The adjustments that accompany the crossing of people to other cultural environments can produce positive or negative health outcomes (Daher, Ibrahim, Daher, & Anbori, 2011). Bochner, Furnham, and Ward (2001) argue that the characteristics of a migrant’s place of origin interact with the socio-political
and economic contexts of the country of settlement to precipitate stress, to which migrants respond with affective, behavioral and cognitive coping mechanisms. Scholarship on migrants living in developed countries indicates that migrant families experience changes in their practices; this acculturation to new cultures restructures gender relations and poses new challenges for women (de Haas, 2010; Lam, McHale, & Updegraff, 2012; Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2011) as well as men (Charsley & Liversage, 2015). In the area of employment, for example, Creese and Wiebe (2012) found that migrant men become disempowered when they have to take jobs below their skill levels, as more men than women tend to be skilled when they arrive in their host countries. On the other hand, women, who tend to be less skilled and more easily absorbed into the workforce can become more empowered economically. This difference in access to the workforce in the diaspora host country contributes to modifications in cultural gender role practices that people in migrant families have to negotiate to thrive in their host communities.

The cultural attributes of Africans, like language, clothing, and food, also easily identify diaspora Africans as not being indigenous to their host countries outside the African continent. Therefore, despite having the strength of numbers (in terms of increasing diasporic population in some of the countries), which is important for the success of any collectivist group, Africans are disadvantaged in Western societies. Researchers have explored the way that crossing borders defines the experiences of migrants of Black African descent. The obvious difference of Africans challenges their ability to secure suitable employment (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012), and facilitates discriminatory practices that infringe on their human rights (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010). These experiences generally reduce the quality of life for African migrants (Kivunjia, Kuyini, & Maxwell, 2014).
Countries like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which have White Settler populations, were deliberate about keeping out Black African migrants until the countries introduced more inclusive points-based systems of immigration. For example, Creese (2015a) shows that the White privilege policies, which continued to characterize Canadian society even after the inclusive point based system was introduced in 1967, render the Black population from Africa and the Caribbean invisible and creates systematic inequalities. Further, competence in a European language like English, French or Portuguese, which are official languages in formerly colonized African countries, should be an advantage for Black African migrants in Western host countries where the languages are spoken. However, a focus on their non-European accents erases such potential (Creese, 2011). Thus, the diaspora is for Africans like the experience of Black Americans in predominantly White environments: a “White space” that presents the “myth of sameness and racelessness” where although Blacks are present they do not belong, because such environments foster a deliberate Eurocentric ethos (Russell, 2011, p. 33).

The challenges that follow such tension may encourage an escape to *Africanness*, to assert their humanity as Black Africans in their White host space (Creese, 2015a), or else encourage a privileging of the practices of their Western host country. It has been observed that African migrants deliberately alter their cultural disposition to enable them to relate well in their Western host communities, which predisposes them to complex performances of self that “bifurcate social identity” (Adeyanju & Oriola, 2011, p. 945). What happens in diaspora African families, therefore, remains a contested issue.

Also, poor health is associated with the inability of migrants to successfully adjust to the existing social dynamics in their host country (Victor, Burholt, & Martin, 2012). The narratives on immigrant health in public health discourses in the media of some host countries imply that immigrants breed disease
African immigrants are also stigmatized as presenting a high risk of the potential to spread HIV infection. However, the experiences of migrants are varied. For instance, a comprehensive systematic review of studies on migrant health issues in industrialized countries by Gagnon, Zimbeck, Zeitlin, and Roam Collaboration (2009) deduces that migrant African women are at greater risk of either losing their new born children or delivering premature babies, than most other women in their host population. This is despite Gagnon et al. (2009) observing that being a migrant is not always relevant to risk of poor outcomes in child and maternal health. Elsewhere, Llacer et al. (2007) show that migrant women across different ethnic groups tend to have higher mortality rates than native women in heterosexual populations in the host country. They, however, observe that the mortality rate for migrant heterosexual men compares favorably with that of native men in the host population.

Recent research, on the other hand, disputes the claim that occurrences of HIV infection in migrant populations are imported into host countries (Alvarez-del Arco et al., 2017; Burns, Arthur, Johnson, Nazroo, & Fenton, 2009). Large scale cross-sectional surveys of migrants living with HIV in European countries show that the majority of migrants became infected after arriving in their host country, and most infections are amongst men who have sex with men but who are from countries where occurrence of same sex practices are low (Alvarez-del Arco et al., 2017; Burns et al., 2009; Fakoya et al., 2015). This observation suggests that African migrants perceive increased freedom to live according to the norms and practices of their diaspora homes without being restricted to the norms and acceptable practices of their places of origin, which sometimes creates stress for them.

The stress that diaspora African women experience in their adjustment to norms of their Western host environments has been explored. I found four studies
that addressed adjustment in intimate relationships. Other studies were focused on the women’s adjustment to the structural constraints in the host environment. For example, Babatunde-Sowole et al. (2016) observe that the African women in their study found Australia to be a “Strange Land” that made them nostalgic for home (p. 447). Similar to the findings from Arthur’s (2009) study on the social adjustment challenges of West African migrant women in the United States, the West African migrant women participants in the study in Australia by Babatunde-Sowole et al. (2016) felt overwhelmed and isolated, discriminated against, and rendered voiceless in the upbringing of their children, against the norms of their origins. Research has established that childminding and the training of children can predispose migrant women to seclusion and loneliness (Rashid & Gregory, 2014). Childminding can also have a deleterious impact on migrant women’s social and economic opportunities (Kamenou, 2008), as well as their mental health (Gee & Ponce, 2010; Syed & Pio, 2010). For migrant African women, these challenges would be compounded by having to train their children without the communal approach that they experience in their countries of origin. The requirement to adjust their offspring socialization practices to fit with the host culture’s approach, which they do not necessarily understand or know how to navigate, would pose a challenge to their sense of wellbeing.

2.3 Socialization

Socialization is analogous to receiving an education on cultural matters; the education gained therefrom often confers competitive advantage on the learner in the same cultural environment (Bourdieu, 1986). The term culture refers to the ways that people do social life in response to their circumstances. It encompasses the social forms, beliefs, practices and language of a group, although all humankind share some concepts that facilitate intercultural communication (Wiredu, 1995). Calhoun and Sennett (2007) also observe that culture involves
practices that people do and remake in various contexts and is, therefore, more than just products and representations. Bourdieu posits that what is taken for granted as cultural reality is socially constructed from deliberate processes and institutions of socialization. While people may be constrained to change, Bourdieu argues that people, as agents, and the societal structures that constrain them, act on each other such that a person’s disposition(s) responds to their interests and living environment in ways that cannot be predetermined, because there are many interests and environmental influences that can also not be predetermined.

Despite the diversity of Africa in ethnic groups and languages, African peoples share cultural values and beliefs about kinship, sacred rites, interdependence and other attributes that constitute a collectivist worldview of wellbeing, or what Neblett Jr et al. (2010, p. 105) refers to as a depression-mitigating, “protective ... Afrocentric worldview” for Africans in the diaspora. Africans are intentional about the transfer of their beliefs to new generations. The values and beliefs are perpetuated through the deliberate transfer of knowledge and socialization by elders in the family and the community; therefore, Africans venerate the role of elders as purveyors of knowledge (Adelowo, 2012; Hanks, 2008; Hiruy & Mwanri, 2014; Nyagua & Harris, 2008; Theron et al., 2013). As a corollary, Africans also privilege their ancestral and indigenous knowledge in practice (O. D. Kolawole, 2012). The transfer of cultural values has been relatively successful, such that the traditional African family is considered to be the institution that is most resistant to the disruptions that colonialism imposed on African societies, and Africans honor their extended family practices in the geographical areas they inhabit, including the diaspora (Njoh, 2006).

The family practices that Africans are socialized to are different from the contemporary western conception of familial relationships in two ways. Firstly, the collectivist values of Africans mean that members of the extended family are
as relevant to a person’s lived experience as members of the immediate family, forming a close kinship (Fashola, 2014). People close to one’s age in the extended family are “brothers” and “sisters”, just like those who are actual maternal and paternal siblings. Older members are called “fathers” and “mothers”, just as one would refer to one’s birth parents. Therefore, the clearly defined boundaries of relatedness in contemporary Western cultures is alien to African cultures (Nzegwu, 2012). Secondly, the training of children tends to be communal, and adages like “it takes a whole village to train a child” are widely shared sayings and understood across African cultures. The engagement with community in this way contributes to African peoples’ sense of security and wellbeing (Adelowo, 2012), but can work contrary to wellbeing when a person is considered to be outside of accepted characteristics common to the socialization of the group (Babatunde-Sowole et al., 2016), especially in instances of disclosure of a differentiating ailment like HIV infection (Henrickson et al., 2016). Therefore, Africans instill the expectations of roles and appropriate behaviors of their societies in their children through deliberate socialization, to avoid occurrences of behaviors that are considered inappropriate by the society and which may bring censure to their group(s).

Research studies done across the world have shown that children are taught different skills and behaviors depending on their biological sex (Al-Attar et al., 2017; Basu, Zuo, Lou, Acharya, & Lundgren, 2017; Bello et al., 2017). Gender role differentiation as a form of socialization involves the sharing and transfer of specific cultural messages, which guide and stratify relations among members of a society (Lindsey, 2015; Steinbacher & Holmes, 1987). The messages set out the expectations and acceptable practices required in that society to support its wellbeing (Steinbacher & Holmes, 1987). According to Eccles, Jacobs, and Harold (1990), there is an assumption that male children are preferred to female children, and that there are appropriate behaviors specified for males and
females in furtherance of traditional practices in families. Eccles et al. (1990) argues that parents’ enduring biases in assigning different biological sex-based roles and responsibilities to children continue to influence the children’s perceptions of themselves and their interests into adulthood.

In African settings, the differential treatment in upbringing involves female children being closely monitored and taught to be nurturing childminders and home keepers, while boys are allowed more freedom and taught to be tough. The outcome of this differential socialization of men and women in the Nigerian society, for instance, is that women are channeled towards a carer and subservient role, while men are directed towards provision of resources for sustenance of the family, and dominance in relationships between men and women (Omadjohwoefe, 2011). Fafunwa (1987) highlights that the role of the woman in the Yoruba society, for example, is to be a submissive, child-caring and home-minding support person to her husband. There is a historical context to this belief as discussed in the next subsection.

2.4 African Cultures and Traditional Gender Roles

Africa is a reality as well as a social construction whose geographical, historical, and cultural boundaries have shifted over time according to prevailing conceptions and configurations. One of the consequences of the shifting understanding of the continent is that the term “Africans” as originally known is now considered to refer to people living in the area below the Sahara and called SSA. This is an acknowledgement that the Arab/Muslim incursion into the geographical continent has claimed some of the territory. The presence of hitherto alien cultures also means that what is African in contemporary times has borrowed from alien cultures. Therefore, notwithstanding contemporary understandings, scholars argue that gendered socialization and patriarchy were
introduced to Africans. The idea of a stable, culturally acceptable African woman emerged from historical and sociological elements derived from contributions from the indigenous, Islamic and Western cultural religions and secular civilization, which are competing cultural orientations that now characterize post-colonial African societies (Mazrui, 1986, 2013). Mazrui (2013), for example, argues that the broader historical context of the encounter between Africans and Western culture creates a collective memory that inevitably include a selection process that creates a crisis of identity, and creation of a false memory that places “something in the past which was never there before” (p.13). However, citing examples from the Greek to European civilization, Keita (1987) convincingly argues that all modern societies are products of fusion of “cultural inputs from alien sources” (p.92). Keita (1987) also argues that a continued engagement with sociological elements make contemporary Africa appear as if cultural fusion is unique to Africa risks perpetuating the idea that being African incorporates a cultural essence that cannot change.

Oke (2006) argues that it is natural for cultural patterns to fade away and be replaced by new ways of doing things in response to change over time. Whether change impacted the structure of African societies before written records began is a contested issue. The written modern history of Africans indicates that gender role differentiation is a part of the fabric of life. Beier (1995, cited in Omadjohwoefe, 2011) documents a saying of the Yoruba people of West Africa which indicates that men hold the instruments of economic and political power over households. A man’s ownership of power included power over his spouse(s) and child(ren), because traditional African families were often engaged in farm labor, and they worked for him. A woman’s access to power and upward social mobility was therefore dependent on her partner’s means and status (Omadjohwoefe, 2011). Many African cultures also define roles for women in the wider society. The most valued role is motherhood (Amadiume, 2005,
2015; Calame-Griaule & Alexander, 1962; Makinde, 2004; Oyewumi, 2004). African cultures revere motherhood because the procreative role of women forms the bricolage by which they weave their identity and social relations, whether the kinship system is patrilineal or matrilineal (Oyewumi, 2004). Calame-Griaule and Alexander (1962) also explore the cultural beliefs about the spiritual and social role of women as mothers in traditional Sudanese society. According to these authors, cultural beliefs imbue the woman-mother with spiritual and social nobility because she gives birth, facilitating the continued existence of her society. The fulfilment of a woman’s childbearing role also increases her husband’s status and influence in the society.

Similarly, the Yoruba people of West Africa and their diaspora in Cuba and Brazil revere motherhood because they consider that humanity is preserved through her labor (Ogungbemi, 2011). Ogungbemi further highlights that male respectability in Yoruba society is tied to having a wife, as the society considers that an unmarried, grown man is irresponsible. The wife, in turn, is expected to reproduce. The wife who does not produce children is considered to have a tragic destiny and bereft of the avenue to overcome her subordination to the man (Makinde, 2004).

Indeed, some cultures in African societies subordinate a woman’s role as wife to her role as mother (Kilson, 1977), suggesting that motherhood is the highest status every woman may achieve in African societies. Amadiume (2015, p. 166) observes that the traditional ideology of African motherhood is based on “self-sacrifice” of women who work for “order and peace” of the society through ensuring “harmony among their children”. Children who disregard their mothers’ teaching would create tension and a perception of threat to the wellbeing of the family, because a misbehaving child signals the failure of an African woman and damages her authority and symbolic value within society. This explains why African women put considerable physical and mental
resources into the upbringing of their children. Omadjohwoefe (2011) observes how mothering and homemaking responsibilities impact on women’s potential and argue that although the practice of gendered role differentiation is culturally constructed, it nonetheless curtails women’s social mobility and political status in Nigeria. Scholars like Olatunji (2013), therefore, argue that gender discrimination among Africans is derived from socio-cultural factors based on the patriarchal socio-economic system that favors men in African societies.

2.4.1 Patriarchal Norms in Policy and Governance in Africa

Feminist scholars use the word patriarchy in the quest to conceptualize and theorize the inequality inherent in gendered roles for men and women. Patriarchy is a contextual and shifting set of rules and norms that guide the practice of social relations, such that the balance of power is skewed in favor of men (Connor, 1986; Kandiyoti, 1988; Walby, 1990). Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (p. 20). J. Carter (2015) writes that “[p]atriarchy is not new. It is a system created and maintained by men of faith and politics who hold the levers of economic, cultural, and political power and who confuse strength and masculinity with domination and brutality” (p. e41). The structures of social relations in African societies mirror characteristics of other patriarchal societies. For example, Crompton (2006) judges a society to be patriarchal if it exhibits three characteristics from the agricultural age of the world’s development, including, the dominance of men in social relations; a division in the productive efforts of men and women into breadwinner and caregiver roles respectively; and, the mirroring of practices of the household in public life.
In addition, the patriarchal nature of African societies is implied in societal structures that are maintained by the male line and give women recognition primarily through their relationship with men. Patriarchal norms are enshrined in the constitutions of many African countries. Nigeria, for example, treats women as second-class citizens in some respects. Section 26(2) (a) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution does not allow a non-citizen partner of a Nigerian woman to become a citizen of Nigeria, whereas a Nigerian man in equivalent circumstances may apply for his wife to become a Nigerian citizen (Abegunde, 2014, p. 176). The constitution allows for widowhood rites which permit families to dispossess a widow of her husband’s property if he dies intestate (Abegunde, 2014; Yusuff & Ajiboye, 2014). By customary law, the wife has no right to inherit property unless her husband had given it to her as a gift, because “devolution of property follows the blood[line]” and the widow herself is an inheritable property in some ethnic groups (Goitcom, 2014, p. 33). Customary laws of the husband’s place of origin govern inheritance of his assets, if he did not formally adopt the laws of a different place of residence, even if the assets are located there. A widely accepted perspective is that customary laws codified in statute books were developed by Western colonial settlers with the complicity of African chiefs and became the accepted ideal African customary practices, leaving behind the more dynamic customs used prior to its imposition. However, the unequal treatment of women continues even when the Constitutions of African countries eschew discrimination on the basis of gender (Aladetola, 2017). Men are, therefore, five times more likely to own land than women in Nigeria (British Council, 2012); the inequitable inheritance practices also contribute to the repression of the economic and political potential of women (Ajiboye & Yussuff, 2017).

The traditional inheritance practices that discriminate against women occur more widely in African societies, against the spirit and letter of the African
Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR or African Charter) of the African Union adopted in 1981. The charter was introduced to eliminate all gender-based violence, including the idea of superiority of males over female persons (Ozoemena & Hansungule, 2014). For instance, customary laws in Botswana and Swaziland entrust men with power and responsibility regarding women’s access to resources, as women are considered not to be fully competent to look after their own interests (Physicians for Human Rights, 2007).

The policy environment is nevertheless slowly changing in places: In April 2014, the Supreme Court of Nigeria voided a customary law of succession of the Igbo people of South-eastern Nigeria that favored male offspring over female and denied women the right to inherit property from their fathers (Goitcom, 2014). The socialization of women to prevailing norms congeals into an essentialist African woman identity enshrined in traditions of inequality (Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013), with its attendant benefits and constraints for women.

2.4.2 Essentialism

In the sense of Fuss’ (1989) definition, essentialism represents the view that the essence of things is fixed and cannot change, and people in particular groups have the same characteristics and tendencies, without which they are unrecognizable as members of their group. Davies (1995) argues that with reference to gender, essentialism permits an understanding that males and females are fundamentally different. The idea of a fundamental difference between men and women gives credence to biological determinism, the view that the difference in the manner men and women think and act is determined by a difference in biological composition. Davies (1995) rejects the notion of biological determinism and argues, instead, that the differences between men
and women are fashioned by codified rules of social relations that influence people’s worldview. Some feminist scholars have also criticized the overreliance on biology as a basis for social relations and identity formation (Moore, 1994; Stone, Epstein, & Straub, 1991; Strathern, 1988). Stoler (1997) and Hirschfield (1996, as cited in Stoler, 1997) further argue the proposition that there is a relationship between essentialist thinking and categories of power, because when people identify by a fixed set of characteristics, it sets how other people view them and deepens their marginalization by the other.

Research into African women’s literature – novels, plays, short stories and poetry - is a rich source for charting African women’s space and a major avenue for eliciting gender concepts from African perspectives (M. Kolawole, 2004, p. 263). For example, O. Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) trace the history of gendered identity in Africa, and argue that essentialist constructions of African women, which started in disparaging colonialist narratives, and Leopold Senghor’s response in his celebration of the Black body in the poem, “Black Woman” (1945), “entailed the sole identification of [African] women with essentially biological or sex-related roles” (p.6). O. Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013, pp. 5-16) articulate three essentialist constructions of gendered identity and their associated complex negotiation of power in relationships represented in Nigerian postcolonial literature. They classify these as “essentialism entrenched”, “essentialism confronted” and “essentialism negotiated”. According to Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013), the “essentialism entrenched” model entailed women uncritically conforming to cultural norms. The “essentialism negotiated” model involved women fashioning a way to accommodate the norms. The third model, “essentialism confronted”, is characterized by a confrontation and subversion of cultural norms, which also entails the rejection of wifehood and motherhood as the sole purpose of an African woman. The authors further observe that resistance to
Western conceptions of feminism by African feminist writers perpetuates the interest in representing the African woman in essentialist ways. The authors’ three models are similarly observed in empirical studies by Jewkes and Morrell (2012) and Jaji (2015).

Pereira (2005) also examines how the discourses and practices of domesticity that set the identity of African women are formed at the intersection of religion, gender norms, and democracy infused with religious ideology in military era Nigeria (1984 – 1999). Pereira argues that there is a conflict between an appearance of equality between women and men and the reality of formal and ideological control of women. She notes that the practice of Christianity reduced the autonomy of women in the postcolonial Nigerian state, even while Christian norms offered expanded rights which remain largely unenforced by the State. Pereira (2005) further argues that the practice of seclusion at home offered Muslim women in Northern Nigeria relief from engagement in physical labor, but simultaneously removed their physical and economic freedom. Recent occurrences depicting the plight of women in Northern Nigeria bring Pereira’s observations into sharp focus. Among certain religious sects in which limiting ideas of womanhood are especially strong, keeping women from getting an education is part of the systematic policing of the boundaries of the restrictive norms women are socialized to. Oriola (2017), for instance, observes of activities by members of Boko Haram, otherwise known as Jama’atu Ahlis Suna Lidda’awati Wal Jihad, an extremist group that operates in Northern Nigeria and neighboring countries, that their abominable treatment of women upon ransacking villages in Northern Nigeria, “hinges on the ways in which gender functions as an organizing principle at various levels of society” (p. 115) in the region.

The boundaries of differential socialization to gendered roles and expectations are maintained by real or imagined threat(s) of punishment for non-conformity, often for the woman but not the man. Therefore, even authors like Agbese (2003)
and Omadjohwoefe (2011), who argue that women had better opportunities in African societies under colonial rule, note that prevailing understandings of gender roles and expectations of African women limit the potential that women may attain, and the situation continues in post-colonial African societies.

2.4.3 Contestations of Traditional Gendered Identity in Africa

The domestic arena of families is nevertheless a changing landscape of contemporary gendered role practices. Voices4Change (2015) observes shifts in traditional role responsibilities in families in an empirical study that explores the expectations and contemporary realities of men in Nigeria. Voices4Change (2015) highlights that the widely held belief that a man should provide for his family’s material needs is not always borne out in contemporary practice. Some women support their husbands as men feel the burden of meeting this expectation in a harsh economic climate. This shifting of roles is in part due to the influence of Western lifestyles and challenging socio-economic environments (Azuakor, 2017; Omobola, 2013; Voices4Change, 2015). It is also partly due to some norms being given different interpretations even in the same cultural environment (Ezer, 2016; C. Harris, 2012). Elsewhere, Ammann (2016) also reports situations in which Guinean women supported their husbands who did not earn much, although the man retained responsibility for the basic needs in the family. The slowly changing cultural landscape indicates that women’s engagement with traditional norms in contemporary times may be more complex than the belief that women are powerless in intimate relationships suggests.

There is also a growing activism in Africa for the emancipation of women and accommodation of greater female agency and visibility in private and public sectors. Agbese (2003) argues that Nigerian women thrive somewhat despite the restrictions the society puts on them. Adelakun (2015) also questions contemporary understandings of traditional practices of Africans, when she
argues that Yoruba people of Western Nigeria have not always limited discussions about sexuality to private spaces, despite the criticisms that followed erotic music performances by St Janet, a female artiste in Nigeria. Adelakun (2015) notes that celebrations of Yoruba indigenous culture in festivals like Oke’badan and Oro Yeye, by the people of Ibadan and Ayede-Ekiti sub-groups respectively, permit the use of bawdy, licentious speech. The festivals also involve open talk of sex for sex’s sake, rather than just for reproduction or performances of fertility rituals, without women having to contend with their bodies being objectified (Adelakun, 2015). She points out that the festivals date back to the 18th century, and a Western scholar who witnessed and wrote about the festival was so embarrassed by the sexually explicit language being used that he wrote about it, in his book on Nigerian Studies, in Latin rather than English, perhaps to make it unintelligible for his English reading audience in Nigeria. The official language of Nigeria is English, and Latin is not ordinarily used.

Other authors take a more cautious view of African societies’ stance on women’s sexuality. They, for instance, argue that discussions of sex and sexuality are dogged by critical cultural attitudes still, although the use of licentious speech at cultural festivals and the teaching of erotic lessons to betrothed women in some cultures in Nigeria and Mali may suggest otherwise (T. Oloruntoba-Oju, 2011; T. Oloruntoba-Oju & Oluruntoba-Oju, 2013).

Oloruntoba-Oju (2006) also surveyed the Nigerian film industry for a reading of representations of female sexuality, agency, and power. Oloruntoba-Oju observes that Nollywood films represent a growing influence of drama that deals with gendered themes which reflect sex-gender conflicts in Nigerian society, and that their approach contrasts sharply with the culture of silence shrouding issues of sex in contemporary African societies. He uses a power play metaphor to frame the “protracted game of stealth ... that requires eternal vigilance, intelligence and counter-intelligence” (p. 9) deployed in the social
relationships depicted in the films. Just as Abah (2008) observes, however, Oloruntoba-Oju notes the return to stereotypic hegemonic conceptions of women as always subordinate to men in the films, despite the attempts to promote an alternative viewpoint of equality.

It is interesting that obvious inequalities between men and women persist in social relations. We know that access to family planning is now readily available and women use it to reduce the consequences of their reproductive role on their social trajectory, as Firestone (2000) predicted. There are also technologies for expressing breast milk for later use, and baby food formulas are available for feeding a baby while the mother attends to other interests she has. There are also leak-proof sanitary products for managing menstrual flow, therefore, women are no longer restricted to the home when menstruating. Without suggesting that women do not have challenges related to reproduction and biology anymore, women’s role of biological reproduction is arguably less burdensome and limiting than it used to be. It seems that the roots of gender inequality are deeper than a need for women’s role of reproduction.

2.5 Origins of Gender Inequality

Researchers are not agreed about the roots of gender inequality being in gender role differentiation or that it is universal to all societies. Records available suggest that gender differentiation was less pronounced in societies engaged in hunting and farming practices (Lerner, 1986), but the records do not show that women had decision making powers over men in any society (Miller & Hoffmann, 1995). The origins of gender inequality are anchored on two different but related accounts of religion and social reproduction elaborated in Omadjohwoefe (2011). The first is based on the biblical canonical texts in Genesis 2: 7-22; 3:16, the earliest record of beliefs and practices that ascribe subordinate
status to women and the expectation that a wife would defer to her husband’s wishes in all things. The second account links the subordinate status of women to the social consequences of the biology of reproduction, as only women have wombs to bear children. There are conflicting opinions from Islamic jurists on the role of women in Islam. While some argue that the Islamic marriage contract does not compel a wife to do housework, others argue that a wife is compelled to serve her husband in all matters (Islamweb, 2007). Therefore, some authors opine that the major religions have anchored women’s marginalization in society with such ideas (Millett, 2016).

There is, however, growing opposition to the continued invocation of canonical religious doctrines to perpetuate the subordinate status assigned to women in contemporary society. Women have been ordained as ministers and leaders of some Christian congregations like the Church of England (Armstrong, 1993) although concerns about their involvement in delivering church services are ongoing (Sullins, 2000). Some adherents of the Muslim faith, also point out that stereotypic representations of Muslim women as oppressed by husbands and fathers stem from practices of traditional customs of people in the Islamic faith rather than from Islam as a religion (Guzman, 2018).

Several authors (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Laqueur, 1990; O’Brien, 1981) argue that experience of sexuality and reproduction are based on more than just biology. They are also impacted by society’s ideals for body shape, behaviors, and a sense of one’s place relative to others in the society, among others. Sexuality is therefore impacted by the symbolic representations of gendering the society. Hence, women subordinate themselves to men because society expects them to, not because they are born to do so. Bourdieu robustly rejects the ascription of the root cause of any social practice to biology. He argues that gendered constructions and dichotomous sexual divisions of humans are arbitrary, essentialist and sexist, and a source of masculine domination.
Bourdieu further argues that sexism “aims to ascribe historically produced social differences to a biological nature functioning like an essence from which every actual act in life will be implacably deduced” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 12). In other words, such gendered constructions are ways of creating an unquestioning environment of control and predictable outcomes of dominating and dominated status for men and women, respectively. It thus conceals the socially created nature of unequal power relations between men and women. The work of Bourdieu is compelling in the argument that life experiences are inscribed on the body and greatly influenced by gender through processes that are often hidden from view. The body thus constitutes an essential part of the habitus (or dispositions). Bourdieu expressed this observation as: “habitus is the social made body” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). Indeed, the various roles that societies expect a woman to fulfil, including child-carer, gender role groomer, and role model to the children, as well as moral and support giver for the husband further restrict how a woman may experience desire and sexual pleasure with her own body (Cornwall, Corrêa, & Jolly, 2008; Cornwall & Jolly, 2006; Mama, 1996; Pereira, 2005; Tamale, 2011). Cornwall et al. (2008) argue that:

Sexuality is about a lot more than having sex. It is about the social rules, economic structures, political battles, and religious ideologies that surround physical expressions of intimacy and the relationships within which such intimacy takes place. It has as much to do with being able to move freely outside the home and walk the streets without fear of sexual harassment or abuse as it has to do with whom people have sex with. It is as much concerned with how the body is clothed, from women feeling forced to cover their bodies to avoid unwanted sexual attention to the use of particular colours to mark the gender of infants and begin the process of socialization of boys and girls as different, as what people do when their clothes are off. And, where society and the State collude in policing
gender and sex orders, it can be about the very right to exist, let alone to enjoy sexual relations.

Hence, gender and sexuality intersect, permeating all aspects of life including history, identity, culture, race, and power. This view reflects in United Nations’ inclusion of sexual health and sexual rights within the scope of gender and social equality given that power relations and practices relating to sexuality are often in the control of dominant groups (Coleman, 2008; Lottes, 2013; World Association for Sexual Health, 2008). There is also the admonition to ensure that such rights are retained by migrants and respected in their migrant experience (Lottes, 2013).

2.6 African Gendered Role Identity in the Diaspora

According to Connor (1986, p. 16), a diaspora is the “segment of a people living outside the homeland”. Although individuals construct and reconstruct an identity through a changing set of ideas derived from their cultural, historical and social contexts (Breakwell, 1986, 1993, 2010; Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014), and such an identity is expressed through acting out selected obligations, roles, attachment to particular locations, ways of relating and membership of particular groups (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011), the worldview of diaspora people nevertheless incorporates elements of their origins. The history of the African diaspora has been and remains influenced by the socio-cultural and political upheavals in the making of the modern world. Diaspora Black cultures and identities are made in the context of continuing history of displacement and adaptation engendered by imperialism and colonialism on the African continent (Patterson & Kelley, 2000). According to Safran (1991), diasporic identities represent a dispersal from, but also continued engagement with, the collective ideals of an origin homeland. Clifford (1997) observes,
though, that the transnational connections linking diaspora communities are not necessarily linked to a symbolic homeland. Clifford argues that instead, decentralized, lateral connections of shared and ongoing history of displacement and continuing adaptation may be just as important for diasporic peoples.

There appear to be commonalities between the gendered role socialization of Black people on the African continent and her diaspora, historical and recent. For example, Wilentz (1992b) observes, with regard to the earlier African diaspora from the transatlantic slave trade, that mothers of African descent passed on their cultural traditions and heritage to generations of their children through stories and moral instructions encoded in talk and tales. An African woman writer describes it as, “[m]others handing down the future to their daughters” in a bid to ensure “generational continuity” (Emecheta, 1979, p.47 as cited in Wilentz, 1992a, p. xxxiii). Marcus (1984, p. 85) refers to the socialization process as “the teaching of other women the patient craft of one’s own cultural heritage”, therefore, recreating the teachers’ experiences. Accordingly, the mothers’ stories that kept the venerated African cultural traditions of collectivism alive through generations, also passed on the gendered basis for the continued suppression of women. Nevertheless, as Wilentz (1992b) points out, a woman’s engagement with the norms depends on the depth of her socialization into African cultural values and traditions by her mother(s).

These observations may be relevant in the context of Africa’s recent diaspora also. Trigg (2017) points out that people’s sense of place impacts on their perspectives and behaviors because location in present place is constructed on the back of a broader history and inspires ideas of certain values. Some scholars observe that diaspora African women’s migratory experiences are influenced by a desire to live in places with the potential to accommodate their growing consciousness about the unequal order of things between men and women in African societies (Belot, 2015; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014). Some work has also been
done on diaspora African women’s adjustments to the tensions that the structures in their host environment pose for them. For example, scholars observe that some diaspora African parents used flexible strategies to combine home and host cultures to successfully navigate the tensions in raising children in a cultural environment that is different from their countries of origin (Cook & Waite, 2016; Creese, 2011; Waite & Cook, 2011). They also use the structures in the host environment to help their adjustments (Adelowo, 2012).

Only a few studies explore intimate relationships among the recent African diaspora in Western countries (Batisai, 2016; Birukila, 2013; Pasura, 2008; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014). In a mixed methodology study over 10 years, and involving only the Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK, Tinarwo and Pasura (2014) observe complex renegotiation of gender roles by women in relationships. According to Tinarwo and Pasura, some women strengthened their position in marital relationships by returning the bride wealth their husbands paid to their parents. This suggests that the women considered bride wealth payment a source of power for men over women and that its return may equalize the relationship. In another study with Zimbabweans in the same host country, some women unapologetically engaged in intimate relationships that would be disapproved back in their origin homelands (Batisai, 2016). Birukila (2013) and Henrickson et al. (2015) also explore the practices and beliefs of African migrants in relation to HIV prevention in New Zealand.

There have been no studies focused on making explicit how negotiations of gender and sexuality framed by African cultural norms and practices impact gender inequality and HIV prevention, and how the strategies women use to negotiate the tensions in their intimate relationships contribute to changing practices and discourses that can be promoted for women’s empowerment and better intimacy and health outcomes. Hence, how the tensions of living as
migrants manifest at the micro level in intimate relationships remain largely unexplored in research with migrants of African descent (de Haas, 2010; Ejorh, 2011; Fanning, Haase, & O’Boyle, 2011; Feldman, Gilmartin, Loyal, & Migge, 2008; Gilmartin & Migge, 2015).

2.7 Scholars’ Response to Prescribed Norms

Disempowering African Women

Scholars, in particular, African scholars, have engaged with the challenge that patriarchal structures pose for Black African women and how women may be empowered. Most scholars concede that some traditional beliefs and practices are oppressive for contemporary African women. They argue though, that patriarchy in African societies is more complex than in western contexts, and that the same practices that constrain African women’s life experiences are potential sources of power for them depending on context (Arnfred, 2007; T. Karenga & Tembo, 2012; Lewis & Ogundipe, 2002; Nolte, 2008). The scholars’ position is that women’s power manifests in their societal roles beyond wifehood (Amadiume, 2015; Chilisa, 2012; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; P. H. Collins, 2000; Hudson-Weems & Sofela, 1995; Nolte, 2008; Nzegwu, 2012; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Ogunyemi, 1985; Ojua, Lukpata, & Atama, 2014; Omonubi-McDonnell, 2003; Oyewumi, 1997, 2002). These scholars argue, for example, that women’s roles as mothers and mothers-in-law give them considerable control over their children and females married into their families (Amadiume, 1997, 2015; Nzegwu, 1994; Oyewumi, 1997, 2004). Women’s roles as priestesses and specially designated traditional rulers elevate them to male rulers with the same access to resources as biological men in similar positions (Amadiume, 2015; Nzegwu, 1994; Omonubi-McDonnell, 2003). Women also have more freedoms and equitable rights with men in some African societies that did not relinquish
their non-discriminatory traditional practices upon colonization and introduction of the Abrahamic religions of Christianity and Islam to Africans (Alexander & Welzel, 2011; Nolte, 2008; Salamone, 2007).

From their arguments, these scholars consider that it is only a matter of attainment of motherhood status, old age and/or assumption of elevated societal positions before African women gain power and autonomy. While the scholars’ arguments have merit, they sidestep the issue of (dis)empowerment of women in wifehood and other intimate relationships. They also do not address whether African women are able to get what they want in social and political life outside the sources of power that they highlight. A focus on the often rare and egalitarian practices of a few communities, the elevation of some women to male status, or even the heroic acts of a few women can mask the challenges of the more prevalent experiences of women as subordinated to men and repressed in African societies.

Scholars have thus interrogated the problem of (dis)empowerment of women of African descent with forms of feminism and feminist theory. Feminism focuses on interrogating disparity between women and men in societal issues through a gender lens that advances wellbeing for women. The arguments of feminist scholars remain poignant: Women are not born, but become who they are, because of the requirement to fulfill certain expectations of being the support system that men need to advance their own wellbeing (de Beauvoir, 2012; Pateman, 1988; Rubin, 1975). Although Rubin (1975) has altered her views somewhat, she proposed that “woman” was created in binary opposition to man, to help men build power and influence when women are given away in marriage. Rubin argues that this practice created enforced rules of kinship that set sexuality and cultural practices, which support male dominance in Western culture. Pateman (1988) similarly observes that, “[w]omen are the subject of the … (sexual) contract … the vehicle through which men … [attain] the security of
civil patriarchal right” (p.6). Writing in 1949, de Beauvoir underscores the consternation of feminists in these views when she writes that:

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. (de Beauvoir, 2012, p. 330)

The argument of de Beauvoir and other feminists is that an accident of birth should not delimit possibilities for any woman. However, US Black women writers and continental African scholars (Aidoo, 1998; P. H. Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2000; Hudson-Weems & Sofela, 1995; Mekgwe, 2008; Ogunyemi, 1985; Oyewumi, 2002, 2004) argue that feminism is focused on the experiences of middle class White women’s issues and is not adequate for explorations of the lived experiences of women of African descent. The African scholars argue that using feminism to explore issues regarding African women introduces a division between women and men that is inconsistent with the African way of life. They further challenge the suppression of African women’s voices in the production of knowledge about them.

African women, Gender and Feminisms

M. Kolawole (2004) theorizes African feminism and attempted to re-conceptualize gender for Africans. She used the *Arere* metaphor to anchor her explication of patriarchal society’s response to women who insist on having a voice. Kolawole notes that the peculiarities of gender issues in African societies had been overlooked and the culture of silence among African women has been misinterpreted as an acceptance of oppressive inequality. She evaluated the

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1 The *Arere* tree is a strong, unpleasant smelling tree that is not desirable close to homesteads.
contribution of women in mobilizing against colonial rule and imposition of taxation on men and women in Abeokuta, Nigeria, the Aba riots in Nigeria, the role of the Kikuyu women in the Mau Mau struggle in Kenya and in Zimbabwe. She concludes that the marginalization of contemporary African women is an erosion of women’s voices resulting from the postcolonial practice of socialization of women to silence. She explores the re-creation of spaces for women by postcolonial women writers, including challenging the revision of history by male writers like Chinua Achebe, whose writing cast women in subordinate roles in contradiction of their activism against colonial rules and practices recorded in modern history. She thus acknowledges the work of African gender theorists who question the source and transfer of the ideology that a woman should not be visible, or audible.

M. Kolawole (2004) acknowledged the resistance by African scholars (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; Nzegwu, 1994; Oyewumi, 2002) to Western feminism and their preference for a focus on identity, sexuality and difference, because they perceive gender differentiation as a postcolonial problem in African societies. Kolawole nevertheless argues that feminism is relevant to African women but there is an appetite for self-naming and particularizing of feminism as promoted by Black and African scholars (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Ogunyemi, 1985; Walker, 2011), rather than subsuming the issues of African women and the traditions they value under a global feminist agenda, since considerations of gender necessarily involve cultural and historical contexts. Walker and Ogunyemi named the Black feminism, Womanism. Umeh (1981, p. 178) notes the perspective of Buchi Emecheta, an African scholar, thus:

I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman’s eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of African women I know. I did not know
that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small ‘f’.

Emecheta clarified her position many years later when Womanism became a rallying point for explications of gender theorizing by African scholars. She said, “I will not be called a feminist here, because it is European. It is as simple as that. …I do believe in the African type of feminism. They call it womanism …” (Emecheta, 1989, p.19 as cited in Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997, p. 7).

Thus, some African scholars instead promote womanism (and variants like “Stiwanism”) as a form of tempered feminist theory to explore the experiences of women of African descent (M. Kolawole, 2004; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). Womanism (Walker, 1983) involves a commitment to represent the communal worldview of Africans in research with people of Black African descent, even as it is focused on empowering women. Womanism approaches the issue of empowerment for women from the standpoint of achieving wholeness for the group; therefore, men are viewed as partners rather than oppressors. Ogunyemi provides a definition that elaborates its intent. For her, African womanism is:

a philosophy that celebrates Black life, while giving a balanced representation of Black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power, and so can be a “brother” or a “sister”, a “father” or a “mother” to the other. (Ogunyemi, 1985, p. 72)

Ogunyemi’s definition of womanism thus encapsulates the aspirations of African scholars to maintain what they believe it means to be Black, which is, to live in the interest of the wellbeing of the collective, giving respect to culture and
traditions. The use of womanism as an interpretive lens in research may address the desire of African scholars to avoid the duality of *us* (women) and *them* (men) approach to responding to the challenges of patriarchal practices of Africans. However, there is little evidence of its impact on advancing women’s empowerment. This may be due to the difficulty in positioning women of Black African descent in feminist and rights based discourses, just as for their American counterparts (Williams, 2015). There has also not been a focus on understanding how prevailing practices may be changing to glean learning that may be shared to empower women. African women’s experiences as migrants also remain secondary to those of men in scholarly works, despite women embodying the cultural identity of their group, and redefining social identities as they recreate new homes in the diaspora (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2015).

What runs through the threads of these scholars’ thoughts, however they view women’s experiences, is practice premised on the structures and norms of African cultures that disadvantage women and a desire to empower them. However, gender is a pervasive system of power, and understanding the relationship between both gender and power is useful for facilitating change (Koester, 2015). Power is generally understood to be the ability to achieve or make other(s) achieve an end. According to Koester (2015, p. 2), proponents of “power over” and “power to” limit issues of power to interpersonal relationships, while proponents of the “actors and structures” approach to explorations of power consider that wider systems of domination anchor people’s opportunities and lived experiences, such that the individual is an effect of power, rather than a power holder or victim. The visible, hidden/invisible model of power contemplates how the real power may be in systems and organizations that control how people perceive themselves, blinding them from doing differently.
Power, regarding people of African descent, is understood to be good when it is in line with the principle of unity among black people. The importance of Black unity is for healing and thriving following the dark history of the slave trade in African people and later, colonization of countries on the African continent. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) offers an understanding of women’s empowerment in the African cultural context:

What does empowerment mean to us as black women of Africa and her diaspora? It means social recognition and dignity just as, most of all, it means space to speak, act, live with joy and responsibility as it has always meant for our ever responsible foremothers wherever they were in history. Our work, writings, and exhortations as women in various forms and media show that we want to end our silences and speak our truths as we know them. We wish to have power which positively promotes life in all its forms; power to remove from our path anything, person or structure which threatens to limit our potential for full human growth as the other half of life’s gendered reality; power to collapse all screens which threaten to obscure our women’s eyes from the beauties of the world. (p. n.p)

Ogundipe-Leslie’s explanation is thus my understanding of women’s empowerment in this study, along with her advocacy to use whatever theories advance wellbeing for women. I explore approaches to power proposed by P. H. Collins (2000) who identified four domains of power that anchor the oppression of women of Black African descent in society. The domains she identified are structural; disciplinary; hegemonic; and interpersonal. According to Collins, “[t]he structural domain organizes oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experiences and the individual consciousness that ensues” (P. H. Collins, 2000, p. 267).
Collins also proposes two approaches for understanding power among Black people. These are the dialectical relationship approach and the subjectivity approach. The dialectical relationship approach assumes a relationship in which one party uses their advantage over another as a tool to oppress. It therefore involves an oppressor, and the oppressed. The oppressed may (or may not) respond with resistance and activism to subvert authority. Collins locates most black women within this dialectical approach. She argues that Black women exist in a matrix of intersecting oppressive systems of domination at the level of gender, race, class and sexuality, which women respond to with personal action and consciousness in their lives, and which may also further deepen their oppression. In other words, Black women may unwittingly continue their own oppression by their response to the demands of the domains that oppress them, just as Bourdieu (1990b) also observes.

However, although Collins observes that Black feminists are concerned about equity and social justice for all Black women, her classification of domains of power represents the layers of oppressive domains for US black women, and the domains may combine differently in the context of research with non US Black women. In African countries, for instance, hegemonic institutions take their legitimacy from the structural organizing principles of the society and the oppression plays out in interpersonal relationships in the public and private domains. The structural domain also does not generally oppress African women through racial policies that segregate people through access to essential services like housing, healthcare and workplaces, which are key domains of oppression for US Black women.\(^2\) Therefore, while Collins’ thought on power provides grounding for debates about Black women’s empowerment, it provides limited

\(^2\) The South Africa Apartheid experience is a notable exception. The policy of segregation ended in 1994, although challenges remain in achieving equitable distribution of wealth.
scope for examining how resistance and ruptures to norms and practices may manifest in research with non-US Black women.

Thus, research with Black African women in the diaspora encompass a complex field of study spanning gender, race, identity, patriarchy, poverty, sexuality, post-coloniality, globalization and others. In this thesis, I explore practices of diaspora Black African women. I orient my research towards praxis, rooting my research in matters of everyday life. I examine relations with intimate others, female agency, relation to other cultures, patriarchy, and privileging of men in relation to their New Zealand host context. These are issues that postcolonial feminists and African feminists explore. Theoretically, I take guidance from the admonitions of feminists for researchers to be reflexive and de-homogenize the experiences of Black women by highlighting diverse ways they engage with issues of gender and identity.

Also, I want to explore the women’s negotiation and contestation of identity and how the tensions manifest in their intimate relationships as diaspora people. This investigation thus requires an examination of social practices across two cultural environments, African and Western (New Zealand).
I, therefore, consider Bourdieu’s theory of practice and social reproduction as an interpretive lens suitable for the study. Bourdieu’s mostly anti duality approach to examining practice in social relations is a key meeting point with the aspirations of Black African scholars, who prefer to use womanism and its variants as an interpretive lens, because, unlike feminism, they eschew antagonism towards men. Although a Western researcher and philosopher, Bourdieu had significant field experience of exploring the practices of people indigenous to the African continent in his empirical work with the Kabyle of Algeria, which shaped his reflexive approach to social science. His theory also allows for a comparison of people’s practices across different cultural locations; it is therefore useful for explorations of the cultural practices of diaspora people.
His theorizing on power leans on the “actors and structures” model which is reflective of the situation of Black women described by Collins. Bourdieu also provides clear tools for interrogating domination of people through cultural power.

2.8 Bourdieu and Cultural Power

Bourdieu’s theory of practice is useful for exploring how unjust systems and practices are maintained using cultural power. He engages with culture by considering culture as an avenue for the propagation and reproduction of structures and systems of domination and inequality. He theorizes the potential of cultural practice to create and perpetuate inequality, but also to mediate change. Bourdieu rejects philosophy’s dismissive stance towards practice, and agrees with Marx (1888/1977) that “[a]ll social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 157). Bourdieu also rejects the treatment of interactions in social relations as though they were separate from the structures of society (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 15). He argues that practice is always geared towards an outcome (Bourdieu, 1990a), and he encourages a focus on explorations of what people do in social relations as a way to understand people’s ability (or agency) to achieve what they want. His philosophy is that agency ramifies interactions in social relations and is not separate from the structures of the society.

Bourdieu’s philosophy of practice brings together four relational concepts that together position power as a product of a society’s culture and the symbolic resources or values the society creates (Gaventa, 2003). The four concepts are habitus, field, capital and doxa (Bourdieu, 1990b).
Bourdieu’s key concept, habitus, is a person’s cultural disposition that at once limits and facilitates change in a different environmental context, but within what is permitted by the social structures that created the habitus in the first place. He posits that fields are structured social spaces bounded by norms and rules that people use intuitively to navigate their interactions with other people. Bourdieu’s field is a competitive space, a site of struggle, within which people compete for the same stakes and dominance. Fields are autonomous and need to be studied to establish how a society works. Bourdieu’s Capital, refers to resources that can be accumulated from the field(s) in which social relations occur. Bourdieu also called this cultural capital (Desan, 2013).

Bourdieu’s writings on symbolic relations are examined through his concept of cultural capital. Rather than starting out on a relation of one group exploiting the other, Bourdieu argues that all parties in groups attempt to achieve their own interests by working within the rules of the game in the field. It is, therefore, the differential accumulation of the valued capital of the field that determines the dominated and dominating groups (Bourdieu, 1986). Lastly, the “doxa” represents how a person’s positioning and beliefs relative to the field and what is permitted in it contribute to how they view themselves as members of the society, and hence, their potential to mobilize the resources in the field to their advantage (Bourdieu, 1990b). Therefore, “doxa” sets out the nature of agency in the social field (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 68).

The four concepts together form people’s life world. Bourdieu’s theorization of the social world is a multidimensional relational space where agents and structure mutually act on each other. He posits that the practices which order a society are absorbed through “cultural products” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 471) that guide routinized actions and ways of thinking. He argues that the cultural products retain their legitimacy through continuous interactions of the people (as agents) with the structures of their society (Navarro, 2006). For Bourdieu,
therefore, norms and rules only provide interpretive resources for strategic action, and, they are “double game strategies”, which enable people to pursue their own interests “while … seeming to obey the rules” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63). He further argues that the individual strategies make an infinite number of responses possible, which predefined rules cannot predict (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Bourdieu (1986) also argues that when a person uses such individual strategies to navigate norms that constrain them, it makes the person feel that they are subordinate to an Other. Bourdieu refers to this as having ‘a sense of one’s place’ in the hierarchy of the society (p. 247). Therefore, the positions that people can marshal for themselves from a possible network of positions in the field of social relations involve power plays, which also determine who is dominant and who is dominated. Bourdieu further highlights that since the social structures and the actions of people in a society together create what members of the society value, there is always space for changing practice, depending on a person’s disposition to prevailing practices.

In summary, Bourdieu’s proposition is that the habitus (dispositions, propensities) of a person and the cultural capital (knowledge, experience, participation) that they can accumulate relative to others in their societal field foreground or aid unjust practices in social relations. Exploring the practices of social relations with Bourdieu’s concepts also helps the examination of how the problem of injustice and inequality may remain “misrecognized” in the field (place or domain) where there is competition for resources, thereby perpetuating inequality between the society’s groups. Bourdieu’s framework is, therefore, applicable to explorations of identity, gender, and sexuality, spheres of lived experiences where inequalities are generally embedded in taken-for-granted social practices.
This brings me to the theoretical tensions in the explorations of the thesis at the nexus of socialization theory, feminism, and Bourdieu’s theory. Feminism as a critical sociological theory considers that gender is socially constructed and emancipatory practices are an imperative for an equitable society. Cultural sociologists also argue for a more sociological approach to feminist criticism to enable a more complex understanding of social aspects of cultural production. Wolff (as cited in Moi, 1991), for example, argues that feminist critique may not be effective unless it focuses on a “systematic analysis of sexual divisions in society, of the social relations of cultural production, and the relationship between textuality, gender and social structure.”

Sociological concepts however do not lend themselves readily for explorations of the ubiquity of gender in social relations (Krais, 2006; Krais & William, 2000; Moi, 1991). For example, explorations of gender rely on social role and expectations for men and women, a relic from the role theory of the 1960s. However, gender role differentiation cannot be conceptualized for analyses of structures of power and domination because role differentiation depends heavily on a specific social situation and ignores other life experiences, whereas issues of gender ramify all aspects of life. The role concept is also focused on role maintained by society and reproduced by individuals. It therefore disregards how people may do gender differently from its social construction.

Bourdieu breaks with established dichotomies of sociologists’ view of the social world and the way such obscure conceptual analyses of gender. Instead, he uses dimensions of habitus in his theoretical explorations of gender. Bourdieu developed his concept of habitus in response to his observation that married people did not follow the rule of roles coined by sociologists. He also developed
the concept of cultural capital when he observed that economic capital did not always account for differences in lifestyles and cultural tastes of groups in French society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). He shows that the power of gender is mediated through the habitus and that male domination is a part of everyday practices and social structure. Bourdieu (1997, p.222 as cited in Krais and Williams, 2000) argues that “gender is a fundamental dimension of the habitus which modifies, as do the sharp or the clef in music, all social features connected to fundamental social factors.” In Bourdieu’s social world, gender is one way to make distinctions while a researcher explores how gender impacts other aspects of life in the society that gave the gender differentiation its meaning. In other words, although gender permeates all aspects of life, its role must not be assumed beforehand but explored theoretical from research in the field.

Bourdieu’s sociological argumentation on the concept of habitus focuses on the body but does not limit it to the body like other sociological theories. His theory thus also helps to overcome the mind-body dualism in feminist analysis. Krais (2006) observes that social science paradigms narrowly focus on the social being shaped by norms and roles of expectations, whereas “[o]nly with the aid of a systematic, analytic approach to the fundamental bodiliness of human action, which Bourdieu’s concept of habitus provides, can their findings be applied fruitfully to overcoming the mind-body dualism” (p.128). In Bourdieu’s sociological thought, individuals experience their genderedness in body and mind, because gender is constructed from beliefs that are experienced through bodily processes that people go through to become what they have been classified as by society. It is also the condition that makes the habitus a set, as well as adaptable, disposition that holds out the possibility of agency and change. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus facilitates the examination of gender as permeating all aspects of life in the sense that people do gender, but the doing is
not the same across societal classes or periods. The doing of gender also does not mean the same thing to every individual in the society.

Further, unlike the perspectives of other socialization theories, Bourdieu’s agent is not a deviant living in opposition to the society. His understanding of the socialized individual is expressed as the concept of a social agent who is constructed as a fundamental social being actively living in and adjusting their practices to the demands of a place at a certain time. In habitus, individuals are enmeshed in the game of the field they live in and individuals and society are co-creating each other. A textual reading of Bourdieu shows that habitus and field, two of Bourdieu’s key concepts are closely intertwined. Bourdieu’s habitus is not static. It is an active set of probable dispositions a person may call upon to respond to opportunities and challenges in their life world. The continuous interaction of a person’s habitus with the characteristics of their field using various strategies they are often impervious to as agential, create possibilities for social change even as people aim to achieve legitimacy in the field by negotiating its constraints.

The field presents specific kinds of valued symbol, such that only those recognized as having acquired considerable amount of them can speak for that field and also withdraw the right to speak for the field from those less adept at playing the rules of the game of that society. The way to achieve dominance in the field is to accumulate the symbolic characteristics valued in the field. Thus, “any agent in the field may be assumed to be seeking maximum power and dominance within it. The aim is to rule the field, to become the instance which has the power to confer or withdraw legitimacy from other participants in the game” (Moi, 1991, p. 1021). Bourdieu’s sociology therefore has people (as social agents) at its core rather than the structures of society often used in other sociological thoughts.
Also, Krais and William (2000) argue that sociology is political since it explores social and symbolic struggles through contested perspectives and classifications that define the social world. According to Krais and William, sociological concepts could be more geared towards practice to explore unjust relationships of power. Bourdieu’s theory is similarly political but strongly focused on examination of power in relationships. Beyond the ideological posturing of other sociological theories, Bourdieu adopts the patterns of everyday thought in his concepts. His explorations of the impact of French culture on the Kabyle of Algeria, his critique of academia and examination of class and cultural consumption in French society all provide resource for explorations of social exclusion and power. Krais (2006) argues that Bourdieu’s practice shows how people fail to see gendered socialization as a cultural pattern that forms a unique social structure based in a symbolic order that manifest power for one over the other, allowing men to dominate women in close interactions. The central thrust of Bourdieu’s theorizing is an exploration of hierarchical power and domination, which he made explicit through his concept of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is an expression of domination in face-to-face interactions. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is soft and wide ranging in its usage for domination of women by men, hence an analysis of male domination is appropriate for understanding domination (Bourdieu, 1996, 2001). Bourdieu writes that:

Symbolic violence is exercised only through an act of knowledge and practical recognition which takes place below the level of the consciousness and will and which gives all its manifestations – injunctions, suggestions, seduction, threats, reproaches, orders, or calls to order – their hypnotic power. (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 42)

Bourdieu’s body of work therefore enables examination of sexual divisions in society, social relations, and historical determinants of cultural production, laying the groundwork for the pathway to examining social relations for insights
on emancipatory gender practices that feminists seek. Feminists though resist his theory as inapplicable to their aspirations because they perceive an undertheorizing of women and gender in his work. A careful reading of his earlier works though shows that Bourdieu’s concept of ‘classes’ is amenable to examining divisions in groups who share common social characteristics, hence, similar habitus (Krais, 2006; Moi, 1991). Bourdieu also intentionally aligns his position with socialist or materialist feminists in his later writings, arguing that: “male domination constitutes the paradigm (and often the model and stake) of all domination” …. [and] change will only be from “collective action, which sets out to organize a symbolic struggle capable of questioning practically every tacit presupposition of the phallonarcissistic vision of the world” (Bourdieu, 2001, pp. 30-31). Therefore, the strength of Bourdieu’s thought for feminist theory is that he takes the anti-essentialist position, which aligns with feminist debates that sexual identities are categories of social practice that must be emptied of prevailing meaning through social change achieved from gendered power struggle.

Arguing that Bourdieu is relevant to feminism, Moi (1991) observes that Bourdieu’s strength is in his microtheory of power derived from his ability to make social theory out of everything, thus allowing highly complex yet quite concrete and specific links between varying aspects of everyday life. She observes that:

Where Gramsci will give us a general theory of the imposition of hegemony, Bourdieu will show exactly how one can analyze teachers’ comments on student papers …. Much of what patriarchal minds like to trivialize as gossip, and as women’s gossip at that, is in fact socially significant. … After reading Bourdieu I now feel confident that it is possible to link the humdrum details of everyday life to a more general social analysis of power. This in itself ought to make his approach
attractive for feminists looking for a mode of social analysis which seeks to undo or overcome the traditional individual/social or private/public divide. … I know of no other theory formation which allows me to make highly complex, yet quite concrete and specific links between, say, my fascination with Simone de Beauvoir, my tendency to eat fish in restaurants, and my specific position in a given social field. (Moi, 1991, pp. 1119 – 1020)

Moi (1991) also observes that feminists may repurpose Bourdieu’s concepts of social practice for exploring social change. She argues that Bourdieu uses his empirical research with the Kabyle of Algeria and a reading of Wolfe’s To The Lighthouse to argue that change is possible in both traditional and modern societies. Bourdieu posits that in addition to uninitiated insiders lacking legitimacy who may rightly perceive male domination as an illusion of masculine importance, sustained contact with other cultures may also create conditions for questioning practice and bring change. Bourdieu observes though that change cannot be decreed.

Feminists also read Bourdieu’s habitus as set and unable to take cognizance of individuals’ reflexivity and processes of social change (c.f Calhoun, 1993; Butler, 1999). There are also concerns by other sociologists that Bourdieu’s theory of practice does not provide enough scope for interrogating individual agency and possibility to change discriminatory practices, although he talks about individual strategies and subversion (Apple, 2005; Burawoy, 2011, 2017; Cockerham, Rütten, & Abel, 1997; Frohlich, Corin, & Potvin, 2001; Nobbs, 2017). For example, there are questions about the usefulness of Bourdieu’s habitus for exploring change because of its limited appreciation of the perspectives and resources of people and its inability to make points of resistance and innovation for change explicit (Burawoy, 2011, 2017). Other researchers in public health observe that the agent in Bourdieu’s theory is “abstract” (Cockerham et al., 1997,
p. 337) or even “absent” (Frohlich et al., 2001, p. 790). More recent research also considers that Bourdieu does not show how his concept of habitus contributes to behavior change (T. Abel & Frohlich, 2012).

This observation represents an incomplete reading of the purpose of Bourdieu’s habitus. The purpose of Bourdieu’s habitus is to explicate the fluidity and incompleteness of social action at a place and time. Bourdieu simultaneously allows for entrenchment in a doxic state as an individual contemplates ambivalences and contradictions in their social experience as well as the opportunity for changing practice, since the habitus is part of the tapestry of their life. Using his own experience as an example, Bourdieu (2001) considers a split habitus that permits set, doxic attitudes and an innovative and agentic one in the same individual according to their conflicting life practices and experiences. The split character of the habitus is reflective of the attitudes and experiences of women towards male domination in complex, contemporary society. Bourdieu argues that social action always starts with individuals already socialized to the symbols and values of the field they are born into before they enter the field as players. He also shows that people, as social agents, internalize and reproduce dominant values of their society, which makes patriarchal power difficult to dislodge because it seems to be natural and universal.

Bourdieu argues, however, that in a complex environment with conflicting and contradictory social practices, a woman’s habitus may be transformed to the norms or she may turn to conscious opposition of normative values. Both states can make space for resistance and change. Therefore, Bourdieu’s theory does not assume that people conform to their socialized state always. In Bourdieu’s sociology, there is always possibility for agentic struggle and changing doxic attitudes, especially where there is conflict.
Bourdieu warns though that such condition will not by itself usher in equal gender order, as meaningful change requires many women taking political action in a social movement rather than a few women rebelling against the gender order. In this, feminists agree with Bourdieu that most change is in the realm of refashioning of gender in the dominant classes rather than a dissolution of male dominance.

I have addressed the tensions between socialization concepts, Bourdieu’s sociological thought and feminists’ views of Bourdieu’s theory regarding gender and women. The allegations include that Bourdieu’s theoretical worldview is androcentric because he ignores symbolic struggle over gender; his work suggests that society is a doxic environment in which habitus is set, and therefore, his concept of habitus is deterministic and incapable of taking cognizance of individuals’ reflexivity and agentic opportunities for social change (c.f Calhoun, 1993; Butler, 1999).

Importantly for exploring the lived experiences of diaspora African women in this study, Bourdieu offers the possibility of a complex analysis of how individuals respond to the norms of their origins when they relate in more than one cultural environment. He explains that:

... the notion of the function of habitus, ... restores to the agent a generating, unifying, constructing, classifying power, while recalling that this capacity to construct social reality, itself socially constructed, is not that of a transcendental subject but of a socialized body, investing in its practice socially constructed organizing principles that are acquired in the course of a situated and dated social experience. (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 136-7).

Bourdieu’s perspective in the quotation above implies that we need to interrogate people’s practices if we desire change. Veenstra and Burnett (2014, p.
193), for example, argue that when Bourdieu’s concepts of doxa, capital and field are examined together with habitus, agency and structure impact each other. They also observe that agency is “necessarily spatial and intersubjective.” Therefore, Veenstra and Burnett write that:

Embracing the relationality of Bourdieu’s concepts allows us to consider the interdependencies of human action (we act and are acted upon) and to understand agency as habitually creative in nature. A relational approach to health practices would therefore consist of critically examining the complex relations between habitus, doxa, capitals and fields whereby healthy and unhealthy dispositions become naturalised as taken-for-granted realities….health researchers….would benefit from a concerted focus on revealing the complexities of the relations between mental structures (categories of perception and appreciation, systems of preference, perceived limits) and objective structures (fields) that give rise to the ‘natural’ health-related practices of everyday life (Veenstra and Burnett, 2014, p.194).

Veenstra and Burnett’s position exemplifies the current thinking in public health research about the usefulness of Bourdieu’s relational theory of practice. Several authors have explored the usefulness of Bourdieu’s theory of practice for engaging with the structure/agency duality in empirical studies for promotion of health and well-being in non-communicable diseases and other health promotion explorations (T. Abel, 2008; T. Abel & Frohlich, 2012; Korp, 2008; Missinne, Neels, & Bracke, 2014; Nettleton & Green, 2014; Oncini & Guetto, 2017; Pinxten & Lievens, 2014; Rütten & Gelius, 2011; Schori, Hofmann, & Abel, 2014; Veenstra & Burnett, 2014). For example, Nettleton and Green (2014) examine people’s agency in mobility practices. They identify three issues which they name as “unthinkable”, “thwarted” and “resisted” in people’s attempts to move around more by cycling. Nettle and Green (2014) then observe that people’s
embodied knowledge is more useful for exploring the possibility of change than the reasons they provide for their practices. This demonstrates a need for a theoretical reorientation towards examining health practices in social fields rather than the erstwhile focus on health behaviors. This is because the factors that make people vulnerable to diseases are linked to habitual practices in their daily lives, which medication cannot access. Proponents of this approach also point out that structural and cultural approaches to public health research do not necessarily obscure the agency of the individual and her choices (Cohn, 2014); a Bourdieusian analysis side steps the agency/structure duality and can be used to explore how people’s dispositions impact potential for change (Nettleton & Green, 2014).

Analysis of data in the current study shows that Bourdieu’s habitus does offer possibilities for explorations of points of adjustment to the field through observations of innovation and rebellion. The concept of habitus also enables identification of oppositions to reproduction of norms and practices that legitimize domination. Importantly for this study, I note the perspectives of Webb, Schirato, and Danaher (2002) on Bourdieu’s ontological commitment to the priority of relations in the interplay of agent and structure in the field. They write that “… for Bourdieu, the relationship between field and habitus does not completely determine people’s actions and thoughts, but no practice is explicable without reference to them (Webb et al. 2002, p.36). Bourdieu’s argument, which I agree with, is that it is impossible for the agent to be absent in interactions in the social field, although individual agency is not independent of the social structure. A person’s agency may be covert or overt as may be relevant to the context, but it is always present.

To conclude, in this second chapter, I explored some of the key thinking about the place of women in African society. Along with critical discussions on African women’s experiences of patriarchal society, I examined the response from
scholars, noted the desire by African scholars for a womanist approach that does not estrange men in the quest for empowering women, and discussed areas left to explore. I also discussed two theorists on power, and the choice of Bourdieu’s, as an interpretive lens in the study. I addressed Bourdieu’s theorization on socialization in relation to gender scholarship and summarized key propositions of Bourdieu’s theories of practice and social reproduction and their use in public health. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological approach in the research.
Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This study follows on from previous studies (Birukila, 2013; Dickson et al., 2012; Henrickson et al., 2015) on issues impacting Black Africans in New Zealand. The study engages more deeply with issues arising from reported research on Africans, using in-depth one-to-one interviews. In this way, it adds depth and a more comprehensive understanding of the issues which challenge the community.

The aim of this study was to explore the intimate relationships of Black African women in New Zealand through the lens of interrogating practice and social reproduction offered by Bourdieu. It is widely accepted that there is a basic system of knowing and making known through methodological assumptions (Creswell, 2012; Green & Thorogood, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Pope & Mays, 2013; Savage, 2006; Tracy, 2013). In the study, I used a qualitative, constructionist approach to explore the research questions posed.

In this chapter, I give a detailed account of the methodological approach and methods used in the study. In the following section, I discuss the qualitative research and constructionist paradigm within which this study was situated. I thereafter discuss the methods used in the study. I explain how I recruited participants in a community that I was new to and collected the data for analysis. I provided a profile of participants and their back stories. I then set out how I analyzed the data for identification of the themes discussed in the findings chapters and discussed my position relative to the research and the study participants. I conclude the chapter by noting the themes for discussion in the three findings chapters.
3.2 Qualitative Approach

Pope and Mays (2013) highlight the appropriateness of the qualitative approach to gain an understanding of the myriad of contextual factors that interplay in interactions between persons, which may impact wellbeing and thus be of interest for public health. Qualitative research explores how people produce their world and give meaning to their lives through their language, behaviors and interactions, which can be gleaned from observations and their narratives of their life experiences (Creswell, 2012; Green & Thorogood, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Pope & Mays, 2013; Savage, 2006). The approach also enables an understanding of how people make sense of changes in their world and the processes and social dynamics of such change (Mason, 2006); as well as what their understanding “means, implies and signifies” (Morse, Swanson, & Kuzel, 2001, p. 875).

A qualitative approach involves engaging with and collecting data from participants in their own settings and analyzing the data in a manner that inductively builds general themes from individual ideas (Cresswell & Creswell, 2017; Tracy, 2013). This approach is suitable for gaining an understanding of the meanings that individuals and groups give to complex issues in their lives within their own individual circumstance and space. According to Mottier (2005), qualitative inquiry follows the interpretive turn, in which data collection involves a mutual construction of meaning between researcher and participants. Qualitative research breaks with the natural sciences as a model for research in that it not only engages with actors being researched, but also focuses on the researcher gathering and interpreting the data as well as considers the context and space in which the research is done. Qualitative research falls within different paradigms, depending on how we understand reality (ontological assumption) and how we study the nature of knowledge (epistemology) (Tracy,
In the next section, I discuss the ontological assumption and epistemology I adopted for the study.

3.3 Philosophical Approach - Constructionism

Constructionism, as an ontological assumption, holds that people’s realities are constructed through their interactions and experiences within their lifeworld (Crotty, 1998; Flick, 2014; Schutz, 1996). Schutz (1996) argues that people construct their realities through selection and structuring of the knowledge available to them to suit their prevailing circumstances and needs. How people construct such realities depends on how closely the knowledge they draw from is well knitted into everyday life experiences. The narratives of such experiences can therefore only be on-going social constructions and not unquestionable truths. As Gergen (1994, pp. 49-50) puts it:

The terms by which we account for the world and ourselves are not dictated by the stipulated objects of such accounts. ... The terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are social artifacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people. ...The degree to which a given account of the world or self is sustained across time is not dependent on the objective validity of the account but on the vicissitudes of social processes. ...Language derives its significance in human affairs from the way in which it functions within patterns of relationship (Gergen, 1994; pp. 49-50).

This study is socially oriented research focusing on social phenomena in participants’ life worlds that shape their perspectives about intimate relationships. I am interested in making explicit the cultural norms that guide their doing of intimate relationships. I am also interested in how discourses of such cultural norms and practices are exemplified or resisted in the personal
narratives of the women’s lived experiences, including how their positioning may impact sexual negotiation and disease prevention. I thus interrogated participants’ stories of experiences of social events as narratives. Narratives make peoples’ ways of life comprehensible, and open up opportunities for people to consider their contributions to the way things are, if they desire change (Richardson, 1990). Therefore, I locate the research in a constructionist’s narrative analysis epistemology.

3.3.1 Constructionist Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis focuses on examining the meanings that participants themselves generate in their stories and how they may involve complex constituent elements that tell deeper stories. Evolving over centuries from epics, through to biographies of modern history, the narrative genre is useful for constructing self and identity. It has been argued that realizing who one is and wants to be requires self-disclosure and reflection through narratives. Philosophers, notably Lyotard (1984) and Bruner (1986, 1991), theorized the relationship between narrative and identity. They identify the logico-scientific mode and the narrative mode as two opposite approaches to making sense of experiences of self and/or community.

A constructionist narrative analysis goes beyond considering what words participants use to tell their stories, it also situates the stories told within interpersonal, social and cultural relations (Esin, Fathi, & Squire, 2013, p. 204). As such, the analysis does not focus on individuals’ internal states (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). Being constructed in time and space, the narratives produced are not finished stories and may change over time (Bakhtin, 1981), therefore, the interpretations that using constructionists’ narrative analysis enable do not necessarily represent reality and may not represent the
only interpretation possible (Bamberg, 2010; Esin et al., 2013; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Reissman, 2008).

Narrative analysis is also used as a method. The approach focuses on understanding how things came to be what they are in the perception of each participant. Narratives give insight into recounted individual and/or communal experiences and how the individual makes sense of such experiences. Therefore, as a method, the narrative helps the researcher to interpret how individuals view their social environments and make meaning of their experiences of it. Thus, when used as a method, the individual is considered to be actively making meaning of their lifeworld, using the narrative as the primary avenue to make sense of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988). According to Bamberg 2010, the stories that people tell about themselves tell of who they are and become the data to be analysed. This attribute of the narrative is important in explorations of lived experiences for areas amenable to change. Narrative meaning derives from acknowledging that something is a “part of a whole and that something is a “cause” of something else” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 6).

According to Bamberg (2010), when a participant tells a story, “they give narrative form to experience. They position characters in space and time and, in a broad sense, give order to make sense of what happened – or what is imagined to have happened” (p.3). The analysis of such narratives makes sense of both as epistemology and as an analytic approach.

Narratives need to be used with caution however, as people may tell different stories of themselves on different occasions. Narratives involve value judgements and positioning that people negotiate in the stories they tell (Esin et al., 2013). People may also tell their stories by moving positions according to the available public discourses and storylines of others. Story tellers may also narrate different stories at a different time and place. The ways that one
interprets stories shared in narratives is also not always transparent to an audience. The potential pitfalls though are mitigated by the fact that presenting the voices of participants is mediated through the researcher’s interpretive work (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009), especially when the researcher scrutinizes how participants arrived at their stories. The researcher can also make clear the angles from which their interpretive work is done in order to make it open to further scrutiny and reinterpretation (Bamberg, 2010).

3.4 Methods

3.4.1 Getting to know the research field

I was new to New Zealand, the study location; I had only visited for the first time in the months before I enrolled on the PhD study. How to recruit participants for the study had been flagged as a potential risk to the study when I was admitted to the program. Therefore, although I was reasonably confident that I would be welcomed as an African scholar though new to New Zealand, my first task was to become part of the African community. As often happens with qualitative research (Tracy, 2013), I used the personal networks I already belonged to in negotiating access to potential participants in the three largest cities, Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington.
In Christchurch where I was based during the study, I attended graduation parties, birthday parties, and indeed, every event I heard of where African women would be participating. I frequented African stalls at the International
Markets on Saturdays, until they were stopped\(^3\). I also contacted organizations and key influential persons who could facilitate access to potential participants for the study. Nigeria Canterbury Association New Zealand first gave me access to potential participants. Being a Nigerian, I was invited to participate in the celebrations of the 2015 Nigeria Independence Day in Christchurch. There, I networked and developed relationships with heads of Black African ethnic community associations who joined in celebrating the event. The group embraces Nigerians and their partners and friends from any country in the world. I, therefore, gained access to African women from different countries, including Nigeria.

I also became acquainted with heads and key workers of organizations with specific responsibility for contributing to the wellbeing of Black African populations in New Zealand. These included the heads of Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Somali Associations in New Zealand. I engaged with representatives of the New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF) for engagement with African communities, who welcomed the study aims. I also met the Executive Director of the Canterbury Refugee Council and Resource Centre Inc. They all gave me their contact details and assurances of support for the research. I followed up with introductory meetings at their offices to formally explain my research interests, purpose, and profiles of potential participants. I also promised to share the findings from my research with them and other relevant parties.

My access to women in Auckland and Wellington took off from reconnecting with a former work colleague, who was studying for a PhD at another University in New Zealand. She had quite an influential position in the Wellington women’s community. Exploring her Facebook page led me to finding out about a major initiative to showcase African culture, the first Africa Fashion Festival New Zealand.

\(^3\) It is not clear to me why the market stopped.
Zealand (AFFNZ) in May 2016. This event would pull in many Black African women from around New Zealand. I introduced myself to the lead organizer on Facebook and registered to participate in the event. She welcomed me and my work, and generously introduced me to her network of Black African women who embraced my work and made space for me. My access to potential participants in Auckland was further supported by a professional model, who spread the word about the research.

I took away additional learning for my work from the events I participated in for networking and access. Condoms stands were almost always present at formal events like National Independence celebrations and Women’s global calendar events like International Women’s Day. These were always male condoms only. The distribution of condoms received laughing dismissal by the men. On one occasion in Christchurch, I heard a woman highlight that "it is for your (men’s) behavior". I also noted the music played after most of the non-African guests had left. I was interested in the lyrics of one by an artiste called Wizkid. It went something like "If I show you the money, are you gonna dance and show me your body, baby?" This line in the lyrics highlights men’s expectations that women may legitimately use their bodies for material gain as Barnett and Maticka-Tyndale (2011) report in research with Nigerian youths on HIV prevention. Men and women alike danced joyously to the music. I did not hear anyone complain about the lyrics.

3.4.2 Ethical Considerations

I ensured the study met all ethics requirements for the protection of human research participants in New Zealand. Ethics approval (ref. H16/003) was gained through a rigorous process of the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (Health) for research involving human subjects in February 2016. The relevant
forms, which include the Participant Information Form (Appendix 1), Participant Consent Form (Appendix 2) and the Study Advertisement (Appendix 3) used to explain the study’s intent and criteria for participation are attached as appendices. I began to recruit participants for the study after it was approved.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights regarding participation in research through a detailed Participant Information Form. These rights and my duty of care as the field researcher representing the University were further explained to each participant before the interview commenced. I elaborated on the content of the consent form which summarized the information in the Participant Information Form and assured participants of our efforts to keep their participation private and confidential according to the University processes. I also required each participant to provide a pseudonym which could not be connected to her. Every participant was required to sign and date the consent form to formally agree to participate in the research, if they understood what I had explained to them. All participants signed the consent forms. Although I had made provision for taking digitally recorded voiced consent to be interviewed (without providing real names) for those who may express concerns about writing their real names on the consent form, none of the participants expressed reservations about doing this. The identifying data collected were kept separate from the transcripts of the interviews and locked in a fire safe cabinet in the Department of Population Health, University of Otago Christchurch.

Participants were informed that they could receive a short summary of findings at the end of the study, if they wished. They were also informed that all participants would be invited to attend an information session reporting the findings to members of the African communities and other relevant parties, without identifying them as participants unless they wished to disclose their participation.
3.4.3 Recruitment of Participants

I recruited 22 participants for in-depth interviews from the three main cities (Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington) of New Zealand for the study. Auckland and Wellington are in the North Island, while Christchurch (where I was based) is in the South Island. The locations were chosen for having relatively large Black African community populations. Participants were selected from the age range 15 – 49 years in line with UNAIDS reporting guidelines for HIV-related research with adults of sexual and reproductive age. However, although the age of consent in New Zealand is 16 years, I limited the minimum age limit for participation to 18 years, which is the age of consent familiar to people of African origins. This was important as the study was focused on discussing issues relating to relationships, including sexual activity. A requirement to secure parental consent for potential participants younger than 18 years would have breached the assurances of privacy and confidentiality made for recruiting participants for the study.

Another selection criterion that assumed risk of possible exclusion was that participants needed to be conversant in English. I had made the decision not to use an interpreter as this may have undermined the privacy and confidentiality of participants in a relatively small and close-knit community in the diaspora. A requirement for translation may also cause loss of meaning and misunderstandings. I, however, did not encounter a situation in the field where a potential participant refused an interview due to language barrier. Participants were persons who self-identified as women. They were required to consent to the study only if they knew or believed themselves to have an HIV negative status. The requirement was relevant because exploration of the potential of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention was part of the study and only persons who are HIV negative may consider using pre-exposure prophylaxis.
As detailed in section 3.3.1, I successfully introduced myself to the community. When my proposal received ethics approval, I followed up and pitched my research to potential participants with a request for interviews. In Christchurch, I made direct contact with potential participants by supporting the establishment of an African women’s group in the Canterbury area. The group was named African Women Collective. I attended events organized for addressing issues relevant to women, starting in March 2016. I developed friendships which allowed me to have one-on-one access to African women to explain my research interest and ask for people to contact me privately if they wished to participate in the study. I interviewed 10 women in Christchurch in various locations including in my apartment, and in their homes when preferred. I also interviewed one participant in a café.

For Auckland and Wellington, I followed up with the network of African women I had been introduced to by three women of influence in the communities through Facebook groups. I used Facebook direct messaging platform to have private conversations with each woman. For cost effectiveness, I made interview appointments for the weekend of the African Fashion Festival New Zealand event in Wellington, in the last weekend of May 2016, and the weekend following in June in Auckland. I conducted eight interviews in Wellington. The interviews in Wellington were conducted in my hotel room as was preferred by the participants, except one participant who preferred for me to come to her house to do the interview. Interviewing in my hotel room required careful scheduling of meet and greet, and interview times, to avoid participants meeting each other.

I conducted four interviews in Auckland. The interviews in Auckland were also conducted in my hotel room as requested by participants, except for one where I travelled to a participant’s home. I also scheduled an interview for Auckland Airport at the request of a potential participant. She had examinations on the day
but wanted to participate, so we agreed to do the interview at the airport to accommodate both our schedules. She was not able to participate in the end because of a car breakdown on her way to be interviewed. Although we considered rescheduling the interview, I did not pursue this as enough data was already gathered and interviewing needed to stop to make the data manageable within the study period.

3.4.4 In-depth Interviews

According to Pope and Mays (2013), in-depth interviews with individuals yield insights when we seek new information to fill the knowledge gap on a topic. Daly (2007, p. 139) also refers to interviews as “conversations with an agenda”. Interviews permit a researcher the space to engage with participants in a “cooperative knowledge construction” that involves interaction which invite people to “express the essential and existential components of their identity” (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009, p. 9). Holstein and Gubrium (2003) further regard interviews as a means for collecting empirical data about the social world of individuals by inviting them to talk about their lives in great depth. In contrast to focus group discussions, individual interviews allow exploration of personal perspectives without the risk of interruptions or influence from others. Green and Thorogood (2013) also highlight the usefulness of individual interviews in developing the richness and depth of study data, because new ideas introduced by an interviewee may be explored further in subsequent interviews with other individuals.

I used a short questionnaire to collect demographic information on each participant, before I interviewed them. Interviews took between 50 minutes and 120 minutes; the average taking about one hour and 15 minutes. Each participant
received a NZ$30 grocery voucher for expenses incurred in relation to participating in the study.

I used a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 4) and ensured that key areas were explored at each interview. I also allowed myself the flexibility to embrace pertinent issues that became relevant as interviewing progressed. I sought to get information with my interviewing, but also invited participants to examine their assumptions and the effect of these on their perspectives of their lived experiences, as Tracy (2013) recommends. I concluded the interviews by soliciting advice for a fictional, young, Black African woman intending to start a relationship with an African man. This brought in the knowledge of participants and allowed insight into what they might have done differently from their current perspectives of the issues.

In-depth interviewing is challenging as it uses the skills of listening and analyzing simultaneously. The quality of the information gleaned from an interview is therefore largely determined by the interviewer’s skills (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Tracy, 2013). I allowed an open dialogue in which participants could freely narrate episodes of their experiences to generate one form of data while I could also direct the interviews to key pertinent questions to elicit other needed information. Memos were also used to record relevant observations during the interviews that could aid in understanding the data obtained. Doing all the interviews myself allowed consistency in the collection of information from participants and allowed me some flexibility in the further probes I followed in subsequent interviews. Nonetheless, there may have been areas unexplored whether due to time constraints, participant’s, or researcher’s comfort levels, or through refusal to divulge further information on a few issues by some interviewees. I, therefore, note this as a possible source of oversight in the study.
The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed before being analyzed. I further checked the transcripts against the recordings for accuracy, making sure to note where punctuation marks needed to be to reflect the meaning conveyed during interviews. I transcribed the interviews as I interviewed rather than waiting until all interviews were completed. Transcribing in this way helped me to familiarize myself with the data and identify further ideas to probe in subsequent interviews as relevant.

3.4.5 Participants’ Profiles

All 22 participants in the research live in New Zealand and are Black women of SSA descent. Sixteen of them are citizens of New Zealand and 18 had been in New Zealand for 10 years and above. The women originate primarily from 10 countries across East & Central, Southern, and West Africa. Eight have their origins in Zimbabwe, four in Nigeria, and two each in Ghana, Rwanda and South Africa. One participant each originated from Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. Two participants also belonged to more than one country in Africa. Participants’ ages were between 19 and 46. Their ages were split almost evenly between less than 30 years (10) and 30 years and above (12). Nine of the participants had been married. Six of them were still married. One woman was a widow and two were divorced. One of the divorced participants was in a co-habiting relationship at the time of interviewing. Eleven of the women were single and two were co-habiting. Participants’ disclosed household income was between 50,000 and 174,000 New Zealand Dollars. Most of the participants were educated to college or degree level or studying for a qualification.
Figure 3-2 Map of Sub-Saharan Africa showing the four regions and 44 countries.


The African population in New Zealand is small and somewhat close-knit. This necessitates caution in the use of personal descriptors for biographical demography of participants to respect their right to confidentiality as agreed during the ethics briefings. On the other hand, SSA is almost a whole continent except for the Arab/Middle East peoples in the Sahara Zone. The SSA region also
comprises varied national, sub-national and religious cultures and identities. Further, although participants talked about characteristics of a stable understanding of a Black African woman, the characteristics of whom are presented in the first empirical chapter (chapter four), the participants nevertheless related with their construction of an ideal African woman in different ways. Therefore, the terms Africa or SSA cannot be used unproblematically, and the participants cannot be grouped together as one without loss of meaning and a risk of homogenizing people of diverse ethnic and identity affiliations. To balance these competing requirements, I shall explore participants stories by relationship status and age range (participants younger than 30 years as youths and adults as people 30 years and older). I also provide each participant’s region of origin in Africa (East & Central Africa, Southern Africa, or West Africa) and length of stay in New Zealand (less than 10 years or 10 years and over).

3.4.5.1 Participants’ Back Story

Adele (20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) left her African homeland in Africa when she was nine years old. She has been in an exclusive relationship with a non-African man for over two years. Her partner wants them to move in together, but she struggles with his request for cultural reasons. She lamented that as an African woman, “there’s a lot more that you have to go through to kind of just be.”

Amy (20s, in a relationship, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over) is divorced and recently started a new relationship at the time of the interview. She is Muslim but acculturated to a Western lifestyle when her family arrived in New Zealand. The acculturation was the source of tension in her marriage as her
husband and his family required her to return to the ways of their cultural practices. Amy left the marriage instead.

Angel (30s, single, West Africa, less than 10 years) professes a religious faith but rejects the submissive, male-privileging wife narrative that often accompanies its doctrine. She pondered about the kind of women who would accept to be dominated by a man for the sake of being married.

Angela (20s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years) originates from a home where the sharing of roles by her parents is complementary and mutually supportive. She remains aware of societal policing of culturally delineated gendered roles.

Barbie (30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years) had been in New Zealand less than a year at time of the interview, although she was also a migrant before coming to New Zealand. She struggled with working and childcare and eventually gave up work because of childcare costs.

Bey (30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) had a very traditional upbringing and simultaneously enjoyed an orientation to an egalitarian approach to doing intimate relationships by her father. She, however, tended to follow her mother’s more traditional approach.

Daneel (20s, in a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) is in a long term, unmarried relationship. She was in her perfect relationship except that her boyfriend refuses condom use, although there were health reasons for her inability to use certain types of contraception. He was also not ready to start a family. She said it was a difficult issue that might cause them to break up.

Earth (30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over) has been in New Zealand the longest of the participants. She simultaneously valorizes and disavows gendered ideologies and practices. She dreams of a return to the homeland in her old age.
with a man who shares her aspirations. She believes that her dream may impact her ability to find a suitable partner, but it was important to her.

**Ess (40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)** is married and values her husband being physically available to her above other considerations. She said that “he’s not about family time” and prefers to spend time with his male friends. This was an enduring source of tension in her marriage.

**Frieda (30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)** came to New Zealand to maintain distance from a long-term relationship in which her partner was unfaithful with a friend in their social circle. She did not know about the affair until the other woman got pregnant even though she and her partner were very close and often together.

**Jessica (20s, co-habitating, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)** came to New Zealand with her parents when she was nine years old. She attended schools where she was the only Black student. She does not have African friends who are not family. She has never dated an African man. Jessica reports always having positive intimate relationships. Sex had always been consensual and discussed prior to her engaging in it.

**Josianne (20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)** is single but in a new relationship where she is still working out how to communicate the reasons for the preferences that she already told her boyfriend about.

**Julianne (40s, widowed, West Africa, 10 years and over)** is widowed and they had a mortgage when her husband died. Her partner had been terminally ill, and they did not have insurance cover for the costs of end-of-life care. Her telling of the story indicated both had worked to build their resources and made investment in property ownership but the husband’s sibling wanted to recover “his brother’s property”.

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Mary (40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years) had recently arrived in New Zealand at the time of the interviews. She is married and subscribes to the conservative norms of intimate relationship she had grown up with, although she considered that the demands emanating from it are burdensome.

Nikita (30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) had been through a lot of heartache in relationships she said she should not have been in. She came to a realization that she wanted and deserved better than being in untrustworthy relationships and made a change.

Ruty (20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) arrived New Zealand after reaching puberty. She is working and studying. She says her experience of relationships “so far has been all over the place”. Ruty has had two relationships. Both were with African men, one of whom is from her country of origin in Africa. Ruty says both relationships “didn’t end quite well”.

Sarafina (30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over) is married to a non-African man. She has traversed many cultures and created for herself what she refers to as a third culture - neither here nor there but works for me culture. She considers that her husband’s approach to training children is different from her African experience, which she esteems.

Sarah (20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) set high standards that she lives by and expects in a man. She appears to be considering a downward review of her standards and requirements in order to engage a man. She elaborates that a relationship should not be a struggle and she would not condone infidelity or an open relationship.

Stacy (20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over) is celibate. She has a relatively new boyfriend with whom she has agreed to abstain from premarital
sex. She wanted to avoid unknowingly being in a network involving other sexual partners since she found out her former boyfriend was cheating on her.

Tiri (40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) had been in New Zealand for a long time. She was doing well as a migrant. She makes herself remain receptive to the policing of her behaviors as an African woman in New Zealand.

Usher (Teens, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over) was the youngest of the group. She is bi-racial and insists there are similarities between her parents’ cultures and their approach to raising her and her siblings, although only one of them is African. She was born in New Zealand and had glowing tales about her time visiting relatives in her African homeland.

Winifred (40s, divorced, West Africa, 10 years and over) is divorced and in retrospect considers she made a good decision, notwithstanding that it opened her to possible censure in the African communities in New Zealand.

3.5 Data Analysis

The in-depth interviews “stimulated narratives” (Flick, 2014, p. 264) of relevant episodes in participants’ experiences within their intimate relationships. These provided rich contextual data which were analyzed using narrative analysis. Narrative analysis help to ground participants’ meaning making efforts in the larger socio-cultural environment that their perspectives come from (Mishler, 1986). The purpose of narrative analysis is to present as full an understanding of the elements of the story as possible (Squire, 2008), although there is no one prescribed way of conducting the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) have argued that there is no ideal method of qualitative analysis. They argue that clarity of
analysis and a method of analysis advised by the research questions and broader theoretical assumptions should be preferred to a pedantic focus on an ideal method of analysis. Indeed, Reicher and Taylor (2005) lament the quest for an ideal method and observe that “rigour lies in devising a systematic method whose assumptions are congruent with the way one conceptualises the subject matter” (p. 549).

The narrative analysis I used in this research follows after Reissman’s (2008) dialogic narrative analysis model, which examines stories as being co-constructed in the context of the “interactional, historical, institutional, and discursive” (p. 105). Reissman (2008) discussed three approaches to analyzing narrative data. According to Reissman, a thematic approach is concerned with identifying topical issues in the narrative; a structural approach focuses on the language use and the dialogic/performative combines both the thematic and the structural approaches in addition to considering the audience and purpose of the story. Elaborating on Reissman’s approaches, Bamberg (2010) describes the unit of analysis as “text abstracts” that are conceptual units which have an origin in the shared grammar of participants. According to Bamberg, text abstracts:

[T]ypically consist of an orientation (or setting or exposition), followed by the complication (also called problem or crisis), maybe an action or action orientation toward a resolution, resulting in the resolution (or occasionally failure), which then is ultimately followed by a coda (or closure). The orientation takes the listener into the there-and-then where actions take place, and the coda is taking the audience back into the here-and-now of the telling situation. (Bamberg, 2010, p. 14)

In the analysis procedure this involved proceeding from reading whole interview transcripts to understand their analytical components and identifying blocks of text abstracts as analytical components to be scrutinized for action and
intention, the setting and outcome. In choosing text abstracts as unit of analysis, I focused on the temporal frame that indicated what the interviewee was emphasizing or downplaying to examine the question being explored. I chose such segments as units of analysis especially if they included words or groups of words that I had observed the participants using to signpost their talk in relation to African culture and traditions. I searched the rest of the transcript for data related to the extract to contextualize it. In this way, I could examine the setting or story of the person(s) involved, including time and place in relation to participants’ cultural socialization, the issue or constraint the participant experienced, her response, as well as the outcome and how the story relates to the present time (coda). I created a topical code for the observation. This text abstract from this transcript became the case for the topical code. I then repeated the process for the relevant text abstract of each interview transcript, creating a new code where a participant did differently and did not fit into codes already observed. I thereafter followed a process of making connections across and between stories to group the codes into categories and refine them into themes common to them.

Therefore, I coded the abstracts in relation to the whole, individual transcript, as well as to the body of the transcripts in the research. I highlighted the sequence of events and outcome at the end. In this way, I found patterns and insights in the data to relate with theory and extant literature. Therefore, coding and theme identification always emerged from examination of the “part-whole” relationship through reading each transcript many times and comparing its story blocks to those of other participants. I refined this process until there were no substantial additions to the existing themes. Hence, there were elements of thematic analysis used in the research in line with Reissman’s narrative analysis model. My reporting in the write up of the thesis also gave priority to reporting through themes rather than by participants as cases, for two reasons. Firstly,
presenting 22 cases in one thesis is unmanageable. The thesis using thematic narrative analysis that I have read used eight cases (Birch, 2011). Secondly, the context of participants as a marginal, small population of close knit communities in New Zealand required careful use of demographic data and not providing most of the storylines of a participant in one continuous block that can make a participant easily recognizable.

The three overarching themes identified from data analysis were: gendered norms as framework for disposition in relationships; negotiation of norms and identity as diasporas; and sexual negotiation, risk, and HIV. My supervisors read the transcripts of interviews and reviewed overarching themes. I made adjustments according to their suggestions as needed. In the three findings chapters, I critically discuss the themes in the context of existing literature and relevant theory.

### 3.6 Positionality

Doing constructionist qualitative research which aims to be useful and empowering for women requires a researcher to engage with reflexivity as a methodological exercise (Wasserfall, 1993). Reflexivity provides insight to knowledge production just as it aids the production of knowledge for understanding the social world. Macbeth (2001) enunciates this when she observes that “reflexivity is a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself” (p. 35). Being conscious that the identities of a researcher are read and evaluated by participants just as a researcher evaluates theirs’ (Tracy, 2013), I was quite focused on being reflexive. I was mindful of how my embodied identities as a Black African woman, probably quite knowledgeable in the eyes of potential participants but also considered new to the African/New Zealand (AfroNZ) scene, could ease, or limit my research.
Overall, I located myself in the research as a Black African feminist focused on social justice for African women through recognizing the ideals of tradition, culture and collectivity as practice and lived experience, rather than just as an African ideology and worldview. It was quite a journey to get to this realization. While I agree with African feminist scholars that African womanhood and being African should be self-defined rather than imposed by people who are not Africans, the interrogation of knowledge for the definitions does not need to be confined to the thoughts of Black scholars. Therefore, I started the research without a preoccupation with any theoretical lens and waited until I was familiar with the data to decide on the interpretive lens it pointed to. As I began to work on the data and share preliminary insights with supervisors, discussions about feminism and its African variants came up and I balked at the idea. Introducing the word “feminism” seems to put people’s backs up in African circles. Such is the disciplining of the mind and body of African women that it defines us and what we do. I, however, remembered the consternation and despair, amidst the rebellion against the societal demands on women of Black African descent during my interviews, and the hope that things might change for good. It would be a betrayal on my part if I would not examine my findings with an interpretive lens that gave hope for changing practice.

The work, therefore, became as uncomfortable as it was enriching. This was a good development. While advancing the conversation on rethinking uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research, Pillow (2003) argues that when there is an assumption of multiple, unknowable subjects in research, the researcher has the space to do a “reflexivity of discomfort” (p.188), which allows the researcher to experiment within the confines of the discursive limits of the paradigm used. Vasilachis de Gialdino (2009) also proposes giving priority to the epistemology of the known subject in qualitative research. She argues that it would allow the researcher to access what is important about the researched
and facilitate an interaction that could reveal what is common to a group as well as what is different and unique about each participant. As a researcher in the field, I presented an open and non-judgmental self to participants. I also went to the field with a healthy position of ignorance and let them know they could tell me anything. I was upfront that I would not offer an opinion, preference, or advice on any issue we discussed, only questions about their personal perspectives of their realities as they understood them. In this way, I hoped to make the interviews feel like being in a sisterhood- open, encouraging, and enjoyable. At other times with younger women, I felt like an agony aunt who would listen and question, but not offer advice.

The commonality between the participants and me as researcher, which made the sisterhood possible, also presented constraints. Interviewees sometimes assumed that I understood what they were explaining, and they would stop sentences midstream, expecting me to complete their thoughts. So, when I probed for explanations, some would respond with, for example, a surprised, “you don’t know juju?” My response was always a smile and the kind of look that said, please, explain it to me. This approach was important. Although I could have filled in the explanation because of the constructionist narrative epistemology I used in the research, I did not because participants come from three regions in sub-Saharan Africa. I wanted the source of data to be as transparent as possible. As far as I know, there are three meanings of the word “juju” used by Black Africans, depending on their origin in Africa. The same word can mean traditional, diabolical fetish practices; a genre of African music; or an endearing form of the name Julius, especially Julius Malema, a Pan-Africanist citizen of South Africa.

The interviewing process was also a source of growth for me. I came to the research as an HIV and AIDS management specialist, with a narrower focus on HIV prevention. In the course of writing the proposal, it became clear that there
are many issues in negotiating intimate relationships than a focus on disease. One could argue that a need to focus on disease prevention is an effect of a problem, not a cause by itself. As an HIV prevention advocate, particularly for women, I was not previously an advocate of pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention (PrEP). Taking a pill everyday seems like a considerable burden and cost when the barrier and abstinence methods were just as effective. I vacillated towards advocating for PrEP, when I volunteered at the Infectious Diseases Department of a large hospital in Northern Botswana. I met women whose lived realities precluded abstinence or condom use. I met women whose male partners insisted on barrier-free sex, even when they knew they were living with HIV and may or may not be on antiretroviral treatment for HIV infection. I met a woman who became infected because her HIV positive husband threatened to rape their eight-year-old daughter, unless she acquiesced to sex without condom use with him. However, talking to my participants in this study and interrogating the data taught me about the primacy of choice and context, and the space for each woman to make her own choices without fear and without judgement. That became my understanding of women’s empowerment.

I also share some characteristics with study participants being a Black African migrant woman since 2007 and married for a bit longer. This means that I have my own knowledge and experience of negotiating relationships as a diaspora African woman, which may or may not have informed the study. However, my experiences may be different because I am new to the African/New Zealand (AfroNZ) scene, having only joined as a research student. Hence, I am an insider/outsider researcher. During the research, my erstwhile cosy life began to unravel. My marriage felt the strain of distance and began to reflect some of the issues that came through in the interviews. In addition to reminding me that empathy should accompany critical examination of data when working with people, it also highlights the fluidity of social realities. Research data is a
snapshot of participants’ recollection of their perspectives about their experiences; it is a construction and subject to change.

Engaging in reflexivity also allows one to be creative about the boundaries of ideological theory and practice. Vasilachis de Gialdino (2009), for example, admonishes researchers to be upfront about their own baggage brought to the research relationship, even whilst playing up the shared component of identity with study participants that may facilitate “relational communication” (Schwandt, 1999, p. 457). According to Vasilachis de Gialdino (2009), previously heard accounts are subordinated in this approach, and multiple representations of the subject are highlighted to allow participants’ voices to come through. This was one of my tasks during the critical examination of data. So, for example, if a participant said her spouse did not do housework in response to a direct question and she at any point in the interview alluded to chores the partner did around the home, I also highlighted the account of the partner doing chores since I know that “men don’t do housework” is a previously heard account. In this way, I let the multiple voices of the participant come out, although she had stressed one account. In this research therefore, I align with the proposal by Vasilachis de Gialdino (2009) that the common components in the identity of researcher and participants presume that both actors have similar capacity to know the issues in the dialogue. Thus, the knowledge arising from that shared capacity to know is valorized in this study. I nevertheless do so with caution. This research is not about seeking an objective truth, but explores interpretations co-constructed by participants and researcher in a defined context. In the explorations in this research, I assume that people may modify their beliefs and practices through social relations in different contexts. I am guided by the caution that the research process and its writing up of findings contribute to the social construction of what is being studied (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Flick, 2014). I, therefore, keep my study constructs open to challenge so that as an
African feminist researcher, I remain accountable to Black woman’s struggles for self-representation and self-determination. As Viveweswaran (1994, p. 80) observes, “how we think we know what we know is neither transparent nor innocent”.

The writing up of some of the findings of the research also raised a burdensome ethical question for me. The research was all about African women for Africans. I felt that it would be useful to share the thinking and strategies that the women used to negotiate the disempowered positions they often found themselves in, so that other women may consider or modify them for their own use. However, I also felt like a traitor, releasing the sisterhood secrets that already vulnerable women used to empower themselves. In the spirit of African collectivity, I decided to share all and hope that it helps African women and men to appreciate the depth of gendered inequity in intimate relationships amongst a people with the ethos of wellbeing for one and all.

### 3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I gave an account of the decisions made about the ways of knowing and methodological approach used in the research. My aim was to listen to and represent the voices of participants on how they negotiate their intimate relationships for their wellbeing, the strategies they engaged, and their perceptions of risks, particularly in a cultural environment different from their origins. I used a constructionist epistemology and Bourdieu’s theories of practice and social reproduction as an interpretive lens in a qualitative research approach. The overarching themes identified were gendered norms as framework for relationship negotiation; negotiation of African norms and identity as diasporas; and sexual negotiation, risk, and HIV. I critically discuss these in chapters, four, five and six, respectively.
Chapter 4 Gendered Norms as Framework for Relationship Negotiation

Tàbí bí o sì se obinrin rọgbọdọ

Bí o ba jìnà sí ’wa tí èdá ’nföré,

Taní jé fẹ o s’ilé bí aya?

“And even if you happen to be a plump beauty

But you distance yourself from required behaviour

Who would consent to take you home as wife?”

(J.F. Odunjo, 1961; translation by

Oloruntoba-Oju, 2007)\(^4\)

4.1 Introduction

Shared norms and cultural values of a homeland are central to the lived experiences of diaspora people (Gray, 2006; Ní Laoire, 2008). For instance, research has shown that the reproduction of diasporic ethnic culture and identities revolves around reinforcement of traditional norms of gender and kinship among Irish (Gray, 2006; Ryan, 2004) and Greek (Panagakos, 2004) diasporic peoples. Gray (2006) argues that family and children are dense sites for

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the intergenerational transfer of culture in diasporic Irish families. Living away from their origins also impacts on the cultural identities and practices of Africa’s recent diaspora in Western countries (Batisai, 2016; Creese, 2014, 2015a; Grillo & Mazzucato, 2008; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014).

An overarching theme which threads through participants’ narratives in this research is the belief that there are roles and responsibilities that women are required to live by, in accordance with norms of African womanhood. Acknowledging that these are complex social issues, this chapter focuses on making the cultural norms underlying participants’ understandings about doing intimate relationship explicit for further interrogation in the study. Here, I will give an account of the voices of these participants in relation to three themes (italicized) “norms of femininity”, and how they went through “socialization to privilege men (intimate partners)”, and, how what they have learnt is policed through “maintenance of the boundaries of gendered socialization.” I will then link the emerging perspectives to the theoretical concepts of Bourdieu to deepen the analysis. I conclude the chapter with the argument that assimilating socialization to norms of acceptable African womanhood, as well as their policing, form the cultural framework that is embodied by participants as “second nature or habitus” (Calhoun, 2006, p. 1405), and which engenders a purportedly stable ethnic identity that impacts on participants’ practices in intimate relationships.

4.2 Norms of Femininity

Calhoun (1994) argues that a desire for recognition contributes to how people organize their lives in ways that can disadvantage them. Recognition, in this context, is based on the notion of identity, and the idea that individuals or groups are treated according to who they are or who they identify as. Calhoun argues, however, that the notion of identity remains a focus of struggle as groups that
suffer exclusion usually embrace identity politics in a bid to affirm their relevance to those who marginalize them. This approach is based on the idea that people’s identities are formed and preserved before they begin to participate in the practices of their culture. Markell (2009) argues that the politics of recognition is relevant for responding to power exercised through culture. According to Markell (2009), identity politics focuses on presenting a positive perspective of a group to obtain approval by the other. This is because, “[t]he ideal of recognition is founded on the notion that what we do (and what others do to us) is rooted in who we are (and who we are taken to be)” (Markell, 2003, p. 77). Whilst it may be successful, identity politics nonetheless traps the group seeking recognition in an essentialist, fixed identity that resists any other kind of expression than the established one (Snyder, 2012).

The perspectives of participants in the current study appear to have been shaped by notions of a fixed cultural identity. My focus here is on their perspectives of what it means, and what it entails, to be in intimate relationships. The women in the study narrated attributes expected of them in intimate relationships. In doing so, they appeared to rely on assumptions of a societal construction of “the” African woman – their “recognition” model. At the core of this belief was a shared understanding among the participants that African women are expected to conform to traditional norms, to be acceptable to men and African society as a whole. The participants’ use of terms like “an African woman is supposed to …” constitute expressions of belief in a model of an African woman that is recognized, or which they recognize, as authentic. This understanding of an African woman is similar to that presented in post-colonial African literature examined by African scholars, and represents an understanding that there is one appropriate way to be a Black woman. Snyder (2012, p. 251) describes this view of identity as a “politics of monovalent recognition”. O. Oloruntoba-Oju and
Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) argue that African women were represented in essentialist ways in both colonialist and African writings.

Colonial representations of African women essentialized them as, “jural minors” under the guardianship of their fathers and then husbands for life (Perlman and Moal, 1963 as cited in Sudarkasa, 1996, p.91). Beoku-Betts (2005) also argues that quasi-anthropologist colonial writers presented African women with an uncomplimentary, exaggerated focus on their domestic lives and physical appearance (Laing, 1825, as cited in Beoku-Betts, 2005). O. Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) argue that although Leopold Senghor genuinely attempted to valorize African women in his 1945 poem, “Black Woman”, his descriptive narratives, which were subsequently used by postcolonial writers of African women’s lives, inadvertently helped to further reinforce the essentializing attributes of wifehood and motherhood attributes foisted on the African woman by colonial writers. Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) also acknowledge the power of African fictional writing to perpetuate cultural beliefs and practices. They observe that despite critical arguments by feminists that “man” and “woman” as gender representations are social constructions, essentialism, in the form of tropes on wifehood and motherhood, remain central to the representation of women in African societies.

The belief in one African woman identity was observed in the current research. Participants in this study invariably experienced their intimate relationships in terms of their cultural orientation. Irrespective of whether a participant agreed with or opposed the beliefs, they all drew from the elements of their construction of an African womanhood to frame their perspectives on being in intimate relationships. They described assumptions of gendered traditional roles and expectations of behaviors for African men and women that they learnt through socialization, and which were policed by people around them, seemingly to maintain social order. The beliefs were mostly signposted with words like “our
culture”, “the way we do things”, “supposed”, “expect”, “taught us”, “told us”, “how would it be?” and “see” among others. For example, a participant indicated minimal knowledge of African cultural beliefs as she said, “… So I have been away from it for quite a while, so I think a part of me is kind of … got … that blockage ‘cause I left when I was nine” (Adele, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over). She, nonetheless, defined her relationship in terms of a difference in cultural identity and practices from the culture of her partner, which needed to be reconciled:

[Laughing]. Oh, my relationships, oh now I’m in a relationship, I’ve been in one for two and a half years with a [non-African] man. Yeah and, so that’s been nice, you know, it’s been, I won’t say it’s difficult but it’s like different, you know, with the cultures and everything. And then the need to understand. Like them not understanding our culture and the way that we do things. And then vice versa as well, and just finding some middle ground… (Adele, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Adele suggested that Africans have a different cultural understanding of intimate relationships from others, which is a source of conflict and tensions. Participants shared their stories sometimes using rhetorical questions or question-like expressions to underscore the complexity of the issues raised. The manner in which the women reflected on the logic of their practices as they shared their stories also reflects Bourdieu’s argument (Calhoun, 2006, p. 1410), that ordinary thought is polythetic, deploying multiple meanings in statements that “put symbols and knowledge together ‘practically’, that is, in a philosophically unrigorous but convenient way for practical use”.

Participants’ narratives of expected roles reflect what Glick and Fiske (1996, p. 491) describe as “benevolent sexism” in marriage norms. Benevolent sexism describes traditional stereotyping of roles for men and women, with men as the
providers and dominant partners in relationships, while women are responsible for nurturing, domestic and support work, and dependent on men for their material needs (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Glick and Fiske argue that while the representations of women have the appearance of positive traits due to the nurturing aspect, women’s cooperation with the roles and expectations nevertheless limit their influence in intimate relationships. I examine the beliefs in the roles and responsibilities of African women under four sub-themes, which are homemaking and family care, appropriate feminine behaviors, reticent sexuality, and compulsory motherhood.

4.2.1 Homemaking and Family Care

Most participants talked about the roles and privileges ascribed to men and women in their homelands. The understanding of gendered roles and responsibilities that they talked about indicated that a man should go outside the home to source sustenance for the family, while the woman stayed at home to do the work of housekeeping, as well as bear and raise children. Mary, for instance, provided her perspective of role division for men and women in the family:

Traditionally, an African woman is supposed to take care of the home, keeping the home clean, cooking, doing the laundry, shopping, and everything that a woman needs to do in running the home. That is what an African woman is supposed to do. And the men are supposed to go out and bring the money home. … So, I know most of Africa, even though I am talking in my situation, they [women] work but they never used to have money for their house. The man needs to provide for the house. And also, men don’t help with the housework … (Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)
Mary described a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities in intimate relationships in traditional African settings, and she did not make a distinction for contemporary times. Mary’s explanation was to the effect that women are not required to make financial contributions to the home, even when they have a source of income. Indeed, the stories from some of the participants revealed that the participants did grant the man status and responsibility for provision of sustenance for the family, even when the woman also worked and earned an income. Mary’s assertion that “men don’t help with the housework”, was consistent with other participants’ perspectives:

...because African men have the mentality of they don’t belong, yes, the home is where they come back to, but they don’t see it like they should spend all of their time there. It’s a woman’s job to actually look after the family and they [men] provide. (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

... I think from my observation and from the experience I have had they [men] think that other stuff by women [Shaking her head] ...they think that taking care of children is the women’s job... the women should be at home with children. (Ess, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Ess’ shaking of the head when she referred to other responsibilities that a woman may fulfill in the family may suggest that men do not value such. These participants acknowledged the existing cultural rules of role division between men and women in relationships, and that men and women intentionally maintain the boundaries of roles. Their beliefs reflect those of participants in other scholarship. Research has shown that Guinean women are not obliged to give their earnings to the man either, even when they work and earn an income, although the working woman may well provide support for her husband by
attending to some of the economic needs of the children (Ammann, 2016). Indeed, the roles that participants talked about were couched in binary expressions and were not simple descriptions of functions that men and women performed, as they also involved elements of power play. For example, Tiri’s story goes further to show how cultural role divisions created a hierarchy as reflected in the quotation below:

…because our culture, that’s what it’s saying. I mean, for you to be a man, you have to show the lead, … you have to go out to hunt and bring meat …and then I would happily do the things that I am supposed to do as a woman because I knew my man was taking care of the financial side of things and then I would take care of the house. (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Tiri’s viewpoint suggested that she was being guided by an understanding of African cultural roles in the way she perceived herself as an African woman. She further talked about how the man’s role of provision shows that he is the leader in intimate relationships, and how a woman supports the man’s role by caring for the home. Tiri’s willingness to care for the home was however contingent on the man fulfilling his role as a provider: “I was happy to do that [care of the house] only if he’s carried on bringing the dosh [money] home, going on hunt himself [laughing].”

The women’s perception that these roles were quite rigid, and their consternation with this rigidity, came out in their disclosures. Mary employed fairly strong terms to describe the rigidity:

… It’s like slavery. It’s a very strong word but sometimes you feel like all your desire is to the man because you take care of him, you feed him, anything he needs you want to just provide to make him happy,
sometimes at the expense of your own happiness. That’s what I feel.

(Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Mary likened gendered norms of intimate relationships to servitude as she found that she had to go to great lengths to please her husband, sometimes at the expense of her wellbeing. Participants’ perspectives on the rigid role expectations and how they perceived their place in the relationships therefore reflect Glick and Fiske’s (1996; 2001) concern that stereotypic representations of family life may limit life opportunities for women.

The rule of men as provider/leader is similar to how men’s role was understood in a study of African migrants in New Zealand by Birukila (2013, p. 190) as “the [unwritten] constitution” of African families that gives men power over women in intimate relationships. Other authors support this argument that African women experience unequal power in relationships (Augestad, 2013; Birukila, 2013; Made & Mpofu, 2005; Omadjohwoe, 2011; Yusuff & Ajiboye, 2014), just as have been observed among other women elsewhere (de Beauvoir, 2012; Pateman, 1988; Rubin, 1975). For the Yoruba people of West Africa, power differentials result from traditional understandings of gender roles. As traditional African families practiced subsistence farming and engaged family members in farm labor, including wives and children, (Beier 1995, as cited in Omadjohwoe, 2011), the man was his wife’s employer and her life opportunities depended on his resources (Omadjohwoe, 2011). Research has shown that women of Africa’s recent diaspora living in Western countries have similar gendered role understandings (Creese, 2013; Grillo & Mazzucato, 2008; Onyemelukwe, 2015; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014).

Bourdieu argues that people are agents because they are part of a societal structure that can be recognized by its norms and signifying practices (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b; Fowler, 1998). For Bourdieu, the beliefs that people identify by are
intrinsically linked to the known rules that structure their social world, constituting and reconstituting each other with more practice, such that the beliefs further construct and reproduce the social realities that inform their ways of feeling and being towards issues of life (Bourdieu, 1990a). As noted earlier, Bourdieu names the way of being *habitus*, by the distinctive inclusion of sociological principles beyond the usual understanding of habits (Nash, 1999).

According to Bourdieu (1977), habitus is a product of history, which creates individual and collective practices that in turn, create history; it produces:

> The system of dispositions – a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles …discerned in the social world… without being able to give them a rational basis (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82).

Habitus thus seems to be the principle at play in many of the narrations and recollections elicited above from participants in this study. The similarities in participants’ understanding of expected roles for people in intimate relationships in this study are striking, because the participants originated from ten countries across East, West and Southern Africa. While the diverse languages and cultural practices on the African continent do constrain generalizations about the role of women in African societies, the similarities in gendered role understandings observed in this study suggest that the gendered role system is a deep, historically constituted structure (Bourdieu, 1990a). It bears emphasizing that several authors have observed the importance of cultural identity to people of African descent (Asante, 2010; Cruse, 1967; M. Karenga, 2000, 2013; Myers, 1987). This may also account for why the understandings of gendered roles in African countries (Augestad, 2013; Breidlid & Breidlid, 2013) are similar to those found in my study.
4.2.2 Appropriate Feminine Behaviors

I further explored participants’ stories about the appropriate behaviors expected of them beyond their roles. Most of them talked about how they would adopt certain mannerisms, demeanor, and appropriate outward appearance. Some of the participants’ stories demonstrate how they report feeling coerced into placing value on perceived appropriate behaviors that would make them attractive to men for marriage. Sarah, for example, mostly opposed consumption of what she understood to be African cultural beliefs, which promote the use of less direct forms of communication with men. However, she explained that she might need to compromise because:

... [I]n terms of communicating my needs and what I want, I think I just have to be a little more subtle, and a little less direct.... You know, I think when you kind of do draw those hard lines, it seems like you are not willing to talk about things or negotiate things.... I think it’s personally just you know, ‘cause things [intimate relationships] haven’t worked out in the past for the long term, so I’m thinking maybe it’s a different approach that I need to take... I don’t think it’s gonna be easy or it’s likely to happen, but it’s a different approach so I would try, just in terms of communicating. (Sarah, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Sarah had found that being open and direct about her preferences did not get her what she wanted in her relationships. She would, therefore, consider adjusting her preferences in order to behave in a way that men expected from a potential partner.

The social reality underpinning women’s beliefs that their desirability for marriage depends on showing appropriate behaviors expected of women may, for example, be explored through analysis of an old Yoruba poem in the epigraph at the start of the chapter, Toju Iwa re Ore Mi ("Take heed of your
character, my friend”). In analyzing this poem, T. Oloruntoba-Oju (2007) argues that “beauty synthesis” (n.p) in Yoruba philosophy encapsulates physical appearance and good morals (as defined by the society), and places behavioral restrictions on women but not men. It is clear from the poem that acting in accordance with “required” behaviors has more value than physical appearance in men’s choice of partners. T. Oloruntoba-Oju (2007) further argues that the threat in the poem amounts to “capital censure” (n.p) in pronatalist societies where there is great emphasis on having children. The poem retains currency in contemporary times as it continues to be recited in various forms in popular music. By implication, a woman who is judged as a non-conformist to cultural expectations faces a threat of exclusion from marriage, and by extension, motherhood. It is important to note here, that the Yoruba culture requires appropriate behaviors of every member of society as encapsulated in the philosophical concept of Omoluabi (a person of impeccable moral character); however, men are generally allowed more freedoms than women within the culture.

The understanding of expectations encapsulated in the poem is borne out in the experiences of some of the participants in this study. Indeed, the experiences show that men hold women accountable for not following conventional beliefs for acceptable womanhood. Josianne, shared how her boyfriend refused to become her partner because her upbringing was liberal and did not conform to the African conservative approach he expected in his intended wife:

… He was saying the way that I was raised was liberal. I was a bit offended actually. I can’t remember the specifics but we talked about kids and you know … being a parent to kids but also being a friend, you know … Yeah, he said that’s how I grew up as well, being liberal … and he’s more conservative, but I just see it as being different, but he was trying to tell me my way was wrong and my family was wrong… it was just
comments and as soon as he noticed they were different to his, he was, yeah, “you’ve got to change that.” (Josianne, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

Angel recalled similar treatment from a man who decided that she was undesirable as a wife because he associated a woman being in employment with prideful and undesirable attributes:

... So, there was a time he mentioned, you know, that that’s me, he said, he thinks what is bothering me is pride, “all these women that work and everything, they have pride.” And I said “no, it’s not called pride. We call it being independent.” ... He now said, he doesn’t think that we can be a couple. (Angel, 30s, single, West Africa, less than 10 years)

The data extracts from Josianne and Angel, who originated from different regions of SSA, show how men and women name behavioral experiences differently, with men appearing to punish women who refuse to behave according to the norms and rules of the society by seeing them as not being worthy of marriage. Angel’s boyfriend resisted contemporary practices that gave women empowerment because of employment, contrary to cultural norms of women staying at home in a domestic capacity and relying on men for their sustenance. In the next section, I explore norms of sexuality and sexual behaviors expected of single and married women.

4.2.3 Reticent Sexuality for Single and Married Women

Research has shown that sexual inexperience and prioritizing desires of men are expected attributes of African women (Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Shefer & Foster, 2001; Wood & Jewkes, 1998), even though these perpetuate the subordinate status of women in intimate relations in African societies (Tamale, 2005). Bourdieu has argued that symbolic capital (what is considered to be of cultural
value in a society) is collectively created over time, based on continuing interactions of material and non-material interchanges between individuals and their group(s) (Bourdieu, 1977). This continuity was played out in the experiences of participants in this study. Many of the participants talked about their understanding of acceptable behaviors regarding sexuality for women. These included a cultural requirement for women to remain chaste before marriage and to be restrained in how they talk about sex and sexuality:

I think there was never like a talk. I was never told like, this is what sex is, this is what would happen…. There was never a sit down and talk and be like one day, you gonna meet a man and this is gonna happen. It was just, “you wait till marriage.” Yeah, there was not much detail other than that. (Stacy, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

So, they [parents] actually gave me the advice when I was going to university. “Don’t follow men, be careful, you know you are going to school to read, don’t forget where you are coming from and where you are heading”, you know? So, the advice really led me. (Angela, 20s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

The quotation from Stacy indicates that there was a reluctance to talk about sexuality in her family and indeed, that talk about sexuality was sparse and limited to a directive not to have premarital sex. The extract from Angela’s interview further illustrates the extent of the reticence about discussing issues of sexuality with young women. Her parents used the euphemism “Don’t follow men” to instruct her to abstain from sex before marriage. They did not use the word “sex” although she was old enough to go to university. Participants often got information about sexuality from outside the family or in school, as the following examples illustrate:
I had aunties, but they were not open [about sexuality]. I don’t think they were open to that conversation. And so, I didn’t talk to them about stuff like that … I think I was introduced to adulthood in that regards by my friends really. (Earth, 30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Yeah, none with my dad. [Laughing]. However, I think when I was 13, at the end of primary school, you started having like sex health class and all that stuff, and parents will know obviously that we are having these classes, and we had a chat [with mom] about that …. (Jessica, 20s, co-habiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Earth’s viewpoint above shows that talk about sexuality was not encouraged, and she perceived that issues of sexuality could not be broached with older women. The preference for not discussing sexuality did not wane, even in the instances where parents became aware that their children received sexual health education in schools. For instance, a participant’s mother’s communication with her daughter when she became aware that her daughter was receiving sex education in school was a directive: “there should be no sex before marriage” (Jessica, 20s, co-habiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over).

Cultural restrictions regarding talking about sexuality have been identified as constraints to the promotion of sexual and reproductive health education to people of African descent (Al-Attar et al., 2017; World Health Organization [WHO], 2007). Research has also shown that African parents do have difficulty communicating with their children about sexual and reproductive health issues due to sociocultural beliefs that constrain talk about sex (Biddlecom, Awusabo-Asare, & Bankole, 2009). Therefore, discussions on sexuality tend to be inadequate irrespective of the child’s gender and limited to instructions on the cultural value of abstaining from premarital sex (Olusanya et al., 2013). Discussions on sexuality and sexual health are also generally focused on
daughters when provided (Bello et al., 2017; Sommer, Likindikoko, & Kaaya, 2013).

The regulation of talk about sex and sexuality extended to women who are married. The data from participants in the current study suggest that women are not supposed to talk about their sexual interests in relationships. Participants’ talk showed that they attributed the belief to culture:

I think it would be cultural, yeah, because African [women], we are brought up in a way that we shouldn’t have a say when it comes to sex (Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years).

As a woman, you were raised to be modest and not talk about sex … they will perceive you, as a woman if you talk about sex … as loose (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years).

While Mary’s quotation indicates the handicap to intimacy that cultural socialization hands to women, Barbie’s shows how women conform in order to be perceived as good women. Indeed, married women believe men make a distinction between what they want in a wife, and any other woman they may associate with. Barbie clarified thus:

… I think that men look at you when they decide to marry you, as this holy woman, that’s why you’re different from the rest of them and you know, belong in his home to raise his kids, but he’s more able to go out there and talk about and experiment with sex outside because he doesn’t, --I think it’s the respect, I don’t think those women they actually look at them as wife material, that’s why they are able to let loose and have those conversations with them. … I think it’s just the environment you grow up in in Africa. It’s a topic that’s off limits too. Even if we do it [sex], -there’s a high rate of you know, teenage pregnancies, HIV, and things like that,
so that tells you we do it, but we are just not allowed to talk about it, you know, I think it’s more of a cultural belief. We just see it as a disrespecting topic… (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

From the quotations therefore, if a woman wanted marriage and to maintain it, she needed to abide by the unspoken expectation that she would not talk about or be open about her sexual nature. As Barbie’s narrative further shows, cultural reticence about sex and sexuality for women continues, when there is public evidence in teenage pregnancies and HIV prevalence that young women are having premarital sex.

The perspectives of participants regarding expressions of sexuality placed women’s sexuality in the private sphere and controlled by men and societal expectations of decency. Sexuality permeates all aspects of life from power to procreation and identity, and sexuality is used as oppression by men just as it is used as empowerment by women (Tamale, 2006). Sexuality is a site of struggle and domination enforced and reproduced for African women (McFadden, 2003; McFadden, Galloy, Ntarangwi, & Abraham, 1999; Pereira, 2003) beginning with colonial constructions of African women as hypersexual and needing restraint (Beoku-Betts, 2005). There is no agreement in the literature about whether African societies contained women’s sexuality to private places in precolonial times. Adelakun (2015) alludes to the use of licentious speech about sex at traditional festivals dating to the 18th century and argues that demonstrating sexuality was not forbidden for women in earlier times in Yoruba land. On the other hand, O. Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) argue that language use among the Yoruba is generally more equivocal than direct5, and isolated

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5T. Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) used terms such as “lyrical (verbal) coyness”, “sexual (verbal) passivity”, “inverse referentiality” and similar terms to describe traditional expressions of female sexuality in the Yoruba culture.
occurrences of the use of sexual language in traditional festivals and betrothal rites can mask the reality that “female sexuality in African settings is traditionally passive, or that female erotic desire is traditionally silent, veiled, treated as taboo or is generally unspoken… and construed in terms of a rigid biosocial functionality” (O. Oloruntoba-Oju & Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013, p. 181).

Scholarship from other African societies also highlights the culture of silence regarding young women’s sexuality in South Africa (Harrison, 2008; Reddy, 2010). Some researchers argue that constructions of acceptable sexuality for young women position them as people who need protection, rather than people who have a right to make decisions about their own bodies (Bhana & Pattman, 2009). Adults avoid or condemn discussions and expression of sexuality by young women (Harrison, 2008), because the culture proscribes talk about sexuality out of respect for adults (Reddy, 2003, cited in Reddy, 2010). A consequence is that the regulation of women’s sexuality to the private sphere contributes to the survival of patriarchal structures of African societies (Tamale, 2005).

The origin of the understanding that women should be restrained in talking about sex and how they should express their sexuality can also be gleaned from the literature on cultural practices. In the Yoruba culture, for example, women are not allowed to express opinions; a woman who expresses opinions is likened to the odious Arere tree from which one must keep a healthy distance (M. Kolawole, 2004). There is also a Zimbabwean proverb that says that all women are beautiful, until they speak (Afritorial.com, 2017). Beoku-Betts (2005) argues that the male-centered world of precolonial Africans made women who voiced their opinions unintelligible to men and other women alike; such vocal women were vilified or even accused of misdeeds that they could not possibly prove they had not committed and they were presumed guilty and killed.
It is in this context therefore that a few of the participants shared stories indicating the belief that not saying no to sexual demands, even when they would rather not have sex, affirmed their identity as African women. Bey responded to her African boyfriend, who berated her for not behaving like an African woman, thus:

I’m like, … [w]hat the hell do you mean I do not sleep [have sex] with you like an African woman? Do I not do it even if I don’t want to? (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over).

Therefore, the participants believe that expectations of chastity before marriage, inhibition in talk about sex, and ready acquiescence to requests for sex in relationships, constitute appropriate norms of sexuality that African men expect of feminine women suitable as wives. In contrast to the expectations of restraint in sexual expression by women, participants perceived men as enjoying more freedom:

Men, African men are, I don’t want to use the word naturally, but traditionally promiscuous. They expect the woman not to go out [have extramarital affairs], but as for the men they can do whatever they want to do. (Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Mary’s perspective, although acknowledging that African men are considered to be naturally polygamous and needful of many sexual partners to be healthy (Birukila, 2013; Harrison, 2008; Reddy & Dunne, 2008), also differed from the traditional belief. Mary made a distinction between expectations of multiple sexual partnerships for men as a traditional construction and as a natural need. She rejected the idea of unbridled natural sexual desires as a reason for multiple sexual partnerships by African men and acknowledged that the cultural expectations that men would cheat in relationships were about what men wanted and not what they needed, hence allowing room for individual agency.
Mary, therefore, highlighted the role that cultural expectations play in encouraging men to be unfaithful. She also pointed to how Christian religious belief could enable subversion of cultural expectations and practices when she said, “[m]y husband is no different from any African man, the only thing is, because of his Christian beliefs? I suppose. That’s why maybe he wouldn’t do that [cheat].” Indeed, another participant pointed out that although multiple sexual partnerships are not unique to African men, they are encouraged in some parts of African society as an expression of male virility and status:

We know that all African men are not like that, obviously … but there are also many other cases which they do have lots of partners, lots of different wives, lots of different girlfriends or whatever, and it’s almost considered as a sign of, its either virility or you are the man, …. I’m sure it happens everywhere, but in Africa, it’s more open. It’s more allowed, it’s almost encouraged in a way. In (Francophone African country], they say in French … first office, second office, third office, you know. They are offices … and it’s a matter of pride. Exactly. [Laughing]. It’s a matter of pride, people are very proud about it, the more offices you have, then you are the big man … Everybody, even the women almost encourage it because if your husband doesn’t have offices, he works from home. (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Sarafina further suggested that women are complicit in men’s practice of multiple sexual partnerships to ease their husbands’ sexual demands of them. Other research also report similar practices of “small house”, akin to the ‘offices’ described above, as a variant of multiple sexual partnership by some African men (Birukila, 2013, p. 184). The findings in the current research also have commonalities with the literature arguing that African societies construct men’s sexuality as being in the public space, that men are knowledgeable about sex, and that they are expected to have multiple sexual partners (Jewkes & Morrell,
Therefore, acceptable notions of masculinity in African cultures contrast with notions of acceptable femininity as women being reticent about sexual matters and limited to talking about sex only in the private sphere.

4.2.4 Compulsory Motherhood

Perspectives expressed by participants in this study further suggested that the desire for motherhood trumped other issues in the women’s lives, because they are expected to reproduce and to do so within timeframes acceptable to society. Some participants expressed acute awareness of the gaze of their community on them when childbearing was delayed. The women believed that they were expected to prioritize attainment of motherhood once they were grown women. However, many did not talk about the need to become mothers in the direct manner with which they presented their understandings of norms of family care or sexuality and behaviors. Instead, they made oblique references to the importance of having children in their homeland cultures, when responding to questions on other themes. For example, Amy remarked: “The culture is like, you can’t do much anymore, just get married, have babies” (Amy, 20s, in a relationship, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over). Motherhood is considered to be so important that women put up with unpleasant experiences just for the opportunity to achieve it. For single women, such as Bey, being unmarried and childless in her thirties contributed to her feeling of being judged. Bey spoke of the stigma attached to a woman’s childlessness in her homeland:

I have succeeded in a lot of things I’ve tried to achieve but, it has been a lonely life... look, at my age, in my culture, in our culture, it’s like, you know, “You don’t have a kid hmnn [gives denigrating look], what’s going on there”, you know? “Is it something wrong with you?” Or you know,
and “You can’t keep a man?” (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

For some, motherhood offered a means by which women could retain ownership of property on their husband’s death. Challenges arose for married women unable to conceive. One participant qualified her narrative about an experience of misogynistic inheritance practice with a resigned, “you know, I don’t have kids” (Julianne, 40s, widowed, West Africa, 10 years and over), signaling her marginal position in an uncompromisingly pro-natal culture. Another participant also shared her experience of childlessness:

… I like children and then when I was getting married, I had that aim of having a lot of children, when I was much younger. I also tell myself I want to have six children and all that, but I realized that at a point in time when I was getting worried and worried and it wasn’t coming and my health was not allowing me and all that, I realized that thinking about it would not solve the problem and because I’m a Christian too, I used the Word of God to counter it? So that I don’t think too much about it. Because every now and then, people ask you and if you want to think about it, how long are you going to think about it? (Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Mary insisted that she did not think about her inability to have children, yet, she dwelt on it because she wanted to have them, and because the people in her society did not let her forget her failing. The participants’ narratives about their attunement to the societal gaze when motherhood was delayed, therefore, showed in affected women’s helplessness in their bid to attain motherhood.

These perspectives are in accordance with theoretical explorations on the issue of motherhood as a critical frame of reference for womanhood in African gender studies. African scholars on women’s empowerment emphasize motherhood as
a key source of power for women, even as they uphold a woman’s right to her body. Their approach reflects expectations of society. African societies do not have the conception that a woman may be naturally unable to conceive a child (Wilentz, 1992b). Research in African countries has generally shown that women experience stigma when motherhood is delayed or is not realized. The childless woman is discounted in society (Upton, 2001), and misses out on a woman’s potential source of power and relevance in the family she married into (Makinde, 2004).

Traditionally, African societies relied on women and children for farming-related economic labor (Potash, 1995; Sudarkasa, 1987, 1996). Therefore, a family without children would struggle to survive. Some men who were married to women who could not have children resorted to the practice of marrying other women so that they may have children and expand their labor force (Dhont, Van de Wijgert, Coene, Gasarabwe, & Temmerman, 2011; van Balen & Bos, 2009). Interestingly, married women who cannot have children, but who live in societies where they are permitted to do so (like the Ibo people of Eastern Nigeria), arrange marriages between other women and their husbands so that the latter may have children through the new wives (Reed, 2001). Some participants’ heightened concern regarding delayed motherhood or difficulty conceiving, reflects the literature stating that motherhood is revered in African cultures (Calame-Griaule & Alexander, 1962; Dhont et al., 2011; Sudarkasa, 1996; Upton, 2001).

In the narratives examined in this section, participants used gender roles and responsibilities to frame their perspectives of being African women in intimate relationships. The roles and other social expectations they mentioned included gendered roles for men and women, appropriate behaviors for women to attract marriage interest from men, and the pressure women felt to attain motherhood.
These perspectives together express essentialist understandings of the role of African women that fix the notion of an African woman identity.

These narratives have congruence with the practices of women and girls of Black African descent in America. Researchers have argued that Black American women also portray themselves in ways expected of them, effectively doing gender in a complicated politics of respectability to be acceptable in their Black (middle-class) communities (P. H. Collins, 2004; P. J. Harris, 2003). Higginbotham (1993), as cited in P. J. Harris (2003, p. 213) used the “politics of respectability” to describe the promotion of attributes including sexual purity, temperance, cleanliness and a general reform of individual behavior as an “uplift politics” for Black Americans who sought to win recognition of respectability from White people. They invested in behaving in ways similar to the expectations that White women would have the four attributes of “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity”. This was described by Welter (1966) as the “cult of true womanhood” for Western women in the 1800s. P. J. Harris (2003) argued that the practice of the politics of respectability created distinctions in behavioral terms that served as a distinguishing condition of acceptance to full membership rights in the Black community, especially for women. In the next section, I examine how participants learnt the understanding of the roles and responsibilities that they shared in the current study.

4.3 Socialization of Women to Privilege Men (Intimate Partners)

Similar to Bourdieu (1990a), Berger and Luckmann (1991) observes that people in groups interact and form social systems that become habitualized and institutionalized with long practice. According to Berger and Luckmann, the behaviors become accepted norms that are embedded in the acceptable practices and beliefs of the people like unquestioned, objective truths in the society. A
differentiation of roles that have specific meanings and objectives for the society also forms part of the habitual interactions that become the norm for judging what is acceptable or what is aberrant behavior (Giddens, 1991). It has been argued that the transfer of cultural norms in African societies has remained remarkably resilient despite contact with other cultures (Njoh, 2006). Bourdieu (1986, p. 471) posits that the practices that order a society are assimilated by people (as agents) in that society over time, “through absorption of ‘cultural products’ presented in various knowledge forms, including education, language, judgments, values, methods of classification and activities of everyday life.” Therefore, socialization is akin to being taught to appreciate and participate in the cultural interests and practices of a society (Bourdieu, 1984).

All participants in this study shared experiences of being taught (or of attempts to teach them) the rules of intimate relationships of their African homelands. Their narratives show how strongly aware the participants still are of the African values they learned, even if they no longer subscribed to all of them. The participants’ narratives indicate that African women are intentionally taught practices that privilege their intimate partners. This was done through instilling in the women the requirement to please their partners from a young age. Bey who was in her 30s and single shared her experience thus:

If you’re a girl, you come of age, or you have your periods, we would have period party... [Laughing] but it was the most embarrassing thing ever because you would sit there... and they talk to us about becoming a woman, the way of a woman, and everything, everything, was catered to please the man (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over).

The participant talked about her discomfort with what she was taught, even as a pubescent child. Some participants also portrayed how the compelling nature
of cultural norms served as a guide in their interactions in intimate relationships. For instance, one of them said:

Actually, I learnt that a woman should be submissive. We have role to play. ... And also because of our surroundings, our environment, the culture. (Julianne, 40s, widowed, West Africa, 10 years and over).

Julianne clearly situated her perspective of gendered cultural norms within the expectations of African society. She further talked about being taught about table manners at meal times in the family:

I learnt from my mom ... I think I told you about my aunty that just got married. And when we went to visit her, after she got married. I and my mom went there. And she cooked for us. When she was serving the food ... the first thing she dished was my mom's food, and then, she dished her own food. Then my mom asked her that, “which food is that?” And she said, it's for you, mama Julianne. And my mum said, “No, where is your husband [sic] food?” That in the culture of [homeland], you have to dish your own husband’s food first. That is respect. He’s the head of the family. (Julianne, 40s, widowed, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Julianne further explained that the man was not seated at the table. His wife was nonetheless required to serve him first as a sign of respect. Further discussions with Julianne indicated that she eventually took the lesson for guidance in her own practices as an African woman. The narrative of another participant further shows that women practice their training to respect men, including when it is only to present a “façade”:

... And in Africa, from day one, you [woman] are taught to respect the man, ... because it’s drilled, drilled, drilled in the woman’s mentality from day one, they grow up having this kind of... and even though we have
this cultural thing where I would say we are respecting the man, we know
deep down, they [laughing] are not respected at home. But in society, they
would be respected because this is the image the woman has got to
portray. (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Sarafina commented on socialization to African culture, consistently using the
pronoun “they” in her description of women’s practice. Indeed, Sarafina trailed
off into silence; she could not find words to describe what “they [African women]
grow up having this kind of …” was. Another participant summarized her
perspective of the socialization of girls and women to African womanhood:

... You know, our culture, really it doesn’t matter where you’re from as
long as you’re from Africa, it’s very much catered to the man. You know,
you speak when you’re spoken to, you make sure he’s fed through his
stomach, his dick and his head. Not necessarily in that order [Laughing].
And you know, you sort of take that literally that the man is the head of
the house, you’re the neck (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and
over).

Bey observed that women take it for granted that men are the leaders of the
family, just as Tiri (40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) had
expressed her viewpoints earlier in the chapter about the roles of men as leaders
and providers. Bey also described a woman’s role as a “neck” which holds up
the head, perhaps indicating that the responsibilities society demand of women
are weighty. A comparison of participants’ perspectives of the socialization of
African women summarized as “like slavery” (Mary) earlier in this chapter,
therefore, shows that the outcome of the socialization of African women is the
privileging of men’s desires over their own in order to be recognized as
marriageable women, which women sometimes see as burdensome.
Nevertheless, women seemed to live their socialization openly, becoming
models of African womanhood to their children just as a participant remarked that:

Yeah, well, I guess she [mother] never really had to say it. I guess I just see it from my parents that the man is usually more of the leader and is more like kind of [the] moral lead in the family. (Stacy, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

Women also intentionally socialized their female children to the ways they had been taught to live in relationships. Most participants in this research indicated that they received training on gender roles and responsibilities primarily from their mothers and other women in their families, although some also shared stories of learning from the wider environment.

As earlier indicated in the thesis, several empirical studies across the continents have shown that adolescent girls and boys are socialized to gender roles and they learn to behave accordingly, so that they may fit in with the expected norms of their societies (Al-Attar et al., 2017; Basu et al., 2017; Bello et al., 2017; de Meyer et al., 2017). Some gender norms apply universally in early adolescence, even in countries where gender inequities are thought to be low (Saewyc, 2017). My study similarly shows that boys and girls are treated differently in important aspects of life in participants’ homelands in Africa. Older women, as cultural gatekeepers in privileged positions, performed the influential role of transferring cultural expectations to younger women.

The narratives of participants show that the training was delivered through overt statements and by induction, as I will show later. A participant illustrated the differential treatment of boys and girls with a narrative of her childhood:
[O]ur mothers. That’s what they told us. They told us that, I mean, if you are a wife, you are married, you are in a home, I have to cook, I have to clean, I have to do all these. Even growing up, you would find as girls, we used to do all the house chores, and then probably maybe the brothers, they’re just told probably maybe you just do the gardening, water the garden. And then everything else, it’s us the girls who used to do the dishes, clean the house and cook. (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Tiri perceived that African girls were intentionally taught home making skills to prepare them to take care of the home when they grew up and get married. In contrast, boys were less regulated, and the responsibility required of them was limited to gardening. The reference to boys being instructed to “water the garden” indicates that the participant may be from an urban home. In other families, the role of boys may be going to work on the family farm. Another participant talked about how the women in her family were her teachers in expected behaviors and cultural requirements of African women. She talked about her trainers:

I was lucky enough to meet my great grandmother, my mother’s grandmother who was... a hundred and seven [years old] when she died, yeah. And, she, until the day she died... she had an incredible memory, which was ridiculous. You know, she remembered things when she was a very young girl, the wars, everything, and the culture, the way things were. So, my mum, aunties, great aunties and my grandmother and my great grandmother and my other aunties from my mom’s family and extended family would sit all girls.... (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)
The cultural messages passed on to Bey dated back more than four generations, as her great-grandmother was the conduit passing on what she herself had been told and experienced. The prolonged socialization process of turning girls to women, therefore, starts through enacting and reproducing the talk and language that described the older women’s own experiences of their societies. As earlier reported in the thesis background, Marcus (1984) observes that the socialization process of the historical African diaspora involved older women recreating their own beliefs and experiences in younger women.

Cultural values and expectations of women and men in society were also transferred to participants directly while they witnessed, or participated in, traditional events. For example, a participant shared what she learnt from her aunts when she was a guest at a wedding ceremony:

… So, like I had aunties and like half-sisters who got married, like I would attend, the cultural things and it was just something that was brought up. But, that’s like where we grew up, like they would tell us that, you have to go to school and like after school, you have to get married. The guy has to pay lobola [bride wealth], like that’s just the cultural thing at home. Like you have to pay lobola if you want the girl. You can’t just do a White [Western] wedding without paying money to the parents to say thank you for like keeping this girl for us [suitor’s family] and all, yeah. (Ruty, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Ruty’s emphasis on her aunties’ teaching about the unacceptability of expecting to get married without the payment of a bride wealth to a woman’s parents, also highlights how women are active participants in the valorization of the cultural rules and practices of their homelands. The quotation from Ruty further shows how contemporary Africans expect their women to have a formal education, which is a cultural practice of Western societies, even as they reject the adequacy
of a White wedding ceremony without fulfilment of African traditional marriage ceremony practices.

The emphasis on what is considered acceptable marriage ceremony practice (Ruty), and the requirement to give respect to the man regarding even mundane actions like serving food (Julianne) indicates that women are socialized to acceptable behaviors to avoid deviations that may cause shaming to their birth family. The outcome of the socialization of women of SSA descent by their ‘mothers’ contributes to the reproduction of gender differentiation and hierarchy. Thus, and perhaps unwittingly, mothers and other older women reproduce the inequality that women experience in intimate relations through “a mothering process” (Reagon, 1986, p. 87) methodology of cultural transmission by diaspora women.

The socialization of participants to ideals of African womanhood in contemporary times is not limited to direct teaching by women in their familial environments. As I pointed out earlier, socialization is also indirect. Some participants said that they also learnt about gendered norms from the wider environment both in Africa and New Zealand:

…most times, you learn things not knowing you are learning things. Things you see, things you hear, to a large extent, you are learning, …Like I told you, even in movies, even in uncles’ stories, reality comes to you, even when it has nothing to do with you. You might be passing [by]… eh, you might go to the market [in homeland], you will hear some people who are so loud[ly] discussing their family…. You begin to pick these stuffs. You balance one or two things together and it informs your judgment. So some you read in school, some you read from [news]papers, or you read from books. (Angela, 20s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years).
Another participant, who had not been consciously socialized into the African cultural norms by her parents, talked about picking up ideas on cultural expectations of women from people around her and from family programs on television in New Zealand:

...like TV shows and also, I’ve seen my friend, her parents, yeah, her mom kind of like stopped [working] and, looked after the kids and all that. And now, she’s kind of like studying again, you know... which is really good that she’s still pursuing what she wants to do. But I don’t know... if she just kind of like wanted to stay at home and do that, I don’t know. But I know like quite a few people, just talking to people sometimes, you know, they will be like, “oh yeah, I’d like my wife to stay at home, look after the kids and I will keep working”, and I’m like, okay [laughing], yeah. Even just, you know, like comedy you are watching with families, like it’s kind of yeah, like the mum is always there, then the dad would come home from work and then, it’s like, it feels that way. (Adele, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

This highlights how the practices of others influenced participants’ thoughts and could, potentially, have shaped their worldview and practices. The effect of this is a reinforcing and policing of the boundaries of acceptable behavior and cultural practice. Nonetheless, it is important to note that most cultural transmissions are not detrimental to women’s interests. Reagon (1986) describes successful transmission and keeping of traditions of African cultural norms through female leaders in the Candomble culture of the Bahia people of Brazil, who are descendants of the Yoruba people taken to Brazil from West Africa. Reagon observes that women anchored and facilitated the retention of many of the traditions that Africa’s historical diaspora had when they were taken as slaves from Africa. Walker (2011) also acknowledges the mother to daughter
transmission of culture among people of Black African descent, and how ‘real’ experiences influence black female writers thus:

And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see. …Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother’s stories. (Walker, 2011, p. 240)

However, the mother stories that kept the commonalities and cultural traditions alive through generations, also passed on the gendered basis for the continuing inequalities between men and women (Wilentz, 1992b).

A participant who had indicated that she learnt about gendered expectations from her mother nevertheless observed that one need not always be bound by socialization into African practices and traditional beliefs. She commented that education should enable one to choose aspects of a learnt culture that suit one’s disposition:

… So, I learnt most of the things from my family as well. From my mom, from my dad, from my parents and from the environment as well. You watch many things on the TV, from your grandma, from your grandpa, that this is the way of life. You pick the one that you think is good for you. Not all their ways of life are good, you know, there are some of them that are not good, but you as an enlightened person, you will pick the one that you think … I want to live this type of life... to make your things to work for you (Julianne, 40s, widowed, West Africa, 10 years and over).

The training of adolescents to gendered norms is practiced in most, if not all cultures. For instance, the findings of Basu et al. (2017) show that in China and India, the countries with the largest populations in the world, both parents are
responsible for teaching their children to assimilate gender norms. Basu et al. observe that parents directed boys and girls to different pathways, with emphasis on different, acceptable expressions of gender roles for boys and girls, the boundaries of which are enforced by physical violence. The socialization of girls in rural communities in India in their study was also to prepare them for the roles of wife and mother by teaching them household chores, similar to stories participants shared in the current study. In the next section, I elaborate on how the boundaries of the norms are policed and maintained by others in the society, as well as by participants themselves, from learnt dispositions reproducing the perceptions and practices that created them.

4.4 Boundary Maintenance in the Socialization Process

Serpe and Stryker (2011) argue that people construct identity by acting out societal expectations for approval by other members of their group. According to Calhoun (2006), Bourdieu highlights through his empirical study of the Kabyle of Algeria how traditional order may reproduce itself through the socializing of the young to the interests and valued practices of a society, such that continuous vigilant monitoring maintains conformity to norms, while masking and perpetuating inequitable practices. The participants in my study believed that their socialization mandated a reliance on obedience to the rules for them to be accepted in their society. They also shared stories about how their social system was consciously and actively regulated by kin and non-kin alike.

Rules and norms are partly maintained by the vigilance of family members. This is because identity recognition also relies on communal efforts in ensuring adherence to cultural norms in the relevant society. A participant’s narrative showed her understanding of this policing:
Well, it’s, you are told [by mother] it is your job to keep your relationship working. Right? And if you get to a point of being married, \textit{you have to stay and make it work}. And if your relationship falls apart, it is your fault...that’s what I’m saying. Yeah, cause we as black African women like, we see from the parents and the like, it’s, you have to stay, no matter what. Whether the person is making you happy, is making you miserable, you’re crying every day at night, but you have to stay. You have to stay in your relationship. And you have to put up with all those things that you wouldn’t [normally]. As an African woman, it is your job to make a relationship work. That is what we’re told. That is what we’re taught. It is your job to stay and we see our parents, they stay through a whole lot of things that you would not believe. If you hear, you would be like, oh what! (Nikita, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Nikita talked about women being taught by their mothers not to leave their partners, no matter what they experienced in their relationships. This understanding was widely shared among participants. However, in the current study, participants discussed the elaborate system of ensuring maintenance of the norms in New Zealand through surveillance by kin and in-laws in the homeland to prevent collapse of their marriages. Tiri, for instance, received telephone calls from her mother and other family members from her homeland telling her that she needed to reduce her work-related travels in New Zealand to be available to her husband:

So, the comments that I would receive from my family, my sisters, even my mom. She would say “You’ve been away for a long time and your husband is alone, hain?” “Your husband is alone”. “You’re leaving your husband, I mean, for a week and he’s alone”. “Do you know what they can do, these men”? You know, they start telling you all these things that, if you are away for a long time, men, they can start to stray. Yeah, so it got
into my mind that probably maybe yes, yeah, I needed to spend more time with him, so that he don’t [sic] stray [laughing]. (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

There was also talk about the role of the mother-in-law in regulating the behavior of a woman in marriage. A participant shared her knowledge of the relevance of in-laws to make a wife submissive in marriage in the tradition of her homeland:

[O]kay, if maybe your brother-in-law or, to make the case worse, your mother-in-law is sitting down and your husband just came and be cooking, your mother-in-law met your husband in the kitchen cooking, what do you think will be her reaction? She will be saying, “Oh my God, you must be kidding me. What [juju] has she [wife] done to my son that makes him to turn to housemaid and be cooking in the kitchen for [her] [laughing], isn’t it? (Julianne, 40s, widowed, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Julianne explained that in her home culture, a woman who practices behaviors contrary to the expectations of the society, in particular those that involve her husband helping her with chores, risks accusations that she has bewitched her husband with “juju” [voodoo] to control his behaviors. Her reverence of the mother-in-law in the quotation also encapsulates the traditional respect accorded to mothers-in-law, who have considerable influence on how men predispose themselves towards their wives. A man could disregard his wife or even marry another in polygamous cultures if she is perceived as disrespectful to her mother-in-law.

Pasura (2008) also observes from his study of Zimbabweans in the UK that extended families and kinship ties are important in the reproduction of gendered ideologies of the African homelands. Contrary to Pasura’s findings that women got respite from the policing by others to maintain cultural norms because they
live at a distance from their homelands, the current findings show that some women’s behaviors continue to be remotely regulated by family members who live outside New Zealand.

Participants in this study also repeatedly referred to the maintenance of norms through social networks involving women who are not family members. Some of these women would give unsolicited advice to stop what they considered to be aberrant behavior, such as co-habitation. The experience that Bey shared provided an example:

He left and like, I rang my aunty, and she said to me, “Has he paid any money to your parents?” I said, “No”. So she said, “Why are you there?” I thought, okay, I don’t know. She said, “Do you have a place to go? You can come and stay with me”. I said “no, aunty”, because ... her kids were there now and they were like my young sisters and I wanted to be impressionable [sic] and I didn’t want that. I said to myself I survived a lot of things at home, I can survive this. (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

The aunty that Bey referred to in the quotation was from her homeland, but she was not a member of Bey’s family. Although the “aunty” offered her support, her comment was also a reminder to Bey that she had no obligations to a man who had not made payment of a bride wealth to her parents. Her aunty reinforced the expectations of behaviors for a woman in the culture of their origin, although they both lived in New Zealand.

Bey also regulated her own behavior when she declined her aunty’s offer of shelter. According to Goffman (1990), social understandings that disqualify others from acceptance are stigmatizing, and people who perceive themselves to be at risk of judgment may avoid contact with people who are considered to be “normals.” Bey experienced “enacted stigma” as she perceived that her identity
as an African woman was “spoiled”, because she was in a co-habiting relationship that did not meet acceptable cultural practice for an African woman. She wanted to retain the good impression that her aunty’s children had of her, but her “spoiled” identity was incompatible with being a good role model to them. Bey, therefore, effectively became a “mother” looking after the cultural wellbeing of her aunty’s young girls. She had effectively internalized the socialization of women to acceptable norms, and the role of older women in maintaining acceptable boundaries of cultural norms by younger ones. Wilentz (1992a, p. 13) observed that African women writers and scholars emphasize that the concept of “mind your own business” is not compatible with the community values that are part of the socialization of Africans. Wilentz (1992b), nevertheless, observes that mothers and other women in influential positions sometimes police and maintain traditional values according to their own personal interests and dispositions.

This way, African women, as mothers and other motherly figures, reinforce the norms and discourses that police their girls and young women to maintain acceptable behaviors and established dispositions. The mothers thus function like the formal organizations of Western countries that Zucker (1988) describes as important reproducers and sustainers of cultural patterns working to ensure that the people reproduce a “cultivated disposition” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 121), which serves to produce homogenous cultural understandings (Bourdieu, 1971). A young woman’s embodiment of cultural competencies from her ’mother’s’ teachings confers on her a form of distinction, which favorably places her in a position to win a suitor. The women’s conformity with the ideology and practices of gender inequality is, therefore, meant to uphold the accepted construction of the identity of an African woman.

The privileging of men continues to manifest in private spaces, with women regulating self and other women in their spheres of existence to live in
accordance with the prescribed norms. Some participants said that they continue the gendered role they are socialized to play from girlhood, even when their adult selves questioned the role divisions:

... Yes, so we grow up thinking that as girls, or then, when we grow up into women, that the kitchen and all these things that’s our responsibility. So yeah, we just carried on. (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

The quotation from Tiri highlights the risk of fixing an identity on specific attributes and expectations. Participants’ perspectives suggest that African women are socialized to privilege men from adolescence onwards, and the disposition and practices are maintained through policing by others and the women themselves. The narratives also suggest that conformity with gendered norms enabled participants to develop the cultural competence that men require of African women, and in so doing provide the opportunity to marry and, in time, achieve motherhood. The structures of African societies apportion gains to women primarily by virtue of their relationships with men. Therefore, the socialization and policing of women to privilege men is a role that is valued and, in Bourdieu’s (1977) terms, becomes the *capital* that maintains the collective interest and wellbeing of the group.

### 4.5 Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I provided an account of how participants framed their relationship practices using traditional gendered role ideologies that also identify them as doing things the African way. The norms and practices they talked about together constitute norms of femininity understood to attract men for intimate partnership (Barkty, 1997). The ideology to privilege men is taught
to them primarily by mothers and female members of their families, who also maintain the boundaries of the gendered socialization alongside men. The enactment of the gendered ideology in practice is the avenue for representations of difference and the characteristics by which women gain recognition as worthy members of society. The participants’ understandings of gendered roles and responsibilities, and their enactment in relationships are interesting in three ways. Firstly, participants’ narratives show how gendered norms are passed on through generations. Mothers and women in the families are the main overt sources of participants’ socialization to African cultural norms. Secondly, the stories show how women become informal institutions that police their girls and young women’s behaviors to maintain the boundaries of acceptable behaviors in the society. Thirdly, the experiences that participants shared lay bare how their socialization creates their disposition towards an identity that privileges the desires of men in return for recognition as marriageable women.

The associated norms that they narrated form the practices of patriarchal social relations in which the balance of power is skewed in favor of men. The women had its norms and expectations knitted into their beliefs and practices, like “a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools and charged with a host of social meanings and values” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 87). Participants maintained this system by reproducing the practices in their lived experiences, just as their progenitors intended. This is the field of internalized social norms and expectations of behaviors that inform participants’ practices and become the taken-for-granted realities that form their African woman habitus. The beliefs and practices of roles and expectations of an African woman continue to influence their representation(s) and worldview as diaspora Africans living in New Zealand, even when they contest and oppose the practice of such beliefs.

Gendered roles and expectations of appropriate behaviors by girls and women are, however, not unique to African societies. The practices exist in Western and
Asian cultures to varying degrees. Some scholars argue that these practices of inequality are not compatible with the African collectivist worldview, and that roles and responsibilities of partners in families were complementary in pre-colonial Africa. However, the contemporary practices of gendered roles and responsibilities by African women in intimate relationships have the potential to impact on health and wellbeing and require focused engagement.

The construction of essentialist attributes of an ideal African woman by participants in this study is similar to how Black (American) identity organizations like US Organization and The Black Panther Party sought a return to an authentic Blackness. In doing so, they promoted monolithic representations of Blackness, the idea that Black people are basically alike (Snyder, 2012; West, 1990), and a black identity is stable and fixed (Markell, 2009; A. Phillips, 2007). It also has congruence with the “politics of respectability” that women of Black African descent in the United States of America engage to secure their acceptance in the Black communities and to curry recognition from Whites (P. J. Harris, 2003, p. 213). Some authors observe that the need for recognition is consequent on the way the African body was objectified and devalued upon contact with western culture (Markell, 2009; Oliver, 2001; A. Phillips, 2007). O. Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) adduce a similar argument for the essentialist ways promoted for African women upon contact with the colonizers.

There are risks in fixing an identity on specified attributes and expectations, although group cohesion may be achieved. The disadvantages of engaging in a politics of identity are well documented and these include distracting objections over inclusion/exclusion criteria, ostracizing people who do not fit the hegemonic definition of the identity, and that the quest to maintain difference

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6 US Organization is a Black Nationalist group in the United States founded in 1965 by Hakim Jamal and Maulena Karenga.
can interfere with the ability to develop crosscutting progressive coalitions (Appiah, 2007; A. Phillips, 2007). A politics of fixed identity may, therefore, reproduce hierarchies within and between groups, making it more challenging for such groups to be empowered (Butler, 1990; Markell, 2009; Oliver, 2001; A. Phillips, 2007; Snyder, 2012).

In the chapters to follow, I examine the identity of an African woman that participants constructed against their narratives of their own practices as people living in New Zealand. I also examine how the disposition to an African woman identity is tested outside of its origin of creation, and show that participants’ accounts of a stable African woman identity is an over-emphasis and significant boundary erosions enable agential responses to the cultural power of men and fluid identities.
Chapter 5
Negotiation of African Norms and Identity as Diaspora

“To imagine is to begin the process that transforms reality” - bell hooks

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed how African women are socialized into traditional gendered roles, the boundaries of which are maintained through policing by self and others. However, this is not to say that traditional roles are strictly adhered to in the diaspora, or even in Africa. The current chapter focuses on how participants deal with the contradictory and/or competing pressures between their understanding of gendered cultural beliefs of their origins and their practices of version(s) of these in the diaspora. Much of Africa was colonized between the 1880s and 1960s and many Africans were thus exposed to Western values and customs. More recently, increased globalization has seen the rapid transfer of ideas and values (mostly Western) all over the world and indeed, in Africa, traditional ways are changing especially in urban settings. For example, while traditional roles ostensibly position women as the homemakers and men as the breadwinners, this is not always observed in Africa. Women in Africa do contribute to the household income and have done so for many years (Sheldon, 2018a, 2018b; Voices4Change, 2015). Some of the participants in this study indicated that they too had played a substantial role of breadwinner both in and outside Africa.
Whilst participants lived in Africa it could be argued that Western ideology was influential but somewhat removed. However, on moving to a country like New Zealand, African migrants become more embedded in Western ways of doing things. This became a challenge, especially for some of the older, married participants in this study as they negotiated the contradictions and dilemmas of two different ways of being. Younger women, who had grown up in New Zealand, were more distanced from African norms but still drew on their African culture when it was deemed useful. In this chapter I present the challenges and contestations to African cultural norms as voiced by the participants and their contradictory arguments as they agentially took up and put down both Western ideas and African cultural mores as relevant to them. I utilize elements of Bourdieu’s theory of practice in analyzing the materials from their narratives to offer a deeper and more nuanced understanding of their lived experiences. The section is organized into five parts. In the following sub-subsections, I will discuss contradictions and shifting norms in the diaspora, agency in intimate relationships, constructing and negotiating a third place, and provide concluding comments.

5.2 Contradictions and Shifting Norms in the Diaspora

Bourdieu’s theory of practice enables the exploration of the tensions and contradictions which challenge people when they straddle different social fields, and locates them in a hybrid space where they can “resist power and domination in one context and express complicity in another” (Moncrieffe, 2006, p. 37). Chambers (2008) argues that new opportunities may emerge from the tension and conflict in migrant people’s interactions with different cultures that allow them to develop more enriching ways of being. The experience, though, may involve “a form of picking a quarrel with where you [one] came from” (p. 2), because questioning what one knew before consistently conflicts with prevailing realities and makes continued identification with the understandings of one’s
[native] socialization untenable (Chambers, 2008, p. 22). The narratives of participants in this study about their approaches to being in intimate relationships were shaped by their understanding of their ethnic identity. While participants drew on some essentialist understandings about African womanhood, they did this at the same time as they contested its ideals. Rather than their identities being fixed, therefore, they were playing out fluidly in the diaspora, just as the narratives of a few participants show similar fluidity in identity practices before leaving their African homelands.

The narratives of some of the participants about shifting practices in their marital relationship in New Zealand reflected changing practices started while they lived in their African homelands. Their stories indicated that men were not always sole providers for the material needs of the family before they left the African continent, despite their insistence on provision as the role of men. For example, Mary indicated that she also contributed substantially to family upkeep while they were still in Africa:

Initially when I was back home, he was mostly using his money for projects like putting up our future home and then I was also using mine to take care of the house... when it comes to helping our families, both of us put our monies together and we use it to help our families. (Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Elsewhere, Julianne also explained how her husband stood up to an older woman’s interference, when he helped with a housekeeping chore while they lived in their homeland:

Like where we were living then we have this borehole. When our pumping machine got broken ... you know how we do this local water? ... My landlady, [on] the first day she saw my husband [fetching water], she said “what? What are you doing? Where is your wife?” “Then my
husband said, “excuse me mama, with all respect, is there anything wrong if I come from upstairs and fetch water by myself?” And the woman was a bit ashamed, “oh no, but, I was just thinking why are you fetching water by [yourself]”. My husband said, “because I needed water, mama.” …

Then I told him [husband], “honey, maybe, next time”, my husband said, “don’t worry, early in the morning before anyone wakes up, I will be fetching the water.” (Julianne, 40s, widowed, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Julianne responded by trying to stop her husband from fetching water, to appease her landlady. Her use of the conciliatory “honey, maybe, next time” was an acknowledgement that the woman was reminding her of her role as wife and she would be fetching water despite her husband’s preference to do it instead.

Here, as will also be observed in the diaspora, there is a contradiction from their assertion that men do not do housework. Julianne also experienced conflict: she appreciated help but this would undermine her need to comply with expected behaviors to be a good wife. Her husband, however, remained supportive and devised a way to undertake the task without being observed by the landlady.

This finding aligns with reports of shifting roles in some of the research in their African homelands (Ammann, 2016; Voices4Change, 2015). For example, Voices4Change (2015) observe shifts in traditional role responsibilities in families, in an empirical study that explored the expectations and contemporary realities of being a man in Nigeria. Voices4Change observe that attitudes and behaviors regarding traditional gendered roles are shifting. They highlight that the traditional belief that a man should provide for his family’s material needs is still widely held. However, in practice, women share the role of provision in the family as men feel the burden to meet the expectation within a harsh economic climate.
Therefore, some of the married participants simply continued the shifting norms they were already practicing in their homelands. As noted in the previous chapter, Bourdieu (1990a) conceives habitus as a disposition formed by socialization to the structure of a culture over a period; the disposition thus developed serves as guidance for action in everyday experiences. Many of the dispositions and actions that a person’s habitus generates are unconscious because learning from socialization is embodied; “society is written into the body” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63). Habitus, therefore, creates identities; it creates societal practices that in turn reproduce the structures of the society and become accepted norms that serve as identification parameters for individuals belonging to the group(s). According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992):

Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted. (p. 127)

In other words, Bourdieu and Wacquant contend that people living within their usual home environment may not feel unduly burdened by the rules absorbed from childhood. While this claim has its merits, the social environment that forms the backdrop of participants’ lived experiences in this study derives from the interplay of the beliefs and practices of their African origins, and the Western cultural context of their diaspora home. This may, in part, result in a multiplicity of identities and fluidity of identity practices, with accompanying tension and negotiations. Indeed, Britzman (1997, p. 184-185) comments on the nexus between habitus and identity on the one hand, and the fluidity of identity on the other hand, and argues for a more complex and contextual view of identity as fluid and negotiated rather than existing on a “straight continuum” because “… 
individuals do not live their identity as hierarchies, as stereotypes, or in instalments.”

Research also shows that women’s access to economic opportunities is contributing to the shifting roles. This was the case in some of the married participants’ families. For example, contrary to the claims by the women that men do not do housework, the men they talked about did make contributions to domestic responsibilities in the family. The challenges of caring for children in the diaspora, without the “free” child-minding support that African women rely on when they live in their collectivist cultures in Africa, blurred traditional gendered roles and expectations in the family. Barbie recounted the changing practice in her family, and the tension that fostered it:

… in terms of living abroad, there’s a shift, I can say there’s a shift in yeah, they [men] provide, but at the same time, there’s no grandma to look after the kids, there’s no maid, you know [smiles], to leave the kids to. And my husband sees it’s a lot of work ‘cause sometimes at some point we were both working, so there was no it’s my responsibility to look after the home, it was our responsibility. So, he would come home and you know, help with chores at home, and you know, spend time with the kids and having to juggle that with getting back to work to provide. So, I think it’s busier for him but I see there’s more of a sense of commitment to family as opposed to when we lived in Africa before we arrived. (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years).

While Barbie was concerned that her husband was busier than when they lived in Africa, she was pleased with how he had begun to share her traditional role of housekeeping and looking after the children even as he solely provided for the family after she had disengaged from her paid job. Also, contrary to their lived experience in Africa, the sudden shift in roles between Barbie and her
husband in New Zealand may, among other factors, be explained on the ground of [economic] opportunity cost in terms of the need to carefully weigh the cost of child minding against the total income earned by both the wife and her husband. Barbie’s acceptance of her husband’s help was, however, different from how some other women received the modification in their husbands’ role. Ess, for instance, was not impressed with the housework her husband did because she was focused on achieving more family time with him. Ess (40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) said that, “house chores can be very tricky… he doesn’t think that he should also be helping in the kitchen especially doing dishes.” She, however, proceeded to narrate a remarkable list of domestic work that her husband often did:

So, I managed my own thing. So, I would wake up, cook porridge for breakfast for my son, do the dishes or do them previous night, so that’s why there won’t be any dishes for him [husband] to do and he would do the cooking. Or there would be just very few things for him to wash, hmm .... I would go to work and leave him to bathe our son, he was very good at that, bathe, feed him, take our son to day care. Four o’clock when I finish or 4.30 [p.m] I would be looking forward to seeing my husband. By the time I reach home, my husband would be gone. Because four o’clock or so, he would start connecting with his relatives and the boys would team up to go [to] every pub whatever place, place a, place b, place c and so. But what was surprising, he would cook either chicken or something, then he would leave me to cook [maize meal] or rice… there would be pot of meat on the stove or vegetables, everything ready apart from rice or because he didn’t know whether I wanted rice or [maize meal]. (Ess, 40s, married, 10 years and over)

Despite that Ess’ husband does a noticeable share of domestic work, she gave less value to his contribution to housekeeping, because he did not spend as much
time with her as she wished. She said, “... weekend when I thought, ha, we are having family time, he didn’t actually have that picture in mind”. Therefore, Ess conflated her desire for her husband to spend more time with her with his contribution to managing house chores and judged his contribution inadequate. Also, Ess’ husband’s approach of not cooking complete meals may be interpreted as a statement of boundary policing despite his willingness to support his wife in doing the chores. He seemed to be communicating to his wife that cooking is not his role and he would do it to the extent that he chose.

As a radical departure from the African norm in which the woman traditionally assumes the exclusive role of a housemaker, other participants in mono-racial relationships in this study expected that their partners should help with domestic work in a comparable manner to which they (the women) worked and contributed financially to the household. However, their partners did not do so to their satisfaction. They contested the taken for granted patriarchal expectation that male privilege would endure for all times, even when a man did not solely provide for his family. Male privilege is used here in the sense of the traditional leadership and power over the household associated with provider status and corresponding exemption from housekeeping duties for men. There has been some debate on male privilege and its associated burden of *noblesse oblige* (protection, provision etc.) and that patriarchal oppression tends to affect both men and women, albeit within different contexts (Walsh, 1997). Other participants also had expectations of being in intimate relationships that their partners did not share or were unaware of, creating tensions. The shifting norms and contradictions of the traditional expectations that constitute the women’s belief system created conflicts that participants had to reconcile. In the next section, I explore how the women managed such conflict to achieve what they wanted from their relationships.
5.3 Agency in Intimate Relationships

Wilentz (1992b) observes that who a woman becomes and how she conforms to norms is influenced by how fully she was socialized into African cultural values and traditions. Other writings on diaspora Africans (Batisai, 2016; Birukila, 2013; Pasura, 2008; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014) observe that there are, inevitably, tensions and contestations when the culture of place of origin and culture of host place interact in participants’ relationship practices. Participants’ narratives in this study contained an inherent contradiction between gendered norms and gendered practices. These became agential spaces of opportunity to choose preferred norms and respond to the dictates of origin culture norms as a participant is able to. In contrast to earlier assumptions that construct African women as powerless victims in heterosexual relationships (Harrison et al., 2015; Physicians for Human Rights, 2007) observations from the current study show nuanced negotiations of the participants’ perception of expectations that they would conform to certain norms. In the process, they engaged various strategies to exercise power and strive for equity in relationships that they felt disempowered in.

Scholars (Ammann, 2016; Shefer, 2016) also argue that because norms change, gender relations among Africans are more nuanced than the binary construction of African women as either oppressed persons or people making massive progressive changes in cultural practices as is sometimes encountered in research literature. The response of participants to expectations of traditional norms depended on their circumstances, preferences, and on their disposition towards participation (or non-participation) in African cultural beliefs and practices. Bourdieu argues that individuals relate with the beliefs and practices of their social environment through their habitus and they reproduce, modify, or revolutionize such practices as conditions permit (Bourdieu, 2003). For participants who mostly favored participation in the traditions they were
socialized to, their identification with beliefs of acceptable attributes of an African woman also became their tools for enacting resistance to the norms. In this section of the chapter, I show that the women used “pragmatism” and “marginal resistance” as strategies to accommodate discomforting norms and “dissidence” as an oppositional strategy of empowerment in responding to the norms that they contested. The strategies were sometimes complementary and are not mutually exclusive.

5.3.1 Pragmatism and Marginal Resistance as Cultural Accommodation Strategies

Striving to live in conformity with expectations of others impacts health and wellbeing (Kandiyoti, 1988; Lee, 2017; Yount, 2011). Kandiyoti (1988) and Yount (2011) observe that women conform strategically to make the most they can of inequitable power relations in patriarchal cultural environments where formal recourse for spousal abuse is rare. According to Kandiyoti (1988, p. 279), older women, who expect to gain “the authority of senior women” in due course, are more likely to blame the woman who is abused by her husband, and advise her to adjust her behavior to suit his requirements. Since such women are close to the abused younger women, the victims are likely to receive such messages with equanimity and invariably alter their own dispositions to avoid becoming ostracized. By that means, the younger women inadvertently internalize the norms that entrench patriarchy. In this section, I identify the empowerment strategies that participants used to respond to the norms that they found constraining. According to Kandiyoti (1988, p. 274), women respond to the constraints of different forms of patriarchal norms according to the distinct “rules of the game” in their social space. In this study, as with others (Boehm, 2008; Lee, 2017; Yount, 2011), participants shared narratives of passive resistance.
in response to the inequality created by African gendered norms of intimate relationships. Two such approaches were pragmatism and marginal resistance.

5.3.1.1 Pragmatism

Pragmatism entails using behaviors central to the socialization of African women (for example, silence) as a strategy to influence behavior change in a partner to realize desired goals in intimate relationships, while accommodating discomforting cultural norms. Women may also escalate socialization to silence to another culturally approved strategy of using community policing as a social capital, to curtail a man’s privileges as head of the household, without causing him harm. For an example of the use of silence as an empowerment strategy, Tiri initially spoke about the inequitable distribution of household chores between her husband and herself, even though they both worked and earned income outside the home:

… That’s my problem …because when it comes to cleaning, I am to clean, [do] laundry, everything. I still have to do it the same way I was doing it back home [in Africa]. So, there’s no change there. And I’m still expected, when I come home, to cook and do all those things, and yet when it comes to this part [bills], it’s oh yeah, it’s half-half... (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and above)

There was a conflict for Tiri in that the change in traditional African gender roles in the diaspora did not translate to a corresponding change in the associated responsibilities and privileges for her. Her husband still maintained his male privilege of not doing housework, even though his traditional provider function was now fully shared. However, although Tiri felt that the inequitable sharing of responsibilities was a problem, she did not raise this as an issue with her husband. She thereby used silence as a coping strategy and potential powerful
tool for drawing attention to the anomaly. The situation started to change in Tiri’s favor after a few years:

... But this is happening gradually. It didn’t just happen like straightaway… but I never really addressed them to say, “Hey, you need to share housework, I never did it, but I think after a few years, he actually saw that he needs to probably chip in as well and help, because we both have quite hectic lifestyles…. So, I’m finding that he’s also trying to adapt to this Western situation where he knows if I’m not home, and he’s home early, he can start cooking, and then when I get home and he’s cooking, I will be sometimes [arms reaching out], “oh, can I just finish off”? And, he will say, “Oh, no, just sit and relax” … So, at least now [laughing] it’s better… (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and above)

Tiri maintained her position through pragmatic silence in conformity to cultural norms. The negotiation of identity was nevertheless complex. She was torn between wanting help from her partner and simultaneously appearing to reject help. In other words, while she generally expressed a desire for equality in housekeeping responsibilities in line with financial contributions, she simultaneously felt uncomfortable with the partner’s apparent “take over” of her accustomed domestic responsibilities, undermining her own desire for change. This suggests that she perceived her husband’s role shifting support as a threat to her role identity. Tiri’s concluding description of her husband’s efforts at domestic role sharing was also instructive, as it was not quite complimentary:

... Oh gosh. He can do laundry sometimes, because it’s just putting it in the washing machine and put it in the dryer [Laughing]. If it was hand washing like we used to do back home, I don’t think so, but now, yes, yeah, he can just take things, put it in the dryer and then sometimes even dishes, just takes them and put in the dishwasher and clears the sink and
all that. Yes, yeah, so these are things that he is [sic] gradually improved on. (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and above)

Her change in perspectives is theoretically significant as a manifestation of the resilience of habitus. An ingrained understanding that housework is the duty of women interfered with her reception of her husband’s efforts to share her domestic role. While she desired such help, she could not quite come to terms with her husband doing the cooking. She would attempt to recover the role from him at the earliest opportunity. She also downplayed the relevance of the chores that her husband performed by indirectly attributing his support to the simplicity of the tasks that he did.

Bourdieu observes that “to be native [is] to be in that relationship of ‘learned ignorance’ of immediate but unselfconscious understanding which defines the practical relationship to the world” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 19). He states that violence ensues in the process of unlearning this nativity or when the unselfconscious learned ignorance ceases to be ‘native’ in its entirety. This seemed to be the case when participants in the current study, who were in a non-native environment, tried to adapt aspects of their nativity that they found challenging to their desires, even as they simultaneously also took refuge under the same nativity when it suited them.

The use of pragmatic silence took other forms in some participants’ experiences. In some instances, some proactive agency was used to complement the silence and achieve greater effect. Mary, another participant, talked about why women eschew conversations and resort to silence, as well as other more proactive ways, to combat their husbands’ resistance to sharing responsibilities equitably in the house:

When you talk about it, it’s like you’re complaining or you’re talking too much or something … So, they [men] don’t feel much, you say it and it’s
like, “oh, maybe I’ll help, cooking is nothing, cleaning the house is nothing.” They will just say that. … It’s when you travel and leave them, that’s when they feel it. They know what you’ve really done in the past. Because sometimes when I travel, I hear my husband calling me and telling me to come back. Why? [Laughing]. When I go on trips, [he says] “come back home. Haven’t you finished? You are taking long” and all that, knowing very well that I was supposed to stay for a week. And even if it’s late, he wants you to come home just because he’s really feeling your absence. [Laughing]. (Mary, 40s, married, Southern Africa, less than 10 years)

While her husband’s attempt to hasten her return home could also be because he missed her company, Mary perceived that her travelling away from home caused him to appreciate the domestic work that she did, and he wanted her to return home to do it. The use of silence supplemented by short stays away from home may, therefore, alert a man to the burden of housework that his wife bears, and which he might have been unwilling to acknowledge. Silence in this context is therefore agentic.

The perspective from Quashie (2012) on the value of “quiet” in the expressions of Black culture aligns with the support for recognition of non-action based agency by scholars (Hardon & Posel, 2012; Kesby, 2005; Madhok, 2014; Parpart, 2013) who argue that doing nothing or not taking action can also be an expression of agency. Quashie (2012) writes that:

Quiet is a metaphor for the full range of one’s inner life... one’s desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears. The inner life is not apolitical or without social value, but neither is it determined entirely by publicness. It is hard to see, even harder to describe, but no less important in its ineffability (p. 6).
Silence as a pragmatic agential approach may also be enhanced by calling on the strength of community membership. For example, Ess (40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) wanted her husband to spend more time with her at home. It was a long running issue from when they lived in the African homeland. Ess had used several approaches, except direct conversation about what she wanted, to get her husband to cooperate with her. She had appealed to family and been told that she should “have another baby”. She had gone for walks, “pass[ing] through that place [pub]” where he could see her, an action she hoped would encourage him to follow her home. She also took their child with her when she went to have a drink at the pub, perhaps to emphasize the inappropriateness of a family with a young child gathering in a pub; she said that she would tell her husband, “okay, we have had enough of this place, we are leaving you. We can’t stay here at the pub with you” (Ess, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over). Moving beyond a pragmatic silence that did not yield the result she wanted, Ess tapped into her social capital (in the form of her friendship circle comprising other migrant African women), to make her husband spend more time with the family:

Hmn. What changed especially like when we moved here [New Zealand]? There were, he had these friends. They would booze and booze and booze but then I realized with the work I was doing at that time, if I didn’t change my shifts, that was going to continue. So, I approached two ladies and then I said, “look, your husbands and my husband, they like [pub] partying. What I’m going to do is, I’m going to be off Fridays and Saturdays so that we make sure these men, we party together... For example, we come to your house on Friday. We party at your house. Those friends will be there. Saturday, we continue, we go to our house”, something like that. So, when we started doing that, there was no time for pub because they would ring each other and say, remember, we are
supposed to go to house so and so, to have dinner at six or something like that. So as women, we knew that was a trick and it helped. So, we ended up just partying as families. (Ess, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Ess’ pragmatic empowerment action, assisted by her friends, changed her husband’s practice. The action was nevertheless taken within the norms expected of African women that participants talked about, as she did not quite question or confront him. Her strategy also shows that it is possible to put constraints on a power holder’s action(s) without a harmful effect on the power holder. Her husband still went out drinking; however, the environment in which his drinking now happened was acceptable to Ess.

5.3.1.2 Marginal Resistance

Marginal resistance as agential strategy used by participants involved a contextual position taking using subversion/reconstruction of established norms of socialization of African women for achieving one’s own ends without openly confronting the norms. This approach signals that fluidity of identity practices may also present the potential for change. Bey, for example, was required to behave in accordance with expectations of an African woman by the boyfriend she was living with, who told her after a serious disagreement that “an African woman would beg me to stay...beg or leave” (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over). Bey wanted their live-in relationship to change into a more stable one. She had been given “a promise ring” and “was so happy because I was like, now we are together, he’s serious.” She was also short on material provisions as she said, “… and I had no money. I had nothing”. Nevertheless, Bey disliked the extent to which her boyfriend required her to submit to his wishes for their relationship to continue. Therefore, notwithstanding her material constraints as a migrant woman, and her knowledge of the cultural norm that an African woman should stay in a relationship whatever her
experience of it is, because “you stay, that’s what you do” (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over), she negotiated the conflict by requiring that the boyfriend meets the basic condition for legitimate intimate relationships in their origin homeland. She explained that:

… [Y]ou know this thing, I don’t know if you have it in your country, but we have it in mine, “do not be a wife to a boyfriend, be a girlfriend. When he marry [sic] you, then you become a wife.” I looked at him and I said, “You haven’t paid money [bride wealth] to my parents, I don’t see a ring on my finger. I look at my forehead, there’s not stupid written on it. So, you know, I’m done. I’m done.” (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Bey employed marginal resistance strategy by invoking an understanding of her homeland culture to suit her preferred way of being. Bourdieu argues that rules and norms are interpretive resources that people use to develop individual strategies to achieve their own interests “while … seeming to obey the rules” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63). A close familiarity with the field also enables people, who have in-depth understanding of shared beliefs, to improvise strategies for surviving within constraining structures (Veenstra & Burnett, 2014).

Another area in which the participants invoked traditional norms as a form of marginal resistance is in the aspect of sexual relations. For example, unmarried young participants did engage in sexual relationships, but did not wish to make it known that they were doing so outside of marriage. However, trouble arose when their boyfriends made demands that could expose them. For example, Adele’s (20, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) boyfriend asked for a live-in arrangement, while Ruty’s (20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) boyfriend asked for a sleep over at his sister’s place. Both women declined the requests, because they thought that making such relationships public could
close off future opportunities for marriage for them if their current relationships failed. Both participants told their boyfriends that the norms of African culture forbade them to agree to their requests:

... Things like moving in together. So, he really wants us to move in together and you know, obviously it’s like in our [African] culture, it’s no. [Laughing]. It’s not happening. (Adele, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

... Like, he wanted me to go to his place. Like, he lives with his sister, so he would want me to go to their place to sleep over, but I wasn’t comfortable with it as an African girl. Like, from where I come from, like our morals, like my mom wouldn’t allow me go to sleep over at a guy’s house. Like, wait before you get married. Or wait before she’s even met the guy.... so, I just thought we should call it quits for now. Like while we try to figure out something, at least, something that would work for both of us, yeah... [Laughing] (Ruty, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over).

The publicness of the practice of living together and sleeping over are against the cultural norms that unmarried women are expected to abide by, considered from participants’ construction of an African woman in the previous chapter. However, the more important issue for both women was that they wanted a stronger commitment from their boyfriends. Adele (20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) said that living together is “just kind of a bigger deal” and she desired something “more solid” than living together while Ruty explained that she wanted to “finish school and get married” (Ruty, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over). Although they did not abide by the rule of chastity required by African traditions, their use of a cultural requirement to refuse their boyfriends’ requests was, therefore, a form of empowering resistance to the
demands of men who wanted to be in relationships with them, without offering them the status of wife that is valued in their African origins. Their marginal resistance approach may suggest that they were not able to insist on what they wanted for themselves but instead took refuge under the umbrella of cultural norms. However, since neither woman adhered to norms of chastity before marriage as required in their homeland cultures, their invocation of culture was also resistance to a culture that seeks to regulate how they express their sexuality. The two young women had effectively used culture as an excuse not to announce their sexual involvement outside of marriage and to simultaneously hold out for how they wanted their relationships to progress.

The marginal resistance approach, as an expression of agency, reflects the proposition that resistance to norms must arise from within existing discourses that seek to perpetuate them, as “[t]here is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very “taking up” is enabled by the tool lying there” (Butler, 1990, p. 145). It illustrates the point Butler made that gender is a “strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences.” (p. 139) Indeed, the participants’ gendered performances though empowering, nevertheless, had consequences. For example, although Adele did not agree with the cultural norms guiding intimate relationships, she gave in to the expectations of her African origin and resorted to a performance of agreement with the beliefs but not for its own sake. Adele followed traditions so that she would not disrespect her parents by finding a middle ground between her boyfriend’s request and her parents’ consent as she said, “I will never move in with him …without their blessings”. She contrasted the cultural approach of Africans in intimate relationships to the more flexible and easygoing approach of the [non-African] culture of her boyfriend. The tension from the conflict caused Adele to reflect that:
During the qualitative analysis, interviews were conducted with a young woman named Adele, aged 20s, who is in a relationship and has been for over 10 years in South Africa. Adele expresses a desire for more freedom and independence in their relationship, suggesting a longing for less restriction and more individuality. She states, "I just think that maybe there’s a lot more, I don’t wanna say, restrictions? But there’s a lot more that you have to go through to kind of just be." (Adele, 20s, in a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Quach (2008) also observes that young, unmarried women in a Vietnamese city creatively negotiate their engagement in non-marital sex in a cultural environment that disapproves of the practice. According to Quach, the women effectively disrupted the linear interpretations of practices and discourses of masculine biased institutions by using discretion and moderation in flaunting the rules, instead of abiding by the norms of their conservative society. Bourdieu argues that practices are what people do and which signal the taking and maintenance of positions in space (Bourdieu, 1990a). According to Bourdieu (1977), despite the entrenched nature of cultural norms, cultural changes occur in the long term, although the success of the transfer of practices from one field to others varies. Some practices are retained (or modified) while some are not; because peoples’ actions are “pre-adapted to ... demands” of the structure that created their dispositions (p. 279). Many participants, therefore, took up traditional practices and put them down as it suited them. In the process, they employed pragmatism and marginal resistance as empowerment tools. The negotiation of tensions was sometimes mediated by participants’ counter-constructions of discourses of traditional norms as they modified some of the practices into which they had been socialized.

What was clear in this study were the multi-layered tensions and competing pressures that participants faced due to their contradictory perspectives about their understanding of what is expected of them as African women and what they said that they do in their lives in New Zealand. Participants mostly responded to the challenge with pragmatism and marginal resistance, in accommodation of the norms, which provided them with the space to pursue what they wanted without a direct confrontation with established cultural
norms. In the next section, I will discuss a third agential approach identified in the study.

5.3.2 Dissidence as a Cultural Opposition Strategy

Dissidence entailed the refusal to be socialized into a compulsive embodiment of African gendered beliefs, by declining to participate in norms that are discomforting. The fact that participants in this study, being migrants, were not embedded in the practices of African cultures, created gaps in their cultural knowledge of their origin and provided the wherewithal for some of them to withdraw from participating in a regimented consumption of African culture. Such participants did not find value in developing competence in cultural expectations of behaviors and domestic roles for African women. Their narratives show that being embedded in the practices of their Western host culture modified the cultural messages that their diasporic African parents passed to them. From the stories, parents managed the dilemma of relating in two cultures by avoiding the deliberate and direct cultural transfer of their African socialization. Research shows that diaspora African parents in the United Kingdom are strategic in the manner they socialize their children by being flexible to combine elements of home and host country norms to limit tensions in the family (Cook & Waite, 2016; Waite & Cook, 2011). In the current research, African parents thereby, and perhaps unwittingly, opened spaces for their children to openly refuse to participate in cultural practices that are at odds with the mainstream practices of their Western host field. Therefore, unlike participants who tried to accommodate traditional norms using pragmatic and marginal resistance responses to negotiate conflict in their relationships, the participants who refused to participate in the norms used dissidence as an oppositional strategy to negotiate norms that they were not disposed to.
Bourdieu (1984) argues that cosmopolitanism and openness to foreign culture can introduce contestations that create emergent capital forms and redefine norms and practices that are valued by a people, precipitating non-participation in their own culture. The participants justified their refusal to participate in the differentiating norms of African culture by alluding to their belonging to somewhere in addition to their African origins. Others opined that the prescribed norms were not appropriate for the present age. These perspectives are in line with Bourdieu’s observation that what is valued in a field is relative, because the cultural competencies that confer valued form(s) of capital on a person depend on social context and vary with changes in the social field they relate in. Hebbani, Obijiofor, and Bristed (2010) also argue that family dynamics, gender roles and intergenerational relationships change considerably and create conflict when members of a household adapt to a new culture at different paces. This may account for why some participants expressed disenchantment with cultural expectations. Sarah, one of the participants was unequivocal about this:

I think it was, it was always more of an expectation of you know, this is how you look after a home. But she [mother] never, I’ve never had conversations with her, and also ‘cause, yeah, I feel like my parents definitely tried to domesticate me in terms of being, you know, feel free to clean, feel free to cook. I’m a terrible cook, but I never felt like there was much significance being able to do those things and having value as a person to be able to, you know, keep a home and to cook and to clean and you know, all that sort of stuff, yeah. (Sarah, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Sarah did not identify with the expectation that an African woman must be able to cook and make house. This perspective is revolutionary, in the context of agency of African women, but might be counterproductive in a modern environment where continental African men are still asked not to marry women
who cannot cook. See for instance discussions on social media about #WifeNotCook (Eyoboka & Latona, 2016; Naijasinglegirl, 2016). This may limit marital opportunities for those who wish to marry African men and may encourage them to marry non-Africans. The participants further rejected the relevance of taught fundamental African values to their lived experiences; they refused to participate in related cultural practices and the associated expectations of appropriate behaviors. These included the rejection of acceptable expression of sexuality required for starting or maintaining relationships with men. Jessica, for example, discussed her objection to the traditional norm of abstinence before marriage:

I just never believed in that [abstinence]… The relationship I was in when I did lose my virginity, it just felt right. And I loved the person, and I just don’t believe in waiting. If you wait and you get married and what if you realize you are not compatible? Then you gonna be stuck with somebody with whom you don’t want to be intimate [laughing]. (Jessica, 20s, cohabiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

The tradition of socializing African women to be in awe of the man in an intimate partnership, such that they were constrained to express personal opinions and preferences, also engendered feelings of incredulity:

And I know that in our culture, the woman’s meant to, how do I put it? I don’t know how to put it because it doesn’t make sense to me. ‘Cause I grew up in New Zealand so I don’t know why the hell that even makes sense, but my mummy used to tell me for example, if you wanted to address an issue you have with your husband back home, you don’t tell your husband you have an issue with him, you set something up. You ask one of his friends or someone that you’ve appointed, yeah, to tell the husband. So, you can’t tell the husband right away. But to me that doesn’t
make any sense. But my mom just told me that’s how you avoid drama and that’s how you do it traditionally, yeah. I just said he’s your husband, if you can’t tell him, [laughing], then you have an issue that’s not normal, like you should be able to tell him, and I will definitely not be able to do that personally. I’ll tell him straightaway. (Stacy, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

Stacy unambiguously rejected the traditional approach to mediating conflict between parties in intimate relationships. She was far removed from its practice and could not appreciate its appropriateness. Some participants persisted in refusing to participate in the norms, even when men responded with further policing of the norms. This was the case with some participants who were single, but who would rather lose the opportunity of marriage to such men than behave in ways that contradicted their own aspirations. For instance, Josianne (20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over) refused to give in to the demands of a boyfriend who did not like her liberal upbringing and wanted her to conform to expected norms of African womanhood. She said, “… he wanted to change me from the get go and make it very clear that he wanted to change me. Yeah, so, that’s it [break-up].” Another participant also talked about her refusal to cooperate with a man who demanded traditional behaviors for women:

I was like, so we still have men that behave this way? You know, this person is not married to a lady but he’s full of rules and regulations. Is this what people do to build relationships? [Shakes head] (Angel, 30s, single, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Angel’s observation highlights the entrenched nature of such expectations in marital relationships, but she refused it for herself. To her, the premature nature of rule setting might engender unnecessary and excessive demands in her
relationship with the man if they eventually got married, because such behaviors by men are tolerated in the African culture.

The refusal to participate in the culturally valued practices and beliefs of Africans, which participants constructed in earlier narratives, include a rejection of the need to privilege men as a means of achieving the valued status of mother. Motherhood is important in African womanhood. A plethora of studies have established the construction of motherhood as the most valued cultural capital for African women and supreme symbol of African womanhood (Amadiume, 2015; Calame-Griaule & Alexander, 1962; Dhont et al., 2011; Makinde, 2004; Potash, 1995; Sudarkasa, 1996; Upton, 2001; van Balen & Bos, 2009). In the current study, however, some participants insisted on their right to negotiate the value of achieving motherhood as an expectation of the culture. For example, notwithstanding her desire to achieve motherhood, Sarah (20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) would not condone infidelity or concurrent multiple sexual partnerships. She said that “… I can never have an open relationship…I might as well be single and then you [the man] can go do what you want…” She recognized the challenge her perspective posed for becoming a mother in the cultural context of frequent occurrences of multiple sexual partnerships by men:

... and actually, there is another thing around having children. It’s that I don’t feel like I need to be in a relationship to end up having kids. Yeah, so it would be great to do it, you know, the tried and tested way, … it would be really good to be able to share the experience with someone else, but I feel like if I get to a certain age [33] and I hadn’t gotten that, I would be happy to do it by myself. (Sarah, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

To circumvent any discomforting experience, which might arise as a result of a marital commitment enshrined in African norms, Sarah seems to have two
options for motherhood; she could either have a child through a co-parenting arrangement that no longer involves intimacy or through the possibilities of in-vitro fertilization. These options represent experiences of single motherhood which impoverishes women globally. Sarah could, however, marry a non-African man.

Earth, a participant, also said that she would remain single rather than marry a man who would require her to conform to traditional norms that she did not agree with. She similarly reflected on the challenge that her stance posed for her potential to become a mother. She reiterated her choice:

As far as it can. I have to get it [honesty and respect] or nothing. Thank God I have friends, male friends, who are hardworking men. I can ask one of them to give me a baby [donate sperm]. (Earth, 30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over)

It is interesting that in all the cases, the participants’ visions of successful womanhood included motherhood, even if they had to do it as single women. The participants did not reject motherhood but conformity with traditional African prescriptions for “successful” womanhood. Such ability to pick and choose aspects of African gendered norms that were comfortable rather than discomforting is a condition for women to begin to gain power to engage with the restrictions that structural inequalities (transmitted through their socialization to culture) pose for them. The agency to respond in a liberating manner to norms that are constraining to women’s interests must be pro-active and oppositional, if a woman is not disposed to the longsuffering patience that the use of pragmatism or the clever maneuverings of marginal resistance strategies entailed in the current study. Negotiating agency in this study, therefore, also entailed a distancing from constraining nativity (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 19), a breakaway from established habitus, and a form of symbolic “violence”.
According to Bourdieu, the competitive struggle between people (agents) for resources determines the ethos of a society as well as who holds power and who is dominated in the society (Bourdieu, 1984). As also noted in the preceding chapter of this thesis, the habits and skills learnt through socialization are what become embodied as cultural capital. Bourdieu takes the usual positive connotation of capital further to suggest that its recognition as a source of domination and its refusal confers power and agency. According to Bourdieu, the subjectivity that people developed from their socialization is what continuously maintains the structure of the society through their practices. As people who experience inequality compete for the resources that are valued in the field, they inadvertently reproduce this structure, thereby giving legitimacy to their own domination by the powerful group, without perceivable response or resistance. Therefore, the orientation of study participants, who refused to behave in ways expected of African women according to traditional beliefs, is theoretically significant. It is similar to findings in studies of cultural practices and preferences in contemporary Western cultures, where some participants did not defer to the expectations of their culture (Bennett et al., 2009; Prieur, Rosenlund, & Skjott-Larsen, 2008).

Like the accommodationist approaches of pragmatism and marginal resistance, the oppositional approach to responding to the norms also had consequences for a few participants. As Oloruntoba-Oju (2006) also observes in an exploration of power negotiations by African women (as represented in postcolonial African literary works), some participants’ experiences show how a woman soon loses her esteemed cultural status when her resistance to the traditional expectations of an African identity is direct and confrontational rather than accommodating of the norms. The experiences shared by Amy and Winifred illustrate how open resistance to gendered cultural practices may make continuing in their relationships untenable for women, even when they are wives and mothers.
Amy openly resisted the demand (by her husband and mother-in-law) to conform to African cultural norms once she got married, although she had been living in New Zealand and living a Western lifestyle prior to marriage:

And it didn’t work out after two years because of cultural ways. How we grew up back home is different than how we grew up here. He would have his own rules like what to do or what to say or stuff like that and I didn’t agree with him…. Like how we married each other was not the same as [before] we got married. When we got married, everything changed. ‘Cause when I get to know him, he was open person and I share everything with him, I can behave whatever, like however I want, but after I got married, he was a bit more controlling, yeah. Because I never wear the scarf [hijab] as my family is Moslem. I never used to wear the scarf. So, but when I got married, he was like, you have to start wearing. And I said, no. I don’t think so. It was kind of like forcing [his] way…. So, which was not working with me [laughing]. I was like, I’m too young for this. You know, “I’m just gonna have my [child], after that we’re finished.” (Amy, 20s, in a relationship, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

Amy rejected the inequitable nature of the demands on her, as her husband was not held to the same standards. She said, “[at] the time he wasn’t even praying, he wasn’t going to the mosque. He would just tell me “you need to go with my mom” (Amy, 20s, in a relationship, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over).

Winifred also insisted on being treated as a person first in her marriage. The unresolved pressure led to the end of her marriage as depicted below:

Our culture, you know, when you are home, you have your family and I have my family and, in this union, there’s these two separate families who would intervene if anything goes wrong. But … here, everybody fights their own battles, yeah. So, when we came here, the pressure of living in
a different land, no family and we battling financially and all these other things, is bound to tear us apart, you know…. We agreed in so many other things. But …. I find my wishes, or my desires were always pushed back and his was going further. So, I said “No, this is not working.” (Winifred, 40s, divorced, West Africa, 10 years and over).

Like Amy, Winifred was not opposed to the general principles of her socialization but rather appeared to be resisting her socialization to privilege her husband’s preferences and his refusal to adapt to the new spatial context of their relationship. She referred to the communal intervention and policing that Africans use to address conflicts in relationships, the absence of which should engender new dynamics of interaction in the diaspora. Winifred and Amy were aware of the censure that could follow their refusal to behave in accordance with traditional expectations that a woman would stay in her relationship regardless of her experience of it. For example, Winifred acknowledged the discourse(s) on the requirements of her as an African woman, but she nevertheless focused on her own perspectives:

… You know, but being an African woman, people like look at you, thinking [claps hands], oh now, she’s single, she just gonna be going around with all different men and things like that. But that is their perception. That’s what they wanna think. But within myself, I know that’s not what I’m doing and just me doing myself and doing what I wanna do and pleasing me. And my life with my children and my family back home [Country of origin] satisfy me [claps hands]. Yeah. (Winifred, 40s, divorced, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Winifred also realized that her action to end her marriage was culturally subversive. She, therefore, approached relevant members of her African community in New Zealand to explain her action; she wanted to mitigate the
judgement and censure that she expected would follow her separation. However, both she and Amy still demanded recognition of their interests and preferences in their relationships. They had risked social stigma by opting out of their marriages. Each woman also had at least one child in her failed marriage. Their lived experiences, therefore, provided an alternative narrative to the dominant one articulated by some other participants, that African women tend to stay in marital unions for the sake of their children, even when such relationships challenge their own health and wellbeing. Thus, the stories of resistance that participants shared in this study challenge their constructions of a fixed African woman identity, which they habitually use to frame their beliefs and practices. The participants’ lived experiences, therefore, show that there is a fluidity in their identity performances and representations. This aligns with the approach that there are multitudes of ways to an appreciation and recognition of a Black identity (Snyder, 2012).

The participants’ agential responses to constraining norms allowed them to expand their options and opportunities. Although most of the participants in the current study had respect for African traditions and the associated norms, their sense of also belonging in a place with norms that differ from those of their origins in some respect, allowed them to engage with practices that were sometimes different from those of their origins. For example, married men having concubines/mistresses in practices referred to as “small house” or “office” as a non-formalized polygamous practice is generally tolerated in African societies; however, non-formalized intimacy practices such as the “live-in lover” phenomenon involving unmarried men and women living together are considered Western and are seldom openly practiced or approved in many African cultures. However, some of the participants, despite the weight of traditional norms, did live with a partner outside of marriage in New Zealand. The cultural norms and practices of participants’ socialization, therefore, became
sites of contestation, and the diaspora appears to provide a facilitative environment for such contestation.

In the postcolonial context, such participants may be considered Eurocentric (Mazrui, 1986), having learnt from their Western environment to think that they are not as African as those who live on their origin continent; and their African cultural practices can be subordinated to the practices of their host environment. Mazrui explored contradictions in the social reality of Africans in his six paradoxes of the African condition. He argues that an overemphasis on coherence of representation encourages dominant discourses that ignore paradoxes and deviations from the norm in African traditions. Mazrui also considered that the encounter between Africans and Western culture simultaneously fosters in Africans a longing (nostalgia) and a forgetting (amnesia) that creates a crisis of identity, which precedes a “getting one’s history wrong” in order to get one’s national identity right” (Mazrui, 2013, p. 13).

In this study, the universalizing of the Western culture was subtle and expressed by participants as that the fact of their being away from the African continent makes them unable to own its cultural representations in its entirety. In the next section, I examine participants’ negotiations of identity in a Western context and the ensuing ambivalence that created them in a third space of identity.

5.4 Constructing and Negotiating a Third Space

Research has shown that change and modifications occur when two cultures interact (Berry, 2010; Berry & Sabatier, 2011). Participants’ practices in the current study manifested a fluid doing of identity as they related with homeland and diaspora home beliefs and practices, fostering a hybrid identity that is incongruent with their constructions of a fixed, essentialist African woman identity. According to Young:
The hybrid is that which combines two types thought of as distinct from each other in such a way as to merge their characteristics into a new type, or the separation of a single entity into two or more parts, rendering each different from the other. (R. Young, 1995, p. 26)

Observations show that many participants were conflicted in their perceptions and their actions; whilst in some ways they adhered to traditional understandings of African womanhood, their practices sometimes suggested changing values in the diaspora. Scholars argue that African migrants in Western countries adapt to life in the diaspora in ways that often challenge their values and ideals of their socialization (Bezabeh, 2016), engendering ambivalence in identity beliefs and practices (Adeyanju & Oriola, 2011). Bourdieu (1990a) indeed argues that habitus is dynamic and capable of regulated changes in ways that complicate idealist, intellectual categorizations that purport to explain human action(s). In this study, the participants’ contestations, and negotiation of the habitus to which they were socialized engendered ambivalence towards African culture. The ambivalence became apparent in their reflections on traditional expectations of an ‘authentic’ African woman and their own practices as diaspora Africans. The questioning reflections of participants and their contestations of cultural gendered practices, even as they participated in them to the extent relevant to their desires and circumstances, located them in a ‘messy,’ hybrid third space.

Ambivalence towards African culture and identity observed in this study was enhanced among participants who were in intercultural/interracial relationships, as well as amongst those who emigrated from Africa when they were children. As also observed in other studies of Africans who live in social fields different from their origins (Creese, 2015a; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2015), participants were ambivalent about African cultural norms and practices. The stage for ambivalence towards their home culture is usually set in two ways. One
is in the form of habitus acquired through direct childhood observations and experiences, while the other is through narratives of home encountered by children growing up in the diaspora. Participants narrated their ambivalence by situating new family practices in the diaspora within the context of modernity and better economic opportunities for women. This enabled them to question and reject the logic of norms that ascribe arbitrary gendered responsibilities to men and women in relationships. Mary spoke about her parents’ home management practices during her childhood, and how she thought of this in the context of her own marriage:

...So, I watched my own mom. She was working, but every day, she was demanding money from my father. Whether he has or not, my father is supposed to provide money for the house. And when I was growing [up] I kept asking myself, “When you have, why do you demand from the man?” And when I got married, my experience is also different. Even though I hardly demand from my husband, but mostly I have that feeling that a man is supposed to take care of a woman, just because of the way we were brought up. It’s something that is in our minds [laughing], in our subconscious minds. (Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Angela’s narrative was similar and exposes how home habitus and the corresponding cultural conditioning can set the stage for ambivalent attitudes in diaspora places far away from home:

... So, while I say it’s based on your own understanding, its working for us because we understood it that way, because that’s the way we’ve chosen to build our family. In some situations, people would say okay, fine. I’ll take care of the house rent, you take care of the school fees. Okay, and times are hard, my sister. For crying out loud. You don’t really allow the man do everything and if you are building with your husband, it makes a whole lot of sense, where you contribute, he contribute, so that’s
what I mean by that. But in [country in Africa], even the in-Laws, nobody
hears. [They will say] “are you serious? You are paying your children’s
school fees? What’s the man doing?” …Yeah, because in [country in
Africa], to a large extent, most families, let me say 60% of [citizens of
country in Africa] will expect [that], even when you as a lady you are
doing everything, you are expected to be a man’s responsibility. But it’s,
they are actually right, okay? (Angela, 20s, married, West Africa, less than
10 years, my emphasis)

Angela generally agreed with the traditional role division in families but
considered that a harsh economic climate warrants a different practice. She
further admits that family members will nevertheless frown on a husband who
requires his wife to make financial contributions to the home as provision is
traditionally the man’s role.

The participants were, therefore, conscious of the conflict between their
knowledge of African norms, and their own modifications of these norms in the
diaspora. They observed that such situations raised more questions and
reflections than answers for them. They, however, navigated the dissonance in
their construction of origin homeland norms and their negotiations of the same
in their diaspora home by taking different ideological positions and using the
conflicting discourses as relevant to their context.

Participants’ male partners seemed to perceive the vacillations because they
“othered” the participants as “unAfrican” when they observed practices
different from those of African traditions, although the men also adopted some
host country practices that were different from the traditions of their African
origins. For example, Bey experienced othering when she told the boyfriend she
was parting ways with that she planned to share a flat with another man who
was only a friend. Her boyfriend was against her plan although he was in a live-in arrangement with her:

I had a friend who said to me, “You can come.” And he [boyfriend] said to me, “oh, you’re going to another man”. I said, “no, it doesn’t matter where I go, it doesn’t matter who I’m with.” …But his concern was, “this is what I keep telling you, you are not African. You’re acting White. And this is the reason you need to leave my house. You’re not a true African. You don’t dress like one, you don’t act like one, you don’t talk like one, you don’t cook like one, you don’t fuck like one”. (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Winifred similarly experienced othering, because she contested her husband’s approach to leadership of the family when he took an important decision without consulting her (she declined to talk about the specific issue). He perceived her challenge of his behavior as violating the norms of her upbringing and following the ways of Western women:

… So, it gets to the point I got categorized as a White Woman. Black on the outside, but White on the inside. Because I don’t just let him do the whole thing of you know, making the decisions and you know, him leading. Well, leading the family is a different thing. I’m happy for him to lead our [child] … and be the man in the house, but I don’t wanna be just put aside like I don’t matter. (Winifred, 40s, divorced, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Othering is a key tool in modern society’s attempts at forcing order on the perceived chaos of nature. Perin (1988) argues that the Other is constructed and marginalized where “lines [of separation] do not hold” and the familiar dissolves into ambiguities and confusion (p. 4). Perin argues further that society’s “[i]ntolerance for ambiguity” (p.9) when the meanings and expectations of
behaviors that people share are threatened, evoke fear and distancing that creates boundaries. By transgressing traditional boundaries of expectations of behaviors for African women, Bey and Winifred crossed boundaries to behave like Western women, becoming “liminal figures” (Lupton, 2013, p.186) threatening the privileges the African cultures bequeath to men. From the quotations, the men responded by labeling the women as “White”. The men were in essence using distancing “exclusionary tactics” (p. 189) to turn the women into the Other, “Undecidables” who “bring the outside into the inside and poison the comfort of order with suspicions of chaos” (Bauman as cited in Lupton, 2013, p.186).

This brings to focus how participants in the study “make and remake” (Neely & Samura, 2011, p.1934) their diaspora spaces to fashion a third space of identity. Some participants seemed to wish to be other and/or be more than African, so that they could adapt better to the norms of the host country. They claimed to disown norms that tied particular behaviors to an African woman’s identity in relationships or argued that they were not socialized to African norms by their parents. When it suited them, however, they invoked discourses of their African homelands to frame some of their perspectives. Neely and Samura (2011, p. 1934) argue that “racial interactions and processes (e.g., identities, inequalities, conflicts, and so on) are … about how we collectively make and remake, over time and through ongoing contestation, the spaces we inhabit.” The process of fashioning the third space of identity is not always smooth, simple, or straightforward; rather, it is fraught with tension. It entails complex negotiations of others’ expectations of behaviors, and self-interrogation or a questioning of what it means to be an African woman. For example, Jessica constructed herself as distant from an African identity. Similar to the experiences of young diaspora Africans in research in Canada (Creese, 2014, 2015b), she attended schools in New Zealand where nobody else looked like her. She had never been in an
intimate relationship with an African man. She also did not have African male friends who were not family. Jessica emphasized her successful assimilation into New Zealand culture and seemed to suggest that her New Zealander identity was dominant, at least, from the perspective of her friends and family. She also seemed to suggest that there was no meeting point between the two identities (African and New Zealander):

Like, African boys aren’t, I’d be interested in them [but] I think it’s a little because of the way, because of the people I’ve grown [up with], and have around. I think a lot of people just see me being, like lots of people comment that I act more Kiwi [New Zealander] than I act African. Or that I act more Kiwi than my Kiwi friends. (Jessica, 20s, co-habiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Jessica’s experience of difference in the host culture is an acknowledgement [by her New Zealander friends] of a successful acculturation into the host culture. Nevertheless, although Jessica was somewhat detached from the practices and norms of traditional African intimate relationships, she attributed personal traits which her partner did not like to her “African heritage”:

... Actually, even more recently, I guess, I’m a very emotional person. Like, I think because I love hard, like I get hurt hard also. And he’s very, like calm and keeps his emotions to himself. Sometimes he can come across quite cold, whereas I’m like, I think it’s the African woman [in me], I like to express my emotions whether you like it or not. [Laughing]. And I think that’s one thing we disagree on, on the how we go about expressing our emotions. (Jessica, 20s, co-habiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

By analyzing an expressive sharing of emotions as an African trait in her narrative, which she contrasted with her partner’s calm approach, Jessica
constructed an ambivalent identity in which, while she thought she acted “more Kiwi” than mainstream New Zealanders, what she perceived as her African identity still sometimes came to the fore.

Observations of participants’ ambivalence towards traditional identities took other forms, including the denial of the influence of ethnic identities in intimate relationships. Sarafina, for example, attempted to construct her relationship with her White New Zealand partner in non-racial terms: “…from the beginning, I consider it as being married to a man, not a man from a different race or different nationality or whatever” (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over). However, what she considered to be a non-racial discourse on the practices in her household also involved a questioning of what was cultural or just appropriate, thereby exposing inherent ambiguities. This eventually led to her questioning her own thought process on the issue:

I relate well, I think… my only problem is that we do sometimes have cultural differences…. there’s a [certain] way for instance I would receive people, but I don’t know, is that African? Is that anything ‘cause I’m sure some Indians have this; do you know what I mean? But then, I see that he doesn’t respond the same way, it’s all very casual and I wasn’t brought up like this. My parents taught me to act differently. Is that an African thing? I don’t know. That’s my point. You know, maybe there are people of any culture or any race whatever that teach the same ways which is you bring people in, you make them feel comfortable, you offer them a drink, you know. Children is the same way. For me children, they need discipline. It’s not a jungle. We need discipline, but you know, my husband, for instance, he considers that children should just be free and growing and it’s all about logic. Logic comes with respect. Of course, I want them to understand that it’s logical to be this and that, but sometimes, it goes beyond that. I am older than you, that person is older
than you. …. Some things, that’s the way they are, there are certain ways of doing things which is a difference in the way we interact. Whether that is African or not, I have no idea. (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Despite her reflexive considerations of difference as noted above, Sarafina framed some of her experiences of negotiating conflict in her marriage as indicating a difference in ethnicity from her husband:

Now, I also do have a tendency to, and I think that’s probably, that might be the African side of me. I have a tendency to explode as I said, at first, because this is how we react. This is how we are where I’m from, you know? …. I grew up with eight brothers and [a] sister. So, there was always a fight happening somewhere. So, this is how we are. And there was never someone like [name of husband], someone calm enough to just sit there and say, this is not on. So yeah, being with him is, we talk, we get things sorted, and if we don’t get things sorted, I would sulk. I’m very good at sulking [laughing] (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over).

Like Jessica, who attributed her preference for expressive communication to her African origins, Sarafina attributed experiences that may be observed in any large family to her African upbringing.

Another tension was that the participants also sometimes had expectations of the same African cultural beliefs and practices that they contested. The tendency to exist in different mind spaces simultaneously was manifest in this latter tension leading to fluidity in both the construction and practice of identity. For example, Bey felt unhappy with her former African boyfriends who expected her to behave according to their shared ideals of an African woman, and who questioned her identity each time she appeared to behave contrary to those
expectations. She recalled that, “…instead of looking at me as just an independent woman who was opinionated, they looked at me like I’m trying to follow [behave like] a White person.” Despite these misgivings, however, Bey also expressed reservations about how her non-African boyfriend behaved in a way that was contrary to her previous experiences in intimate relationships:

Actually, I’ve not dated an African man [in a while] …. So, the current relationship I’m in now, he’s Kiwi [New Zealander] and, he’s very much, “Whatever you want babe, whatever you want, I’m okay”, “whatever you need”. I’m like, “Wow”. Sometimes, which is weird, because I find it different, I’m like, “What do you mean whatever I want? I’m not dating myself, what do you want?” You know? That was an opposite problem. I’m almost forcing him to be African [laughing]. It doesn’t work, and something weird. It’s actually quite weird, I find, yeah. (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Contrary to her previous discomforting experience of always being expected to defer to the man’s wishes while dating an African man, Bey struggled to accept that her [non-African] boyfriend could continually privilege her preferences over his own. This demonstrates the scope of ambiguity when cultural capital is traded across ethnic spaces. Bey further expressed her ambivalent stance towards African culture when she simultaneously encouraged African migrants to embrace an ‘authentic’ identity by not forgetting “who you are”, while she admonished them not to be limited by their African cultural orientation that may constrain their ability to adapt to a new environment:

Don’t forget who you are just because you’re where you are. And do not let culture depict who you are. You have to assimilate, you have to. For me, that is one thing that I had to do when I came to New Zealand.
Assimilation is not [to] forget, you have to fit in where you are. (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Like other participants, Bey’s conflicting perspectives captured the ambivalence involved in occupying a third space of culture. Reay (2005) has argued that when a habitus encounters unfamiliar terrain, the effect goes beyond change and transformation to create ambivalence and discomfort. Reay’s argument echoes Bourdieu’s, that the movement of a habitus across new and unfamiliar fields creates a “cleft habitus, a habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and its ambivalences, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of the self, to successive allegiance and multiple identities” (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 511). Nevertheless, Bourdieu posits that habitus is dispositions “acquired through experience”, and is therefore contextual in nature (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 9). The awareness of these conflicts created different levels of tension within the participants. There was tension in the desire for an identity that was uniquely their own and based on norms that borrow from both African and other cultures that they choose to live by. It shows how exposure to a different cultural environment may impact the traditional practices of African women. Participants’ practices manifested a fluid doing of gendered identity as they attempted to make new spaces for themselves. Ultimately, they inhabited a new (third) space, which had elements of the old and the new and more. Sarafina provided an apt illustration of this perspective:

… That is the third culture. It’s not a mixture of the rose that’s taken from [African homelands], no, no. [Shaking head]. It’s that rose but it’s that rose that’s just pointing at the sun in a different direction. Because that rose has now realized that there is no point trying to take part of the first culture because you don’t know, you’ve lost that culture. There’s no point trying to take part in the second culture because that culture, you’re here, I’m not denying any of those, but you just don’t identify to them either.
Then you become that other person that is basically you, intrinsically you. I call that third culture. … I have [chosen] an element of every single culture of different cultures and have created, a whole … [new] person … I am proud of being [Sarafina] who was born in Africa… it really is important to define that, that person is itself. It is not a person who is rejecting. I’m not rejecting anything at all. Neither am I going to celebrate something that I cannot take as mine, but what I can take as mine is whatever I have created as a person I am now. (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over)

The third culture consciousness was hinged on the acknowledgement that although participants originated from multiple countries in Africa and had lived as migrants in Western countries for varied periods, their skin color evoked certain expectations of them by others that they did not always share. However, participants’ experiences of living in other cultures created midpoint spaces in the form of the third culture that allowed them the opportunity through and by which they created and explored their experiences and representations as diaspora African women. The third culture that the participants described appeared to be similar to Anzaldua’s mestiza consciousness; a distillation of identity affiliations and multiple experiences into a new “third element” expression of identity that is “greater than the sum of its several parts” (Anzaldúa, 1999, pp. 101-102). Sarafina said that believers in the third culture are women of African descent, who have stories of displacement like her own, and who were “…cut off from [their] African root very early, [and] had to adopt a new root, a new identity of [their] own.”

The participants’ (re)shuffling of elements of their African identity through vacillations between a ‘due to’ or ‘not due to’ an African identity shows that a fixed, core identity that can be captured and normalized does not exist, although it continues to “exist” as a kind of sense making tool. The narratives of
participants in this study, who did not feel constrained to define themselves by pre-defined attributes of being African reflect Britzman’s (1997) argument for nonunitarist ways of expressing identity affiliation(s). It also reflects the inherent ambivalence of identities, which is, however, useful in negotiating a comfortable place within unfamiliar diaspora spaces. Scholars have argued that globalization is producing transitional identities that unsettle the notion of distinct cultural identities. According to Bhabha (1994), hybrid identities constantly challenge the boundaries of identities, such that, “the difference is neither One nor the Other, but *something else besides, in-between*” (p. 219) (original emphasis). Bhabha (1994) describes this as “a third space of culture” (p. 219).

The concept of third space has not been without contestation, however. The critical issue, as raised by Oloruntoba-Oju (2014), is that “the third space of culture” (p.121) is often characterized as if the past and the present do not have an impact on it. Oloruntoba-Oju’s concern is that the third space is often viewed in postcolonial discourses as a “death knell” for original cultures, or as a totally new cultural space, within which neither the migrant’s old culture nor the new is distinguishable. Participants in this study were caught in this conflicting discourse on the third space, as their gendered practices manifested the ambivalences of the third space. The tensions and ambivalences nonetheless highlight their agency in exploring the norms of their origin cultures for what works for them in negotiating their intimate relationships as diaspora Africans.

5.5 Concluding Comments

The chapter addressed the contradictions and/or competing pressures between the study participants’ understanding of gendered ideologies of their homelands and the adaptation of its practices in the diaspora. Participants’ disposition to an idealist African woman identity regarding intimate relationships was tested
outside of its origin. The women either adopted or adapted different modes of expressions of cultural identity consequent upon their being embedded in a foreign culture. This impacted their perceptions of African gendered relationships, sexuality, and kinship ties. Despite progressive shifting of roles, however, participants invariably experienced intimate relationships in terms of their cultural socialization, or it at least served as a sense-making tool even when they contest its norms. Further, the economic power of the women as equal or higher earners with their partners restructured gender hierarchies as it blunted gendered discourses and blurred the boundaries of the traditional roles and responsibilities of their socialization. However, some married participants seemed reluctant to embrace the accompanying agency that ruptured gendered spaces gave them. This was in contrast with studies of diaspora Zimbabwean women in the UK (Batisai, 2016; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014). Unlike participants in the studies of the Zimbabwean diaspora, the tendency of some of the participants in the current study to accommodate cultural obligations caused them to discountenance the men’s involvement in domestic roles, diminishing the shifting sociocultural landscape in their diaspora space. Instead, they focused their concerns on a disquiet at men taking over their traditional roles and/or the lack of deep intimacy with their partners. This became a challenge, especially for some of the older, married participants in this study as they negotiated the contradictions and dilemmas of two different ways of being.

On the whole, the participants exhibited an engagement with a residual collective vision of their origins and a continued identification with its norms in accordance with the characteristics of a diasporic consciousness in modern societies posited by Safran (1991). However, the expression of an African identity in the participants’ experiences was not linear or simplistic. In practice, participants negotiated the fields of their origins and their host country homes, which offer different opportunities and constraints. The experiences of enacting
gendered norms and engaging with their contradictions in the diaspora also created conflict in participants’ intimate relationships. This brought on reflections and recollections of participants’ contestations of their gendered identity practices in the diaspora. Women could, and often did enact or refuse aspects of African gendered norms of roles and behaviors depending on their disposition towards specific issues. In the process, the women employed “pragmatism”, “marginal resistance” and “dissidence” as empowerment tools in complex negotiations of traditional norms in their response to the cultural power of men. The negotiations were sometimes mediated by participants’ counter-constructions of discourses of traditional norms. Therefore, they experienced multi-layered tensions and competing pressures as they took up traditional practices and put them down as it suited them. The women’s expression of identity was, therefore, fluid, while they adjusted to the practices of their Western host country. This fostered an ambivalence towards African culture and adoption of a hybrid third space of culture along with its multiplicity of identities.

Participants’ experiences demonstrate a remaking of identities in the diaspora and imply that cultural practices that constrain have unstable meanings and can manifest differently from established norms. The participants’ flexible doing of identity was nevertheless attuned to traditional African ways of being, as frequently represented in the dilemma folktales of Africa’s oral traditions documented by African female writers. Abrahams (as cited in Wilentz 1992b), for instance, argues that African traditions do exist comfortably in ambivalent contexts that are left open to different, and even contradictory interpretations, allowing for deeper reflections about cultural norms and values. This belies the rigidity typically claimed about African traditional values.

In conclusion, these observations show that while identities are often imposed by socialization, this is not without people’s active participation. Although
traditional gender assumptions of African womanhood impacted the participants’ worldview and representations as Africans living in New Zealand, their performance of the “African identity” was nuanced. Through their modifications of traditional gender norms in contemporary times, the women demonstrated fluidity in identity practices that accommodated other ways of being within the African woman habitus. The foregoing observations further show that absolute or fixed socialization is impossible as people relate with their identity affiliations in fluid ways. I argue, therefore, that rather than being a set habitus, the women’s dispositions were individual, and an unsettled work in progress, as they reflected on their experiences and questioned the habitus to which they had been socialized and, which inevitably responded to a diaspora field that has different practices and beliefs, creating them in messy, hybrid identities.

Overall, the women in this study engaged with African cultural practices in complex and contradictory ways in their diaspora home. They mostly accommodated the contradiction of sharing the role of men as breadwinners, while their own traditional roles remained largely unshared or unchanged. Yet, they also sometimes undermined their own desires for changing practice when the opportunities presented themselves. Also, if breadwinning was traditionally the condition that gave the man power and headship in African families, then any requirement for the woman to share the man’s role of provision should logically have diminished the man’s headship role and enabled a complementary sharing of the woman’s domestic caring role. However, the women did not challenge the authority over the wife and family that the culture bestows on men, except in a few cases where the practices appeared to override the woman’s personhood and psychological wellbeing.
Chapter 6
Sexual Negotiation, Risk and HIV

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined how participants negotiated cultural norms and identity in the diaspora, ultimately inhabiting a hybrid space in which elements of origin and host culture coexist. In this chapter, I examine the doing of hybridity with regards to negotiating norms of sexuality. It has been argued that meaningful explorations of issues related to sex and sexuality are pertinent to understanding societal structures and principles among Africans (Mama, 2001; T. Oloruntoba-Oju, 2010; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2006; Posel, 2006). Sexuality has its utmost expression in experiences of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure, preceded by desire that is itself impacted by culture and socialization, is the feeling of satisfaction gained from relieving the libidinal tension of wanting sexual gratification (T. Oloruntoba-Oju, 2010). Although some African countries have conceded to prevailing global perspectives on the liberalization of sexual orientation with legislation that allow same sex relationships, sexuality remains largely impacted by traditional beliefs and the privileging of heterosexual relations (Cloete, Rispel, Metcalf, & Reddy, 2010; Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy, & Moletsane, 2010).

Traditional practices that limit a woman’s sexual pleasure and choices also endure in tandem. Some societies still require chastity before marriage, which is tested by brutish evidential practices on the wedding night (Ojo, 2010). Female virginity was similarly valued among the African societies in Uganda, although its loss did not seem to impact future marriage prospects (Roscoe, 1911 as cited in Tamale, 2006). The compulsory inheritance of a widow by her late husband’s brother or relative to keep her in the family because of the children is an enduring
practice (Ojo, 2010), and the practice of widow cleansing also continues in societies in East and Southern Africa (Perry et al., 2014). According to Perry et al., (2014), the practice of widow cleansing involves a widowed woman submitting herself overnight for sex without use of condoms with a stranger for whom it is a profession, while traditionalists perform rituals outside because she is considered unclean with evil spirits and unsuitable to be inherited by her late husband’s brother nor for sexual relations with another man. There are also societies where the wife is entertainment for the sexual gratification of brothers and visitors of her husband. A woman’s sexuality was thus determined by wifehood and motherhood.

Such traditional practices and beliefs culturally construct a difference in acceptable sexuality for women and men because in contrast to women, men are in control of their sexuality and not subject to sexual practices in the way that a woman is essentially made into a sexpot stripped of sexual preferences and choices about how she may engage with her sexuality. These practices impact on the spread of HIV among African populations. Men and women reproduce and reinforce the constructed difference in their bodily practices that make sexuality gender-skewed to avoid censure. As Kosemani 2000 (as cited in Ojo, 2010, p. 4) observes, “when it comes to the question of what the African scale of value is, sex relates to the totality of the human condition. Any deviation is faced with stigmatization.”

Despite the constraints, women attempt to relocate sex from the realm of the essentialist, reproductive role, to the erotic, with an insistence that men must fulfil women’s desire for sexual pleasure also. In the current study, married women mostly maintained traditional practices of “what can you say about sex?” along with an agreeable “men want it and women give it” attitude to marital sex. Young, unmarried women, however, simultaneously engaged a host culture neoliberal understanding of sexuality, “it’s my body and I will give it to whom I
please” alongside a regretful or whimsical, “it was a mistake” to do premarital sex that they were not expected to do as unmarried African women. The neoliberal notion that women are empowered and can control their sexuality at will was unrealistic in practice and understandably challenging to do, just as other scholars (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gill, 2008) observe. Participants negotiated the tension that accompanied the conflicting discourses of sexuality of their hybridity by taking refuge in a modified form of the African norm of abstinence before marriage that they hitherto found difficult to do. The recalcitrant nature of the restraint on doing sexuality became a point of distinction for the women between the African and non-African men they had sexual relations with.

According to Lupton (2013), notwithstanding its potential to create opportunities for equitable relationships for women, “hybridity is always risky” (p. 184), because it tests and destabilizes established categories that differentiate people. Wellings et al. (2006) also argues that “the ability of individuals or couples to pursue a fulfilled and safe sex life is central to achievement of sexual health” (p. 1706), and an understanding of the broader social contexts of sexual behaviors is important for effective intervention. In the current research, participants’ approaches to responding to norms of origin and host homes impacted how they understood intimacy and potential risk in their relationships and ultimately, their perspectives of African men. In this chapter, I examine how participants negotiated sex and associated risks in their relationships within the complex context of straddling origin and diaspora places and norms. I discuss the impact of the norm of reticent sexuality on intimacy in participants’ relationships. Then, I examine their agency to negotiate unwanted sex and also safer sex, in consideration of their stories about trust and risk of infidelity in their relationships. I thereafter examine how their perceptions of risk are mediated by their perception of New Zealand as a place with low prevalence of HIV infection.
Lastly, I explore participants’ perceptions of African men as intimate partners and conclude the chapter.

6.2 Intimacy and Sexual Pleasure Without Talk

The perspectives of most of the participants suggest that they considered that the cultural restrictions on how women should do intimate relationships were problematic and created barriers to intimacy and sexual pleasure. The following remarks from a participant provided an illustrative summary of the frustration the participants expressed about the issue:

… The African culture, that society that we form embraces that idea more than any other race, really. Or any other culture or group of people? Africans are so into a woman being suppressed or oppressed than anyone else is, you know? We always have to forego, the woman always has to forego oppression of your sexual nature? Don’t express to a man that you need more in a bedroom, don’t express to a man that you need to be hugged. Don’t … but you should just cook. Cook ‘n’ clean ‘n’ serve him and his friends when they come over, and don’t talk when he talks. You should not have opinions. (Earth, 30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over, my emphasis)

Hegemonic norms of femininity (as represented in Earth’s observation above) hindered communication and expression of sexuality in participants’ relationships, and there was a silence about sexual pleasure and sexual preferences. This attitude was frustrating for women who actively desired experience of sexual pleasure. Another participant shared that:

If you’re a very sexual being and you’d feel like, before you feel like – I like sex, I enjoy it so much and I wanna have it all of the time, especially
with my man, I wanna have it all the time, and so before you felt like, oh my God, he’s gonna think, I am not a good girl. So, if I have to say that this is what I want and you know yourself, you get cranky if you don’t get it, so that is it. (Bey, 30s, Single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

The participants thus believe that men constrain women’s sexuality and there is a frustration about being discouraged from talking about it. The acceptance and reproduction of such gender-skewed sexuality practices create a culture of silence about intimacy and sexual pleasure. Nevertheless, there were pointers to women’s desire for sexual pleasure, for instance, as shown in Bey’s quotation above and others to follow. It was also evidenced in some women’s refusal to use protective physical barrier in the form of condoms in order to get pleasurable sex, as I will show later in this chapter. They were just constrained to be communicative about what they wanted. While a few participants said that they discussed everything about their relationships, most did not talk about sex and related expectations and preferences with their partners. Tiri, for example, was nonplussed at the suggestion that one might discuss matters of sexuality and enjoyable sex with a partner:

Sex is not, - we don’t really talk about it. We just do it. [Laughing]. We don’t discuss about it. We just do it. I mean, to talk about sex is like, how do, what can you say? Like, are you getting enough from me? Or am I getting enough from him? Not those things. We just do it. And then we tell each other during the moment, yeah. After that, there’s no discussion about it. … I just think sex is sex. Isn’t it? Is it not the same? (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

The limited conversations about sex in an intimate relationship as portrayed by Tiri gave context to her lack of knowledge about her husband’s expectations regarding sex. She said, “I’ve never asked him.... So, I just assume he’s fine
because those things, we don’t talk about them.” She had not told her husband about her expectations about sex either. Tiri said that, “I just think what he’s doing, that’s what’s supposed to be done”. However, there was also whimsical expression of regret in her lack of knowledge about whether she was getting good sex when she said that: “if there’s anything more, that’s my loss” (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over).

Research has shown that partner dissatisfaction with sexual or emotional expectations is a major reason for multiple sexual partnerships (Mfecane, 2013). Since relationship expectations are known through communication and negotiation, participants reflected on how culturally informed silence about sexuality can introduce risk of infidelity in relationships. Comparing two perspectives on talk about sexuality from Barbie illustrates how risk emanates from reticence about talk of sex and sexuality in marriage. She said that:

… if you talk about sex, and even your husband when you talk about it with him, I remember a time very early on in our relationship, my husband said to me, “Ah ah, I can’t believe you can say this. I’m really afraid of travelling and leaving you alone. I wonder what you would do”, [laughing] and talks like that kept me in check. I’m like, okay, I’m not supposed to say this to you, okay. (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Barbie stopped talking about issues of sexuality to demonstrate to her husband that she was a trustworthy wife, as traditionally, a woman who talked about sex was considered disrespectful and unfit to be a wife. However, according to Barbie, the husband was having sexual talk with another woman. Barbie shared her response to seeing sexually explicit text communication with an unknown woman on her husband’s mobile phone:
... And I was shocked about it [sexually explicit text messages], I was like, really? “You mean you can actually type this?” [Laughs]. You know, “Does this go on in your mind?” You know? And he said, “It was nothing.” … but that was not the point, the point for me was we never had such conversations. I never knew what his fantasies were sexually, but here he was expressing it to somebody on the outside, you know, and she [the woman] was open about it. … So that was just, - it was a wakeup call for me to say okay, yeah, we look at our husbands in Africa as the ideal father figure, sex talk is off limits and things like that, … although that’s changing now in our generation, because now you find men who are able to say I want a lady who’s freaky in the bedroom but a woman in the street. … because like my husband would say to me, “I want everything [makes a funny face] [laughing] in my home”. “I want the wife, the friend, the prostitute, everything, I want it at home”. So, yes, women should be more open now, I know it’s really hard, even for me getting to that point, cos, that’s not how we were raised (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

In the above quotation, the experience was an adjustment point for the participant. Barbie questioned the socialization that did not prepare women for deep intimacy that some men seem to seek when they indulge in infidelity. However, the conflict helped her to get past the cultural constraint to a realization of what her husband wanted: a respectable woman always but a “freaky”, sensual “prostitute” in their bedroom.

The characterization described in Barbie’s quotation is like what has been reported for how men in some other African societies desire their wives. For example, Tamale (2006) explores the connections between sexuality and other aspects of life in the Kiganda culture in Uganda (East and Central Africa). Tamale observes that sexual initiation for young women’s sexuality is open and methodical; it has also mostly survived centuries of reconfiguring and
discriminatory regulation by colonizing authorities, because their focus on working with men for a patriarchal system overlooked the institutional Senga system for transmitting knowledge about sexuality that was traditionally in the control of paternal aunts. She observes that the practice has been modernized and even commercialized for wider accessibility and economic empowerment. Nevertheless, the expressions of erotic and sexual expression continue to be consigned to private spaces as observed in earlier research (Mama, 1996; Schmidt, 1991; Tamale, 2011); a wife is expected to be humble and respectable outside but a “prostitute” in the bedroom (Tamale, 2006, p. 27).

Other studies similarly observe that Black African women in their research were constrained in communicating sexual preferences in their relationships, and they were surprised to find that some men preferred emotional intimacy (Stern & Buikema, 2013; Stern et al., 2016) contrary to their expectations that men are not vulnerable (Schneider, Cockcroft, & Hook, 2008) in intimate relationships. In the current study, the women sometimes stopped talking about an issue when a partner had a different perspective and does not cooperate. Daneel shared her experience of talking about an important sexual health issue that she had not been successful at getting her partner to cooperate with her on. She said:

... So, it was just best for me to not be on it [contraception].... the risk of pregnancy is probably what would end up tearing us apart. For the fact that he knows that I won’t do an abortion. So now, at the moment, I’m not on birth control, he’s not using protection, he’s refusing to use protection... like now, he’s just flat out refusing. (Daneel, 20s, in a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Some of the women devised ways to talk about what they want through an indirect approach if they expect that the partner may find a topic uncomfortable. Mary, for instance, said that:
I ask all those questions because we talk about those things openly. Yeah. And I ask him, do you think I would go for somebody, he would say “no”. When I ask him, do you think I would go for someone else? He’ll say, “no”, because I know you wouldn’t do that. That’s what he tells me. .... And sometimes we just joke with some of the things. When he’s, when you think it’s so difficult to say, just crack a joke, even though you’re serious about it, then you know what the other person is thinking. [Chuckling] (Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

In the quotation, Mary was delicately having a conversation about trust and faithfulness as she was going to be away from home. She would also use jokes for explorations of more delicate matters. Thus, it appeared that communication about important or serious issues was not an easy endeavor, even when partners generally have good conversations.

The challenge in communicating successfully with partners was also observed in relationships involving non-African men, although the experience was more varied. The following excerpt is from Winifred’s (40s, divorced, West Africa, 10 years and over) interview:

**Winifred:** I think any relationship, be you White or Black, with kids or friends, whatever relationship you have, you communicate. When you have a relationship when you don’t communicate, that’s where trust is omitted. Because you find people would just hide things because it’s convenient. Rather communicate it. People would keep things and then they say, you didn’t ask that. How am I supposed to ask that when I don’t even know what that is? People need to learn to communicate and our men don’t communicate. Our men just do things because they are the boss.

**Toyin:** When you say our men, who are you referring to?
Winifred: I’m referring mostly to African men. Wow, to be honest with you, it’s not only African men.

(Winifred, 40s, divorced, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Winifred’s context was that she had been in serious relationships with men from different racial background, including African. Another participant, who is in a biracial relationship, shared her experience of poor communication about sexual matters by her partner and was surprised to encounter the attitude in a White person. During the interview she shared her experience:

Toyin: What about the intimate life? Are you also able to discuss all the things in the bedroom stuff?

Sarafina: Yeah, well, that’s been a little more up in the air. I mean, I have, I feel that I have discussed it at length, now that’s the only side, I think, he’s not as open as I would have wished him to be open ... hmn, but then, the fact that he doesn’t talk about things, I think is just a male ego rather than a cultural thing, because if anything, I would have expected a White man to be able to talk about this kind of things, but the fact that he doesn’t talk about it I see as, I think is more his ego rather than the cultural side of him, or maybe there’s a cultural side. So, maybe there is [makes face].

(Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Sarafina’s story, and Winifred’s, show that being with a non-African man does not automatically translate to better communication for deep intimacy. Sarafina’s also relates to the issue of how much cultural attitudes impact on individuals’ habitus and whether people will all behave in the same way because they have gone through similar socialization. The varied experiences the women shared show that cultural socialization and the habitus it creates is not necessarily static or stable as various influences can modify how a person
interacts. Being in relationship with men from both African and non-African origins thus posed challenges for the women regarding effective communication, impacting sexuality, among others.

The disposition to reticence in talk about sex and sexuality limits women’s power to negotiate what they want, impacts on their sexual decision-making and exposes them to risk associated with sexual and reproductive health (Calvert & Ronsmans, 2013; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). There is an on-going interest in focusing on shifting norms of masculinities as it has been argued that women are constrained in sexual decision making (Campbell et al., 2008; Shefer, Ratele, Strebel, Shabalala, & Buikema, 2007) due to their participation in hegemonic norms of masculinity that privilege men and make them feel entitled to women’s bodies (Hunter, 2005; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010).

In the current study of diaspora African women, I observed three ways in which the women negotiated unwanted demand for sex by men, depending on their disposition and the type of sexual relationship. I discuss the three approaches of “an unvoiced no”, “an ambiguous no”, and “an unequivocal no” in the next section. While the scenarios represent relationships at different stages, it nonetheless highlights how women fare in exercising their sexual agency in an environment that pushes a neoliberal ideology of empowered women whose ability to negotiate sex is unproblematic.

6.3 Negotiating Unwanted Sex

Given the socialization of most participants to privilege men and to acquiesce to men’s desires and needs, the negotiation of sex was fraught with challenges and negatively impacted their ability to refuse unwanted sex. Research increasingly shows that unequal power between men and women in intimate relationships
constrains women’s sexual agency (Atteraya, Kimm, & Song, 2014; Langen, 2005; Senarath & Gunawardena, 2009; Wellings et al., 2006). However, the sexual agency of African women has only recently come into focus (Tamale, 2011). Sexual agency is impacted by the expected roles and behaviors considered to be appropriate for men and women in a society (Koester, 2015). Sexual agency is, therefore, socially constructed within a context, just as gender is (Butler, 1990; Cornwall & Jolly, 2006).

Women in the current study also felt subject to the cultural discourses prescribing appropriate sexual behaviors that curtail their sexual agency, even in the diaspora. Manalansan (2006) observes that women’s bodies and sexualities are culturally marked; their bodies represent a link to the preferences and practices of their origin cultures. There are nevertheless nuanced differences in the way the women engaged with unwanted sex and consent in their relationships. Some women expressed what I will refer to as an “an unvoiced no” when agreeing to sex, even when they would rather not have sex:

…they tell us that we shouldn’t deny your husband sexual relationship. So even though you’re tired [and] the man wants it [sex], you allow him. But it wouldn’t be like when you were not tired. Sometimes, you can just give yourself but in your mind, it’s a different situation altogether. … but ideally, if you had your own way, you would have said that you are tired, and you are not interested. That’s how it is. You eventually maybe not enjoying it because you just want to do it and they will always enjoy it … (Mary, 40s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years).

Mary complicates the experience of feeling compelled to always agree to sexual demands from the man when she describes the erosion and denial of the woman’s sexual desire and pleasure. Smith (2009) observes that although African men and women in his study agreed that sexual intercourse should be
by mutual consent, most of them expected a woman to agree to have sex with her husband whenever he wanted, except during her menstruation or just after childbirth. These periods constitute intervals when a woman is least likely to conceive. It has been argued that women’s agency in making decisions about their sexuality may be understood within the context of inequalities in gendered power as women feel pressured by society to show that they can attain motherhood (Mfecane, 2013; Smith, 2009). Women may, therefore, agree to have sex during their fertile periods, even if they would rather not have sex. Smith (2009) also links the practice that a woman must not refuse her partner sex to the belief that being a wife and mother constitute social identities for African women and there is a lot of stigma attached to being divorced. Other research also suggests that women’s compulsive acquiescence to sex is a strategy to manage men’s infidelity. Skafte and Silberschmidt (2014), for example, observe that despite the empowering traditional sexual practices of Rwandese women in their study, the women’s agency was still curtailed by the social pressure for them to be “good and respectable wives” (p. 4), such that, a woman is not allowed to refuse her husband sex and the threat of the husband going to other women ensures her compliance. However, the Rwandese women’s experience differ from what Mary describes above because giving the woman pleasurable sex is an integral cultural context of sexual activity in the study by Skafte and Silberschmidt.

Despite the handicap, Skafte and Silberschmidt further argue that always complying with a husband’s sexual overtures is agentic, as it was a [pragmatic] strategy for the women to maintain their [material] “subsistence” in marriages and contain male infidelity. Skafte and Silberschmidt’s argument aligns with the perspectives of scholars who argue that women control men through their sexuality (Groes-Green, 2011 as cited in Skafte and Silberschmidt, 2014) and that women wield power through their sexuality “behind a façade of wifely
submissiveness” (Arnfred, 2007, p. 143). Feminists like Lorde (1984) and Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, and Thomson (2003) indeed construct a woman’s sexuality as her resistance to oppression, and Tamale (2006) observes that the practice of Ssenga, a female passage of rites that teaches the nuances of sexuality for women in the Buganda people of Uganda, is used to subvert patriarchy just as it reproduces it. Tamale observes that women are actively taught to use the giving of sexual pleasure to the husband to placate him in order to prevent domestic violence and for manipulating him to get whatever they wanted, even as they pretend to be meek and submissive.

However, in the current study, although Mary’s perspective in the last quotation relies on her disposition to conform to her cultural socialization just as for the participants in the studies by Smith (2009) and Skafte and Silberschmidt (2014), her choice of words in the narrative indicates that she did not think that compulsory acquiescence to sex is empowering. She noted that it was not ideal and only beneficial for the man. Also, Mary indicated in earlier chapters that she contributed to provisioning the home in her family, so her inability to say no to unwanted sex was not to maintain material provision from her husband, unlike the case of the Rwandese women in Skafte & Silberschmidt’s study. Juxtaposing this observation with insights from Skafte & Silberschmidt’s study, it may be that a married woman perceives acquiescence to sex as empowering only when it secures her husband’s material provision for her. It may be argued then, that the challenge for married women to refuse unwanted sex is at least, in part due to a shift in balance of cultural power towards men upon marriage. Also, although women in the current study did talk about the use of manipulation, it was only in the context of what they were told. For example, regarding her upbringing, Bey said that:

My mother was very much like that, you know, African women, you know, you manipulate. You manipulate the situation to make sure the
man thinks he’s in charge, but he’s not. So that’s how we were raised. 

(Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

On the other hand, another participant reflected on a discussion at a Singles seminar where a man complained that women manipulate and dominate men when they get the opportunity. She shared that:

Some of the complaints of the men, from the men, was that women, once you give them a little space, they tend to take over, they tend to dominate. They tend to, someone specifically said, “the women are manipulative.” But I don’t know how, manipulative how? I don’t know and I think someone, a lady, asked, “what do you mean by the women are manipulative? He said, you know our women, now she would just come, she would try to use you, maybe your weakness or something to manipulate you. He didn’t really make any point at all, but he specifically said, they are manipulative. So, I don’t know if the men generally sees the women – that is African men, if they [sic] sees us African women as being manipulative or they feel that we take advantage of the situation, I don’t know. So, I really can’t say why, but I know I’ve heard one say, when you give us [women] one step, we tend to take ten. (Angel, 30s, single, West Africa, less than 10 years).

It could be that women with their own means do not see the need for manipulative tactics or they were not willing to talk about how they use the approach. The empowerment strategy may be explored in future research.

Another observation of sexual negotiation in the current study is that the material and emotional circumstances of being a migrant may curtail a woman’s sexual agency, wherefore she gives an “ambiguous no” response to a man’s sexual advances when she would rather not have sex. For example, Bey’s story prior to the period of the research suggested that she struggled to re-establish
control over the body she had submitted to a “live-in lover” arrangement with an African man when she really wanted marriage. She increasingly found that the role was similar to the responsibilities required of a married woman in her cultural background, although she was yet to assume the status of a wife. Therefore, she considered the co-habiting relationship burdensome without the achievement of the wife status she sought. Whilst she had been socialized to not reject sexual advances from a partner, Bey reclaimed some autonomy through remaining unresponsive during sex:

...One time I remember I had a horrible cold, I was very, very sick. I was hot and cold, and he decided “I want to have sex”. I said to him, it’s kind of like, you can decide all you want but you know I have to be a willing participant. (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Bey was an unwilling participant in the sexual encounter. Her boyfriend was dissatisfied with her lack of response and Bey related that he had said, “it wasn’t good enough... It’s your job to make sure I’m satisfied.” By contemporary understandings of rape, which connotes the absence of “explicit and continual consent” (Ashmore, 2015, p. 6), being an unwilling participant would mean that the woman did not consent to have sex. In this context, however, Bey did not say or indicate that she experienced the sex as rape, although she clearly voiced an unwillingness to have sex. She cooperated because she was expecting marriage to the man she was with. She said “… [b]ecause my ultimate goal, I’m not dating somebody just for fun, I’m dating somebody with the intention of marrying” (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over). The difference in whether she consented to sex or was raped is therefore the African cultural context of not refusing a partner’s request for sex as a woman’s role in the relationship. Parrado and Flippen (2010) argue that women’s bodies may become sites of contestation in migrants’ struggles to make sense of their changing cultural order, thereby reinforcing previously socialized understandings of self.
Further, in the context of her being a diaspora African in a Western environment, Bey may have been required to communicate a clear refusal of sex by saying “no”, if she did not want to have sex, which she did not. Burkett and Hamilton (2012) argue that implicit pressure from male privileging beliefs disrupt young women’s ability to refuse unwanted sex, and coerced sex is often normalized in heterosexual relationships. Observations from the current study and Burkett and Hamilton’s (2012) study show that the expectation that women can, and have the personal responsibility to say “no” to unwanted sex is problematic in real life situations, because such negotiations occur within complex traditional gendered ideologies that women simultaneously contest and consent to. Madhok et al. (2013) also argue that the relationship between coercion and women’s agency is flexible and shifts according to context and social norms; therefore, women’s action in refusing consent may sometimes be constrained and unsuccessful.

Other scholars (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007, 2011) also consider that the prevailing conceptions of consented sex and rape limit the understanding of women’s sexual experiences to wanting and consenting to have sex or otherwise, excluding considerations of circumstances when women are ambivalent about having sex. Therefore, there remain grey areas to explore in women’s consent to or refusal of unwanted sex in the research participants’ contexts.

Some unmarried participants however said that they would respond with an unequivocal refusal, if they did not want to have sex. Jessica, (20s, co-habiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) said it would be a “no-brainer” for her to refuse to have sex with a man if she did not want to. The example from Ruty also demonstrates autonomy in the refusal of unwanted sex, when she changed her mind after previously agreeing to have sex:

I just ended up not having sex with them … like, we were about to have sex and then I told him to use protection and he said, “No.” And I said, he had to use it, but he kept on insisting, “No.” And he’s like, “oh, I won’t get you
pregnant, like, I will pull out.” [Laughing]. I’m like, “but there’s things called STIs and no, I don’t know where you have been, like, I don’t know, the girls you’ve been with might carry STIs and all that”. And he’s like, “oh no, I won’t do that to you”. And I said, “No.” And he actually got quite angry with me for telling him to use protection. So, I just left, I just left him… Very angry, yeah, so I just thought I should leave very fast before like he did anything. Yeah. (Ruty, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Ruty repeatedly said “no” to sex she no longer wanted, as was her responsibility according to how expression of sexual agency is taught to young people in her Western environment. However, she was nonetheless potentially vulnerable to risk of violence because the man was angry about her refusal. Scholars (J. Baker, 2010; J. Baker, January, 2008; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gill, 2008; Powell, 2010) argue that rather than being the sexually empowered and liberated beings described in post-feminist discourses, women do not find it easy to refuse unwanted sex. In my study, it appears that young women manage the constraint by creatively negotiating an “unequivocal no” in their relationships through two avenues. One was through a 90-day abstinence period in a new relationship. The other was through total abstinence from pre-marital sex, after having experienced sex.

In the first instance, instead of abstinence from sex before marriage, the women deployed arbitrary rules about the need for a waiting period in new intimate relationships before a woman should agree to have sex. There was talk of abstaining from sex for a couple of months, and there appeared to be some agreement in participants’ interviews about a “90-days rule”. Echoing some other unmarried participants’ perspectives, Earth explained what the rule entailed:
Do the three-month thing. That 90 days thing, before you take any big steps. Don’t listen to the sweet words …. don’t do anything, don’t get too emotionally involved like sexually, probably don’t even kiss him for three months. That’s the 90-days rule. Or, if you want, kiss him, but don’t have sex for three whole months, see how he is, then you know whether he wants you or he just wants to be sexual with you. If he sticks around, if he’s still respectful, or there is no sexual pressure with you not giving in, you’ll know. (Earth, 30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over)

The adherence to the “90-days rule” seemed to provide a review period during which the women evaluated the intentions of their boyfriends regarding the direction of the relationships. The negotiation of premarital sex through a pre-determined 90-Day period to decline to have sex is agentic; it also represents a restructuring of prescribed norms of acceptable expression of sexuality for women as it indirectly challenges gendered norms of chastity before marriage. I note here that the use of a three month waiting period to have sex in a new relationship may be a widely used strategy as Burkett and Hamilton (2012) mentioned it in a study of sexual agency of young women in Australia.

In the second approach of using total abstinence from sex outside of marriage to negotiate unwanted sex, the participants made it known upfront that they would not have sex until they were married:

… So, he knew beforehand … that sex was not on the table. When we met, he asked me how come I don’t have a boyfriend, and I said because it’s very hard to find a man these days that is waiting ‘till marriage. And he was very surprised, but it seemed like he was happy to hear it, and he’s like, wow, you know, you don’t meet girls like this a lot…… but I do have other friends [who] live very different lifestyle to me, and I feel they are constantly in heartbreak and just struggling. They are pretty much who I
was when I was with my ex. Still now, constantly, like relationships not lasting, getting hurt, yeah. (Stacy, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

This approach to negotiating unwanted sex also had its challenges as Stacy nevertheless had occasions of tension about it with her boyfriend. Another participant, Josianne, shed light on the difficulty she had explaining to her current boyfriend why she was abstaining from sex in her relationship with him, when she had had sex in previous ones. She said that:

I’m still trying to work out why I’m trying not to have sex, so that I can explain to him better for him to understand … I mean, I’ve had it. I know what it’s like, I enjoy it, and we’ve got chemistry, it’s just a bonus but it’s not the main thing, you know, and I think it distracts me. I told him this. It distracts me from getting to know the person, you know. I’m scared that if we do it then it would just be like the other relationships and we will no longer be talking. (Josianne, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

Josianne’s experience shows the tension that a decision not to have premarital sex introduces into a relationship when a woman had previously experienced sex. Her story shows how a man may feel entitled to a woman’s body because she had experienced sex before. It also brings to focus an over-reliance on women being able to make their own choices, leaving them less supported by society in the management of their sexuality (J. Baker, January, 2008; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012). Participants’ stories suggest that the decision is a way to avoid infidelity. Josianne (20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over) did not want to add to the tally of men she had had sex with. She said that, “it’s more about, just not adding to my list and waiting until [marriage].” She elaborated on her perspective:
I guess I’m being intimate when I shouldn’t have, too early or too wrong people I guess maybe, I haven’t made the best decisions, but, but since I’ve, - maybe the last, maybe five years, I don’t, I choose wisely or I’ve actually now decided not to do that anymore until I get married. So, I’m not intimate. (Josianne, 20s, single, East and Central Africa, 10 years and over)

Another participant explained that, “the main issue was the cheating ... and I didn’t want to go through that kind of humiliation again” (Stacy, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over). The women remained conscious of traditional expectations of when sex is permitted for an African woman. They talked about their struggle to abstain from sex as young women growing up in a Western environment where freedom of choice regarding sexuality is encouraged. A participant observed that:

... It’s not something I’ll do again. At that time, yes, I did. Like, well, I was still young .... So, like, sex is normal here in New Zealand [laughing]. It’s not a big deal like back home .... Yeah, I had already lost my virginity at 17 years. Which was a mistake, a big mistake... (Ruty, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Ruty’s inability to set a well-defined boundary for herself at the time resulted in regret for her. She also seemed to be apologetic that she had premarital sex. The participants’ contemplative stories reflect some of the dilemmas for women regarding Western environments’ expectations of women as confident and able to avoid unwanted sex. Women experience tension when they are simultaneously guided by views of traditional gendered ideologies and neoliberal notions of women liberation. Gill (2008, p. 442) observes that for such women, “notions of autonomy, choice and self-improvement sit side-by-side with surveillance, discipline and the vilification of those who make the “wrong
‘choices’” (p. 442). She suggests engaging a “soft feminist sensibility”, the use of a blend of feminist and anti-feminist elements, to think through how changing cultural practices and representations contribute to how people view themselves.

Women’s agency in sexual decision-making, as shown in this section, is not uniform; it is impacted by traditional norms of sexual behavior for women, the nature of the relationship, what women perceive as expectations of the society they live in, and personal preference. Married women’s reliance on the provisioning role of their husbands may not explain their ready acquiescence to sex when such women contribute financially to the upkeep of their families. Their disposition to not refuse a husband sex seems to stem from the shift in balance of power in favor of men after marriage. While unmarried women said that they could succeed in refusing unwanted sex, the circumstances of being a migrant and a desire to achieve culturally acceptable relationships curtailed their agency to refuse unwanted sex and some resorted to creative ways to refuse sex unequivocally as appropriate to their preferences. From the narratives, it could be surmised that a modified type of abstinence remained relevant for unmarried participants to negotiate unwanted sex and manage their interests in relationships. While the abstinence period was not specifically for HIV prevention, it nonetheless has relevance as an HIV prevention strategy, if combined with HIV testing at recommended intervals during the three-month period. This is because new HIV infection can take up to three months to be confirmed in HIV tests. The three-month period can be used as a waiting and testing period during when the partners can make sure that they are either free of HIV infection or they get a diagnosis and treatment plan if they are infected. In the next section, I will discuss participants’ perspectives on strategies available for negotiating safer sex for HIV prevention.
6.4 Negotiating Safer Sex

Abstinence, or delayed sexual debut (which is a less restrictive form of abstinence) is the only safe protective method against contracting HIV through sex (de Cock et al., 2012; Laga & Piot, 2012). However, many studies have shown that people generally find it difficult to practice abstinence (Clutterbuck et al., 2012). Promotion of abstinence as a HIV prevention tool is thus not encouraged in New Zealand and elsewhere. Sexual health guidelines in the United Kingdom, for example, recommend that abstinence may only be discussed as one of a range of strategies to reduce risk (Clutterbuck et al., 2012). Indeed, a recent systematic review of effectiveness of HIV prevention interventions published over 20 years done by Krishnaratne, Hensen, Cordes, Enstone, and Hargreaves (2016) included condom use and HIV testing, but not abstinence. Other methods for preventing STIs, which involve protection during sexual intercourse by using condoms and pre-exposure prophylaxis [PrEP] are referred to as safer sex (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2001). In this section, I will examine participants’ perspectives on condom use and PrEP in relation to their stories about trust and fidelity in relationships.

6.4.1 Condom Use

Using condoms consistently as an HIV prevention tool is recommended as minimum intervention where there are suspicions that a relationship may not be mutually monogamous (C. Collins et al., 2008; Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2001; Laga & Piot, 2012; Merson et al., 2008). Research has also shown that partners who talk about condoms are more likely to use them in sexual encounters (Wilson, Díaz, Yoshikawa, & Shrout, 2009). However, only a few participants’ attitudes towards condom use focused on an informed desire to be free of infection. Some participants’ narratives show that the women’s agency to ask for condom use is curtailed by their understanding of
traditional norms of female sexuality and a desire not to upset their partner. This was especially the case in marital relationships. Tiri argued that:

Black men don’t like condoms probably … But in saying that, when you are in a marriage or a committed relationship, sometimes, condoms is actually not even something that can be tabled or that can be discussed, because you just assume that when you are in a marriage, I speak for myself, then, there’s no need for your husband to use condoms. I’m speaking from the African perspective that is, you can’t really, as women, we can’t really say, “oh, use a condom”. And they will be like “Why? Have you done something”? [Laughing], you know. They will start like blaming you to think aha, maybe you’ve done something, and you don’t want them to catch whatever you have done. And then also, even for me as a woman, if my husband all of a sudden started using a condom on me, I will also be questioning that to see what was really going on because you just assume - I think that in marriage, there’s no need for that, especially when you are in a, [pause] I can’t say secure, I don’t know what’s the English word that I can use there, when you are in a loving, long term relationship. Sometimes, yes, yeah, we don’t think of those things. (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Tiri acknowledged the implication of the socialization of women to be silent about intimate issues when she said, “as [African] women, we can’t really say, oh, use a condom”. Tiri remained governed by her education to follow men’s lead and privilege their preferences, although she now lives in New Zealand. Bourdieu argues that there is “… an “ontological complicity” … between habitus, as the socially constructed principle of perception and appreciation, and the world which determines it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 20). According to Bourdieu, structures are enduring environments that act as rules, which condition the thoughts and behaviors of individuals, and the understandings of
the norms of a person’s social field are firm and transferable to different contexts. Tiri nonetheless pointed out that marriage is rightly associated with expectations of fidelity and trust, and there should not be a need for use of condoms for disease prevention. Therefore, even in the context of limited or non-existent conversations about sex and sexuality in her relationship, Tiri believed that there was hardly any risk of infidelity in her marriage and condoms were not relevant to her. Other married women had similar understanding of condom use as an “intruder” (Chimbiri, 2007) in marriage situations. Barbie’s response to the question about whether she could ask her husband to use a condom if she had reason to, was also a quizzical:

How will it be asking your husband to use condom? …. It’s normally not, condoms is not our first choice of prevention being married. Rather we look at things that can prevent pregnancies because nobody ever thinks I’m trying to protect myself from HIV when I’m married. (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

The challenge in negotiating condom use in marriage, therefore, remained even in circumstances where there were concerns about infidelity. For example, condom use was not new in Barbie’s marriage, as they used it for prevention of unwanted pregnancy. Nonetheless, requesting condom use because of concerns about possible infidelity by her husband created tension between them:

…personally, my husband really does not have a problem with that [condom use] … for the child bearing reason you know, [chuckles]…. There must be some [reason for asking for condom]. I’ve done it before, but only because I had doubts of infidelity in the marriage…. because here I was, thinking it would never cross his mind things like this, and then it comes. Obviously, there was a big fight about it, so there was not even
time for the sex, not to talk of using the condom [chuckles and laughter].

(Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years).

Barbie pragmatically did not pursue the matter further after the “big fight”. She hoped that her husband knew better than to put his family at risk because of sex, as she observed that: “I don’t think he would wanna just throw away his life and that of his family just for, you know, sex”. Her vulnerability to the risk of STIs therefore remained dependent on her partner’s sexual behavior. Studies have shown that marriage does not reduce women’s vulnerability to the risk of HIV, compared to sexually active single women. This is because married women are more likely to have more sexual intercourse in a context where it is challenging to negotiate condom use even when a partner’s risky sexual behavior is known (Clark, 2004; Lagarde, Pison, & Enel, 1996; Sangi-Haghpeykar, Poindexter, Young, Levesque, & Horth, 2003; Smith, 2009). As some participants’ experiences show, the outcome of such a challenge is even more tension. Smith (2009) argues that in a cultural context where being married anchors a woman’s reputation and social identity in relationships supposedly based on love, a woman who asks for condom use challenges her husband’s infidelity and weakens her standing in the marriage by an acknowledgement that her husband has outside love interest(s). Therefore, women tolerate and cover up their husbands’ infidelity. Thus, multiple sexual partnerships remain a risk factor for sexually transmitted infections, even for married women. Nevertheless, Ruark (2008) shows from research in African countries that a married woman’s risk of becoming infected with HIV is at least comparable to those of single women who may be better placed to negotiate having sex using condoms.

The risk posed by inconsistent condom use is not confined to marital relationships, however. In the current study, younger women’s shunning of condom use was because they and/or their partner did not like to have sex using a protective barrier. They used condoms primarily for prevention of pregnancy,
and replaced condom use with other contraceptive use once their relationship progressed. Their use of condoms, when they did use it, was for preventing conception rather than STIs/HIV prevention. According to Jessica (20s, cohabiting, Southern Africa), for instance, “now we’ve been seeing each other long, we don’t [use condoms]. Yeah, we just rely on me, on my birth control.” Other participants also explained that:

In the beginning, we were using condom and then, ... I think just the more it progressed, we kind of moved away from them. We went to the clinic, both of us. It was separately. [We did] like, all the tests, yeah, to see that everything was clear [of infection], first of all, which was good? And then, we moved to [a] different contraception. (Adele, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

We don’t use condoms. I don’t think we even discussed it actually... I think I just probably assumed that he would be clean. I don’t think, no. I don’t think we had a conversation.... and again, it’s uncomfortable and you understand? [Laughing] and then I thought to myself, I’m on contraceptive anyway, so I’m quite safe, I think. That shouldn’t be an issue. (Freida, 30s, in a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Adele and Freida, like some other young participants, also preferred the experience of sex without a physical barrier, even if they said they could confidently negotiate condom use. They explained that:

I don’t feel anything with it [condom] [chuckling] yeah, I don’t like it. As in, it ruins the feeling for me. Yeah. I can’t feel, like it’s, I don’t know what it is, but I can’t, it doesn’t feel good. [chuckles] or nice. Yeah. so that’s why. (Josianne, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)
So ... like, we just tried an experiment once, and then after that we just stopped.... And of course, I was scared of getting pregnant and all, but I was also on the pill. We just wanted to know the feeling of not using a condom. Yeah, well we enjoyed it and I guess that’s why we then stopped using [physical] protection. But like sometimes, we would. Like, let’s say we had gone out clubbing [and] we drank [alcohol], I had to make sure he used protection. (Ruty, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Ruty was careful to mitigate risk of pregnancy by using condoms when she had been drinking, although alcohol would not normally interfere with contraceptive use. The reason that most of the women did not use condoms is consistent with the findings of Mfecane (2013), who observed that their participants shunned condom use in established relationships because they perceived that condoms detract from sexual pleasure and its use in such relationships was mainly for contraception. Just as Wang (2013) predicted in a study, therefore, prevailing norms and anticipated emotions from partners are important in predicting intentions about condom use. People are also less likely to discuss condom use in what they believe are monogamous relationships older than three months, even when they say that they are able to effectively communicate about using condoms if they wished to use it.

It is also interesting that studies conducted with Africans on the African continent similarly show that requesting condom use before sex conflicted with the societal values about the place of a woman in the relationship and the expectations of pregnancy and childbearing which fulfils a woman’s role in the family. Maticka-Tyndale (2012) concludes a systematic review of over three decades of research about condom use among people in SSA that extremely low condom use was due to complex interactions of cultural beliefs and expectations of people in intimate relationships. This clearly shows that these cultural beliefs are enduring in Africa and continue to be relevant for SSA women in the
diaspora. There may be other reasons for not using condoms also. Agha et al. (2002), for example, found from a comprehensive eight country study of reasons for low condom use among people of SSA, that a low personal perception of risk due to trust in a partner was the most important reason for not using condoms during sexual encounters. This perception is problematic in the African cultural context where the practice of men having more than one sexual partner at a time is permitted and even expected in some circumstances.

Risk of exposure to HIV and other STIs due to partner’s betrayal of trust was not hypothetical or just about unconfirmed suspicions in the current research. Some participants confirmed that they were potentially exposed to the risk of HIV because of inconsistent or non-use of condoms in relationships where trust was broken. They talked about believing that they were in trusting, mutually exclusive relationships and not using condoms consistently, only to realize later that their partners were engaged in intimate relationships with other women at the time they were together:

Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it just didn’t work for us really. It would break. Or it caused me pain, yeah, the condoms, not enough lubrication, or what, I don’t know. It wasn’t working for us both. I think that’s what my little young mind thought well, [laughing] oh Lord. If it’s just us, of course it’s just us … he’s not seeing anyone else. But of course, he was seeing half the city. (Earth, 30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Such revelations of infidelity often came as a surprise or deep shock to the receiving partner. This was reflected in Freida’s relationship:

We were dating for either five or six years. Like all through Uni[versity], and all that. And he just woke up one day, I didn’t have a clue, he just spoke up one day and said to me, “I slept with somebody else and she’s pregnant. And she’s having an abortion this morning and I have to be
there by 8 O’clock.” I was like, with who did you sleep? When? Where? And it was one of our friends. I was like, when? How? [Laughing]. Like, we spend all this time together. Where did you do this? (Freida, 30s, in a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

The experience was traumatic for Freida; she left her country of origin for New Zealand to get away from a situation that threatened her wellbeing. In conclusion, consistent with the literature (Chimbiri, 2007; Mfecane, 2013; Montgomery et al., 2008), therefore, the reasons that participants presented for not using (or suggesting use of) condoms in marital relationships were not only cultural, but also ethical and practical. A marital relationship is a union that normally assumes fidelity and trust, and involves expectations of safe sex, except in settings such as polygamous relationships (van Niekerk, 2002). Although consistent condom use is a protective behavior, its use in marriage is associated with infidelity and mistrust, unless used as a method of contraception (Corbett, Dickson-Gómez, Hilario, & Weeks, 2009; Harrison, 2008). Women’s silence about infidelity in a context where condoms are seldom used invites a questioning of the assumption of safe sex in marital relationships; it also makes women complicit in maintaining the multiple sexual partnership practices by men that negatively impact HIV prevention.

6.4.2 Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

Despite the experiences shared by many of the participants about untrustworthy partners, and inconsistent use of condoms, some of them would not consider using pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV (PrEP). Several authors observe that science has moved the frontiers of HIV prevention forward with the introduction of biomedical approaches whose potential benefits are still missed by communities, because leadership is lacking to address social and contextual
barriers to use (see, for instance, Laga & Piot, 2012; Collins, Coates, Curran, 2008). This perspective, however, assumes an unproblematic acceptance of such biomedical interventions by people as research (Idoko et al., 2015; I. Young, Flowers, & McDaid, 2016; I. Young, Li, & McDaid, 2013) has shown. Idoko et al. (2015), for instance, observed in country wide research in Nigeria that women bear a burden of distrust as most women who test positive to HIV become aware of their infection during routine antenatal HIV testing and promoting PrEP use in the cultural milieu is challenging. Some people said they would not take PrEP if their partner was infected and they were not.

In the current study, the continuing impact of the cultural socialization of most of the women on their practices showed in their desire to avoid arguments with husbands or partners and was a major reason for disinterest in PrEP use. A participant explained her perspective:

... He would probably ask why I thought of, you know, using a daily pill for HIV prevention ... it would boil down to, I have to explain why [chuckles] and it comes back to the lack of trust.... We are not just taking the pills because we just want to be HIV safe, because HIV is a sexually transmitted disease, so there has to be a reason. *It’s either I don’t trust you or I just want to be safe for my children because I don’t trust you....* so, it [PrEP] is not something I would take every day. No. *Except I do it in secret,* which is not what the marriage should be based on. It should be something we mutually agree on but then it would strike a level of distrust amongst the parties involved, to say, it’s either he doesn’t trust me, or I don’t trust him, *so it’s not something I would use, but ... if I had any doubts or reasons to, then I would* (My emphasis). (Barbie, 30s, Married, West Africa, less than 10 years)
Barbie considered how her partner would receive her consideration of PrEP use, causing her to quickly point out that it would damage trust in the relationship. Barbie’s reflections on the possibility of a secretive use of PrEP may sound inappropriate or even impractical since it is a daily drug and the risk of detection by the partner is high. However, it shows an awareness of the extent to which some women may resort to a pragmatic approach as an alternative to confronting their partners or addressing the related socio-cultural norms that curtail their agency to negotiate their own wellbeing in intimate relationships. Smith (2009) argues that women rely on the expectation of African cultures that men would invariably be responsible fathers and husbands, as a pragmatic strategy to curtail their husbands’ infidelity. Therefore, women mostly ignore or negotiate the behavior rather than confront it. Consistent with what women are taught to value in the culture, it is also noteworthy that Barbie would consider taking PrEP to keep herself healthy to look after her children if she needed to, although she disliked the idea of taking pills every day.

Participants also had mixed perspectives about PrEP as a drug. Most participants were put off by the tedium of everyday pill taking and probable side effects of long-term drug use; they did not consider that their potential exposure to risk of HIV warranted the challenge of taking pills daily when they were not sick and were not at high risk. A participant, for example, opined that:

No, because it’s an everyday pill. You are bound to forget sometimes. You’re bound to get tired at some point [laughing]. So, I think an everyday pill is a bit too much… Honestly, I wouldn’t really use it because I don’t think that my life is at that level of threat that would warrant me to take the pill everyday as opposed to, God forbid, if I was dying of cancer or something, you know. (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)
In her own perspective, Tiri also personally considered that PrEP use “is just like drinking Panadol (pain medication) when you don’t have a headache.” She, however, said that she thought PrEP would be helpful for the prevention of HIV for sexually active young women. Further, like Julianne (40s, widowed, West Africa) who insisted that, “no, it’s still chemical, you know”, Tiri was averse to PrEP use in gel form:

What my mom told me is that “you don’t put anything there [vagina] that’s not supposed to be there”. Yeah, like even soap, I don’t even put soap there. I just have this thing, because back home, there used to be a lot of things that women would put there; they were to do with sex, like, if you put it, your husband will not stray…. There were things like that from Sangomas [diviners]. They will be like, “If you put that, he won’t even look at another woman”, [laughing]. … I think those things were the ones that cause ovarian cancer because even in my country, ovarian cancer was quite prevalent, and I just think it was some of those things that we put there? (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Tiri perceived that there would be a long-term and negative effect on health from regular PrEP drug use. Her explanation also shows that her mother’s teaching continued to influence her perspectives as an adult woman living in the diaspora. Her language further reflects her socialization to reticence in matters of sex and sexuality; she used the word “there” several times to refer to the female organ instead of vagina.

A few participants, however, preferred the gel preparation form of PrEP as an alternative to the challenge of everyday pill use. In addition to avoiding pills, Nikita, for example, considered that the gel form is useful for framing the possibility of using PrEP in terms of a benefit to her partner, pragmatically
accommodating norms for women to privilege men in intimate relations in their consideration of PrEP use. She said:

...Well, I’m sure he would want me to be healthy. He shouldn’t mind if it’s gonna keep us healthy and with the gel … if it’s before coitus? I suppose it’s extra lubricant. So, he wouldn’t mind. (Nikita, 30s, in a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Some participants, who grew up in New Zealand and were more confident in following their own preferences in relationships, were also confident about their ability to communicate their preference about potential PrEP use to their partner. For example, despite her misgivings about the everyday pill taking required in PrEP use, a participant said that:

I couldn’t do a daily pill, [but] I feel like I would do it for HIV [prevention] to protect myself … I don’t think there should be a problem [for partner], unless there is side effect that would affect them. I don’t think it’s any of their business as such. As in, they can’t say don’t, for me not to take it, unless it would affect them somehow. If I decide, like I have an IUD, that’s what I have … that is what it is, so I think they should be okay with it, yeah. (Josianne, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

Josianne was assertive about opposing cultural norms that constrain the agency of women in relationships as she made it clear that making decisions about her own body and wellbeing was her choice, if the partner did not suffer consequences from such. Similarly, although Sarah was not previously aware that PrEP use for HIV prevention was relevant to people other than MSM, she indicated that she may use it if she was in a relationship in which she felt at risk:

I would definitely use it [PrEP], but it would also put into question the relationship as well…. It would make me evaluate the relationship. Is this
person worth me compromising my health and also taking this medication to stay in this relationship? ... so I would be taking PrEP because I think that I could be at risk. Or I am at risk of being exposed. So, I’m assuming that it’s because of them. So yeah, it would make me re-evaluate whether those health risks are worth it .... But to be honest, it would be a very slim chance that I would prioritize any relationship over my health for anything [laughing], it really is, I’m a bit selfish like that. Unfortunately, I really am. (Sarah, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Sarah qualified her acceptance of PrEP in terms of an extreme need requiring extreme measures. A need to resort to the use of biomedical intervention would make her question the value of a relationship that would make PrEP relevant to her, and that she could not envisage a situation where she would prioritize such a relationship above her own health. On the other hand, PrEP use may also provide a pragmatic way for a woman to keep herself safe in a relationship with an unfaithful partner while she evaluates her options:

I would have [taken PrEP] until I got to the point where I have said enough.... So, I was basically just there still looking for my leeway. I wanted to know that my heart didn’t wanna be there anymore. But I was still there because some part of me still wanted to be there, and so if I was still in that position emotionally, I would take that [PrEP] pill, I think. Yeah. (Earth, 30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over)

However, PrEP in its current form of administration may not be suitable for Earth as she envisaged. The use of PrEP must be continued once started because there is a probability of developing resistance against the drug as a result of intermittent usage (Abbas, Hood, Wetzel, & Mellors, 2011; Kibengo et al., 2013). Earth’s perspectives, however, raises the consideration of whether flexible
administration/dosing of PrEP could be beneficial for women and needs to be explored.

It would, however, be simplistic to ignore other underlying reasons for the perspectives offered by the women on HIV prevention measures. For example, Tiri suggested that the stigma associating Africans with HIV epidemics might prevent people from being open to discussions about risk of HIV and taking the HIV test to know their status, although they understood the benefit of taking PrEP. She said, “a lot of people shy away, they don’t even want to know sometimes, because of the stigma attached to the disease.” Angela (20s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years) also acknowledged that stigma against people who look “slim” accompanied media campaigns about HIV and AIDS in her country of origin. She said, “you know, then, it was so bad that people, they actually discriminate. So, you don’t want to be discriminated [against] you get?” Here, Angela was making a reference to the emaciated state symptomatic of people in advanced stages of HIV/AIDS disease and the reference to the disease as a “slim” disease in popular language.

The observations in the current study thus extend the insights from other qualitative studies (van der Straten et al., 2014), which focused on explorations of the reasons for low adherence to PrEP use in a clinical trial. The unsuccessful Female Pre-exposure prophylaxis (FEM-PrEP) trial of daily oral FTC/TDF PrEP in the VOICE study involving African women showed that a major deterrent to adherence to drug use was sociocultural beliefs and practices. Most women in those studies deferred to the preferences of their male sex partners who did not want them to use PrEP. The current study shows in addition that the way PrEP is administered is also a deterrent to use. Some participants nevertheless clearly communicated their ability to make an independent decision about PrEP use without partner approval.
Further, while younger participants who engaged in premarital sex were focused on preventing unwanted pregnancies, many of them did not pay the same attention to the prevention of HIV infection, despite their observations that men are often promiscuous. The management of sexual health for prevention of unwanted pregnancies and treatable STIs were the predominant sexual health issues for them in their Western host cultural environment. A reliance on the protection offered by the characteristics that participants associate with New Zealand as a place, was evident in their narrations. In the next section, I will elaborate on how the women’s perceptions of New Zealand as “safe” showed in their negotiations of sex and sexuality.

6.5 Space, Place and Risk: New Zealand as “Safe”

Seamon (2013, p. 11) draws on Edward Relph (cf. 1976) and defines place as “any environmental locus in and through which individual or group actions, experiences, intentions, and meanings are drawn together spatially.” Trigg (2017) also points out that people’s sense of place is relationally constructed on the back of a broader history with a reliance on factors including personal histories, shared consciousness, and pragmatic needs, among others. This perspective of place and what is of importance in the environment was relevant in this study. There is a high prevalence of reported bacterial STIs in New Zealand in comparison with other developed countries, with Chlamydia infection being the most reported (The Institute of Environmental Science and Research [ESR], 2014). The country, however, has a low prevalence of HIV (AIDS Epidemiology Group (AEG), 2018; Ministry of Health, 2014). Apart from gay and bisexual European men who make up the highest risk group in New Zealand, immigrants from SSA (and more recently, Asia), are assumed to be at higher risk of HIV than other social groups in the country (Dickson et al., 2012). This
assumption follows other international conventions that classify people who originated from regions with high prevalence of HIV (such as SSA, South-East Asia, India, Eastern Europe and South America) as high risk (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence [NICE], 2007). Also, the challenges of surviving as a migrant often involve working as much as possible to earn a good living. These two perspectives of New Zealand as a place influenced participants’ attitudes to risk in their relationships.

Research has shown that individual perceptions of risk are formed within people’s understandings of their social relations, which are hinged on norms that structure their lived experiences (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2006, 2008; Rhodes, 1997). Some sociologists also argue that experts often perceive lay people’s response to risk as irrational, whereas the response that seems irrational to experts is based on lay people’s evaluation of their own pre-existing knowledge of the relevant risk in relation to their ongoing experiences (Wynne, 1989). They further argue that experts are somewhat detached about their own knowledge about risk, while most individuals relate with risk “at the level of the local, private, the everyday and the intimate”, and therefore, are more reflexively aware of changing risk spectrum than experts, who tend to view risk as fixed (Wynne, 1996, p. 70). Reflexivity involves the deep interpretation of meanings regarding self and social processes related to a perceived risk, in a way that takes cognizance of other aspects of life that people embody through socialization before contact with the potential risk (Binkley, 2009; Lash, 2000). Sarah, for instance, provides an encompassing perception of risk of HIV by an African living in New Zealand:

…. and the thing there is, you know, although I have said I am very much aware of HIV and AIDS, I think sometimes my environment which is [city], New Zealand, kind of puts me at a state of relaxed about HIV and AIDS, which it shouldn’t, but I think if I were anywhere else in the world
... my senses will be a little more heightened about HIV and AIDS specifically. I don’t know, I think it’s just in terms of proximity, it’s just you don’t hear about it as much. You don’t hear about, you know, who might have it and the thing as well is that, you know, people could be on medication, you just don’t know, but I think it’s just not at the forefront of my mind when I’m in a sexual relationship in New Zealand. It’s not, but if I was anywhere else in the world, I think I would be, yeah, a little bit more … conscious. (Sarah, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Sarah’s construction of low vulnerability to the risk of HIV involves an interpretation of three things. These include the low prevalence of HIV in her location relative to known epidemic areas and populations, and hence, an apparent silence about its prevention; the impact of HIV on her cultural group; and an awareness of how HIV infection is managed. Her reference to people being on medication also suggests an awareness of expert knowledge that infected people could stay healthy when on ART. Indeed, according to expert knowledge on HIV risk, people living with HIV who use their ART medication as prescribed and whose viral loads cannot be detected in laboratory tests cannot transmit HIV to others, a development tagged, “undetectable is untransmissible” (U=U) (Rodger et al., 2016). Sarah was thus interpreting all the relevant knowledge available to her in her perceptions of risk in New Zealand, rather than following a fixed understanding of HIV risk.

Most participants mapped their perception of risk of HIV to the knowledge that HIV prevalence is very low and their men were either too busy trying to make a living to be unfaithful, the population was too small for infidelity to go unnoticed and that even if their men had sex with non-Africans, there would be little risk of HIV. They, therefore, assumed that the environment provided a moderating influence on men’s risky sexual behaviors. Barbie (30s, married, West Africa, less
than 10 years), for example, said that, “[B]ut in New Zealand there is really very low probability of things like that [infidelity] happening.” She believed that men have “more work to do”, and less time to hang out drinking in clubs where, “there’s alcohol, there’s women, [and] there’s other things that can be distractions for them.” Tiri’s perspective amplified Barbie’s:

Not here in New Zealand. Probably if it were in [origin country] … I probably would have said, maybe. Because here is such a small community. I mean, the word would spread so quick [sic] if… so people probably they are scared of doing those things. So, not here, I never. Plus, his work as well? He’s very, very busy? So, it never occurred to me. (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Tiri also alluded to the effectiveness of the African community’s self-regulatory mechanism of community policing (discussed in chapter four) because the population of Africans in New Zealand is small. She also did not perceive a risk of HIV even in the unlikely event that her partner has an affair with a New Zealander. HIV prevention interventions emphasize the contribution of multiple sexual partnerships as a key driver of HIV epidemics in their African homelands as they create more connected sexual relationships through which existing HIV infections are transmitted (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Mah & Halperin, 2010; Mishra & Bignami-Van Assche, 2009; Soul City Institute, 2008). However, the women considered that they would not be unduly exposed to risk of HIV acquisition even if their partners had other [White women] intimate partners in New Zealand:

… I think, it’s just in our, there [points to head], that we probably respond more to the people of our own. Yeah, not that I am racist or anything, but it’s just thinking that I know these men, probably even they love them [White women] even more than they love us, [laughing] yeah, but, … I
just think that probably maybe even if they do, maybe it’s [risk of STI] a little bit safer even here. I just don’t know. It’s my belief. (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Tiri’s judgment reflects some research findings (Maticka-Tyndale, 1992; Stern & Buikema, 2013), which show that people attribute potential risk of acquisition of STIs (including HIV) from others based on how they have learnt to judge people by their sociocultural characteristics, like ethnicity, sexual preference, social class and physical appearance, among others. Another participant shared an experience where her partner similarly expected her to disregard exposure to risk because he was in another relationship with a non-African woman:

I said, “look, we’ve been using condoms before, why all of a sudden it’s not [a] good idea?” His friends were married. They were having sex without condoms, they were trying to have children… then I said “no, I won’t have sex without a condom, thank you very much”. So, he would go and have sex with women without condoms, with Kiwi women here, and his thing was, “oh, they are White, you know, all them Māori, they don’t have AIDS. So, it’s okay”. (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Thus, participants seem to shed the label that associates Africans and HIV infection. They, instead, construct their perception of risk based on the characteristics they associate with their location in New Zealand, which has low prevalence of HIV. Specifically, HIV has been popularly considered an African disease. Wellings et al. (2006) highlight that this is a likely consequence of over-surveillance of SSA populations relative to other geographical areas affected by HIV. While there are generalized HIV epidemics in some African countries (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2014b), migrants are often from the healthy populations and they undergo rigorous health screening as a
condition of entry into most receiving Western countries, including New Zealand. Such receiving countries specifically impose entry and residence restrictions on people living with HIV infection who are non-citizens (International AIDS Society [IAS], 2009; Rushton, 2012).

The outcome of participants’ located assessment of risk is an assumption of good health status. For instance, Nikita suggested that the reason the issue of HIV testing hardly came up in conversations was a combination of attitudes of silence, embarrassment in talking about it, and the assumption of good health status due to being resident out of Africa:

> When was the last time you got tested for any STIs is a very difficult conversation. ...that was a conversation I never had, I found it very difficult. Like when do you open this conversation? When do we talk about that? ... Because that’s a conversation you can’t have just before the clothes are off? .... So, it was just assumed that we’re both healthy. We didn’t talk about HIV.... We just assumed we’re both here. We’re both overseas, we’re clean. (Nikita, 30s, in a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Participants may have also been reassured by their knowledge of New Zealand’s HIV screening requirements that restrict entry and residency opportunities from people who have an HIV infection. Others did not talk about HIV testing because they relied on people to use the knowledge they gained from prior exposure to HIV prevention messages while they lived on the African continent. For example, a participant observed that:

> We’ve never discussed like even, to say HIV, how can we? Because you just assume it’s adults. I mean, coming from Africa where ... there was a lot of awareness. It was probably every five minutes, every billboard that
you see. It was talking about HIV and condoms and all those things (Tiri, 40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

This perception of low risk was not changed by participants’ knowledge that the perception of a place as having a low prevalence of HIV can foster risky sexual behaviors. For example, Barbie recognized this risk in her comparison of men’s sexual behaviors relative to the prevalence of HIV in two African countries. She said that:

... [W]e lived in southern Africa for a couple of years and it was on every day, on the news, in schools, everywhere. You couldn’t hide away from the HIV conversation. So, we did. And I think that also made him a bit more responsible knowing it was out there in huge numbers, so he, I think, that made him extra cautious about, you know, extra marital affairs and things like that as opposed to where we come from in [West African country]. We don’t talk about it that much, so men still engage in lots of reckless sex as opposed to them in [southern African country]. I’m talking about [men of West African country] now, ... I think there is a higher possibility of them contracting it even in [West African country] than they would, cos they know it’s in [southern African country], a lot of them are very cautious about the women but when they go to [West African country], they kind of just let loose, not because it’s not there, [but] because the awareness is not as much as we get it in southern Africa. (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

In her comparison of men’s behaviors related to risk of HIV in two African countries, Barbie highlighted the danger of increased vulnerability to risk of infection when people perceive an environment to be low risk for HIV acquisition. However, she did not perceive similar danger of increased risk in New Zealand (where she is now resident), because the risk is so low in
comparison to the African countries in question. She concluded that: “I think it [risk] has a lot to do with where they live and the kind of... diseases they are prone to in that area... [and] where you live impacts your behavior.” It is not surprising, therefore, that Barbie was disinterested in HIV prevention measures. She observed that:

We’ve moved out of Africa; we’ve spent better years abroad. I don’t see any issues of infidelity arising, so yeah, it’s not something that really would bother me so much for now. If I still lived in Africa, would it? Yes. If you were asking that question, if I lived in Africa, would you take this [HIV preventive] measure? Oh, yes, I would, because the possibility of him straying out of the marriage is higher [there] than here in New Zealand. (Barbie, 30s, married, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Barbie did not see the relevance of mitigating risk of exposure to HIV from (a remote risk of) infidelity in her marriage; she no longer lived in a place where several risk factors interact to increase women’s vulnerability to risk of HIV. Therefore, participants’ location in New Zealand had an impact on their attitudes towards HIV risk and their perception of its prevention methods. Similar to the immigrant group in Olofsson and Ohman’s (2007) study on risk perception in Sweden, participants’ perspectives were grounded on their prior knowledge (of their countries of origin) juxtaposed against their knowledge of their host country as a place. This reflects the argument by Sanders (2017, p. 1704) that the characteristic beliefs and traits often associated with a people are not the only determinants for exploring risk, as people’s “reactions to the space in which they face the dilemma is an integral part of understanding risk in society.”

To conclude, many of the participants in the current study argued that their risk of exposure to HIV was low because the prevalence of HIV is low in New Zealand, and their partners were aware of safer sex practices from their countries
of origin. However, the women’s knowledge of multiple sexual partnerships by men did not always prompt the cautionary protective behavior that might be expected. The participants’ perceptions of risk of HIV infection were, therefore, mediated by the characteristics that they associated with New Zealand as a place. Indeed, participants’ perspectives on how their location impacts their attitudes towards HIV prevention is consistent with previous research among Africans in New Zealand. Birukila’s (2013) New Zealand research participants were similarly not focused on consistent condom use or HIV testing, although they were sexually active and reported occurrence of multiple sexual partnerships. Birukila’s participants perceived their risk of HIV acquisition to be low and less relevant to them than the dangers of the wars and harsh conditions that drove them away from their origins to New Zealand.

The current study’s participants’ low perception of risk despite reporting inconsistent condom use and beliefs that their men may engage in multiple sexual partnerships also reflects the perceptions in studies on diaspora Africans in other Western contexts (Baidoobonso et al., 2013; Beyene, 2000; Chinouya & Davidson, 2004; Luque, del Carmen García Fernández, & Tejada, 2006). Baidoobonso et al. (2013), for example, observed that their Black participants in a Canadian study reported low risk of HIV although they reported inconsistent condom use even when a partner was engaging in multiple sexual partnerships. These perspectives of low HIV risk from the current research represent a repudiation of expert knowledges that tend to view lay people’s perspectives of risk as irrational once it deviates from expert recommendations for assessing risk. In the next section, I explore how New Zealand was perceived in terms of risk to getting into or maintaining existing intimate relationships and the negotiation of identities it engendered.
In chapter five, and thus far in this chapter, I have examined how participants’ cultural beliefs, relationship practices, and gendered identities have been influenced by the opportunities that their diaspora landscape provided. I now consider how New Zealand, as a “small pond” for relationship opportunities, influenced the relationship practices of the women. Participants in the current research were at different stages of an introspective journey into a (re)construction of their identities as diaspora African women. While some were already in a transformative “third culture” space, others, challenged by the research interview, were at the start of a focused exploration of some of the related issues. The women’s narratives of doing relationships were stories of struggles. They compared what they believed about the norms and expectations of their African origins against their understanding of the norms and practices of their host culture and the belief system of their intimate partners, some of whom were not African. These considerations generated ambivalence towards their original culture and contradictions between their construction of their beliefs of African cultures and their practices in New Zealand. Despite a common understanding of traditional expectations and roles of an African woman in intimate relationship, their reception of and responses to its demands were varied and were mediated by their personal interests. Such interests became grounds for their enactment of agency either in accommodation of African cultural norms or in opposition to some of its constraints. Such agential capacity was enhanced by their knowledge of practices of other cultures and their location in a Western host context.

However, one interest that seemed to be common to the participants was a desire to gain a relationship or keep the one they have. This desire impacted their
attitude towards culture, gendered identities, and risk, whatever their perspectives of those may be. For example, notwithstanding their location and achievements in other aspects of life, communicating discontent and asking for adjustments to their needs was challenging for participants because of concerns about the competition, – other women.

So, with an African man, well, typically, I’d say, I’ve only dated [citizens of country in Southern Africa] [laughing] and him from a different culture. It was very difficult to talk about sex like what we’re like, or what we do or you know, and things like that, they always felt you were, you’re messing with their manhood kinda thing, ... and I think it’s all women, that’s where the problem is, we all tell the men they’re very good when they’re not good. And when they’re not doing right. (Bey, 30s, Single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

The quotation shows how women reproduce their socialization, adapting to the beliefs that give other people power to interfere in their preferences and determine their life experiences. The women who would rather do differently are viewed with suspicion, like the “sisters within” (P. H. Collins, 2004) who are stigmatized for upsetting the way things are supposed to be. Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron (1991, p. 51) argue that symbolic violence works on people in whose habitus is incorporated a disposition to act out “the way things are supposed to be”, supposing that they are complicit in their own domination “whereas others will ignore it”. From the quotation, even women who may otherwise ignore interference in their preferences give in to expectations of behaviors for women when the competition is stiff. Another example can be gleaned from the story of a participant whose doctor, according to her account, considered her to be well adjusted and thriving in her New Zealand host country. She was in a situation where she could have responded differently, but she did not:
[I was] 26. I would have made better choices. But, all I did was I kept going for HIV tests, I kept going to have myself tested, to the point where my doctor said to me one day, she said, “if you come here again for an HIV test, I will kick you out. You’re gorgeous, you’re, you’re going high, you’re working so hard on yourself, you are pushing yourself hard, why are you with a person that would make you do these tests? Why can’t he go and have this test done?” But I never asked him to. … I don’t know the point. What’s the point of his behavior? I cannot think about it. I can’t get my mind around it. You know, and I think also when, -with men like that it’s us women that allowed him to do that because I would have not been any of those girls. … I think, there’s a lot of African women who are more attracted to a man when he’s taken. I think so. (Earth, 30s, Single, West Africa, 10 years and over)

The participant attributed her failure to do differently to her youth. However, her doctor’s description of her is of a woman who is focused and purposeful. Yet, she did not display the same traits in her relationship where the man had put her in a sexual network without her knowledge, by having intimate relationships with other woman alongside her. She also attributed the fault to the other [African] women involved because, “the other three Africans, they knew about me. People, they would text and beg him to break with me” (Earth, 30s, Single, West Africa, 10 years and over). Therefore, here again, there seem to be a competitive demand for men. The knowledge modifies a woman’s behavior because the man had less incentive to stay with a woman who did not prioritize his preferences over her own.

Thus, there was talk about women as the other sexual partners of unfaithful men. Although some participants talked about casual relationships with older men,
they did not indicate the men’s marital status. However, there were also participants who were the other sexual partner of unfaithful Men. The participants’ narratives indicate that the men had not been open to them about being in stable relationships with others or married. For one participant, the revelation came through a traumatic experience of the wife calling her to discuss her relationship with a man she had been with for three years, and who said he planned to marry her. He did not tell her that he had a wife in his country of origin in Africa and that he had challenges with immigration approval for her to join him. She shared that:

I’ve had really great relationships with African men and it didn’t work because I moved or they moved or they were married and they forgot to mention that they were already, [laughing] but, [laughing] and I didn’t know I’m the time keeper until the wife showed. … I got a phone call from his wife. She said, “oh, I just wanted to know how things are with my husband?” I said, … “who?” She said the name. I said, “oh, wow, lady, I’ve been seeing your man for almost three years.” She said, “I know. I saw that on the messages on whatsapp and everything and facebook.” “Oh wow, okay woo, this is a conundrum. It’s a very difficult situation.” She said, “yes, it is.” (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Despite the surprise and disappointment she felt, Bey said that she offered to end her relationship with the man because the woman had a child with the man and was pregnant. This is an empathetic response to another woman’s concern. It hints at the respect and ownership of a man that is accorded to a woman who achieves motherhood. It also suggests that Bey would not have given up the relationship if there were no children involved:
... So, I said to her, “look, you’ve got a child with him?” She said, “yes.” I said, “okay, well, look you know, I’m not a home breaker or anything. I’m a lot of things but I’m not a home wrecker, I’ll walk away”. And I, I was very calm when I was talking to her but with him, oh my God! “How could you do this to me [in a changed high pitch voice]?” He was like, “oh, it never came up.” .... I say, “oh really? ... I talked to her, she’s pregnant. What [do] you mean? Oh you broke with her and accidentally fell on her and got her pregnant?” [laughing] What kind of crap is that? [Laughing] what an idiot. Oh God. I didn’t want to lose it with the wife because she’s pregnant and I said to her, “look, either way you’re in? You know, at the end of the day, I’m not doing it for you, I’m not doing it for me, and I’m doing it for your children.” (Bey, 30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Although men were not open about being in multiple sexual relations and go to great lengths to hide it in some cases, a participant avowed from her own experience of being the other sexual partner of an unfaithful man that, “you would know”.

Well with men, they can’t hide it. It’s always being secretive and people would have passwords on their phones and you would get – they would lock things away in their houses if you go to their house, and there’s always that, you know, like, private phone calls and things and as a woman, woman’s intuition I think, I guess, it comes into play. That’s why I had all these trust issues and you would know and it always comes out anyway. (Nikita, 30s, In a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)
The influence of population and a refusal to be in a relationship that is not mutually exclusive featured in another participant’s decision to refocus her future towards study and career development rather than seek a new relationship after a life changing occurrence. She said:

Okay [chuckling], for the future, okay, the future is, initially to me is very scary, [sic] fright, you know, it’s like, oh my God, where would I start from? Where should I go to? I don’t want anyone to break my heart. I’ve had the best husband. I had a good relationship. Oh my God, I don’t want to marry a white man, culture is different, then, where is the African man here? [claps]. They are all married. I don’t want, you know. A lot of things and [laughing], that’s a good question. Initially, I thought that no, no, no, I make up my mind that I’m not going to get married. That I will just live my life, but one thing that helped me was when he [sic] pass away, I was like, every day I wake up, it was like a hell, so I said to myself, what can I do that will make me, -that will be like a new thing that I’m pursuing you know, that I’m - new focus. That was when I said to myself, Julianne, maybe you should go and study. Then I enrolled myself at [college].

(Julianne, 40s, Widowed, West Africa, 10 years and over)

The foregoing is testament that not all African men dominate their partners, even if her partner was exceptional. Bourdieu (1984) argues that when a group is ascribed a superior status in comparison to another, it triggers a learning process geared towards transforming the group to the status accorded them, affording distinction. Furthermore, the distinction is not diminished even when they do not use such learning. Therefore, distinction does not always cause a reproduction of power. Bourdieu also argues that although all parties may recognize the rules of the field, they will not necessarily have similar disposition or play the game in the same way, because they may have taken different trajectories to be who they are.
The memory from the good marital relationship influences Julianne’s choices. She would not be involved in a relationship that was not monogamous, which put her in a quandary as she did not want a mixed culture relationship and the African men she knew were married. Thus, her story presents another scenario of competitive demand for African men in the New Zealand space.

I showed earlier that some participants’ relationships with non-African men was not unproblematic, even if the different, Western cultural outlook provided the women space for self-actualization in some areas. For example, gains made in realization of sexual pleasure weighed against the unease of relating intimately across two cultures. A participant shared her perspective thus:

Like oral sex or whatever for him, he enjoys that, which is different from White, sorry Black guys because African guys will be like, [waving hand] ha haaha, ha ha ha, we were not taught that woo [points to genital area]. I don’t know that, oh, that’s disgusting, but you’re very welcome to go down there [the penis] yourself, hmnn hmnn. With him, “I’ll do it”. That’s what, -- I like it, so do it. So, the advantage is when it comes to sexuality because I believe some or most white people are very open about a lot of sexual stuff, and very patient. He’s been very patient with me, teaching and learning, --teaching me things and learning things from me, so he’s pretty good, hmnn. Oh yeah, he’s been pretty good hmnn hmnn. (Bey, 30s, Single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Bey was explicit in her enjoyment of sex because her non-African boyfriend was open to new experiences and willing to please her. She made a clear distinction between her experience of sexual pleasure with him and the African men she had been in intimate experiences with. She also considered that permission to be expressive of her sexuality is the main advantage she got in being with a non-
African. This is interesting because the participant also said that her White boyfriend did other practices that were “very different from our culture”, including sharing the chores as he says, “you’re not my slave. Stop. Let me cook … no, we don’t have to do things my way”, whereas her African boyfriends had been demanding and overbearing. Nevertheless, Bey (30s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) observed that “…dating a White person? Hmn, [clears throat], it’s not as easy because it’s a clash of cultures.” Another participant’s experience of a biracial relationship showed many challenges:

We’ve had a long patch of not resolving anything and just kind of pretending, not really pretending, I mean, we talk, we raise questions, which no answers come for at all, sorry, and then it all kind of like, it’s like a conversation that fizzles out without really coming to a conclusion. It just all goes very quiet and trickles. And, and then, it’s unfortunate there are resentments that build around the fact that there’s no answers. (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Sarafina’s perspective raises a few issues. She mostly initiated the talks in her relationship. Her practice was different from the African cultural expectation of reticence talking about big issues in the marriage. The communication was not effective despite being with a White man. Hence, she had focused on the greater goal of keeping her marriage and family intact. She said, “we both have been coming into our role and also realizing that despite certain issues, there are bigger, there’s a bigger picture.” Therefore, although some participants observed that opposites attract and African boys were attracted to blonde girls and White boys are attracted to African girls, it was still the case that some women preferred the African cultural context in some respects. For illustration, Jessica (20s, cohabiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) stated her preference for dating non-Africans as well as observed that African boys also prefer to date White girls because opposites attract:
Jessica: And then, but then the African boys I know they like Kiwi girls. They would prefer, like lots of them will prefer like a little blond girl.

Toyin: You said a lot of them prefer a little blond girl?

Jessica: Yeah, a lot of them [laughing] that I know. Yeah

Toyin: Do they actually say that to you?

Jessica: Oh, just from what I’ve seen.

Toyin: What do you see?

Jessica: Yeah, the, its observation. They prefer like blonde girls, maybe, like deep down I just prefer Kiwi guys.

Toyin: That’s interesting. [Laughing]. Did you ever ask any of them why they seem to have that preference?

Jessica: No, I don’t think I’ve actually ever had a conversation like, with a few like, guys I know.

Toyin: Did you ever wonder why they seem to have that preference?

Jessica: I just think it’s same as, just exactly, just to think that opposites attract.

(Jessica, 20s, co-habiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Another participant’s experience further shed light on the observation shared by Jessica. Ruty said that:

Yeah, that’s what happened. And like the girl they were talking about is a girl from a different culture. A Caucasian girl, ‘cause they say, “oh, African women are crazy and all. Like, you should go for like the
Caucasian women like they treat you well”, and all us African women don’t know how to treat our men [laughing]. So like, it was all that and like, I only heard it from one of his friends, like he told me about it, of which that friend was only telling cause he was trying to ask me out [laughing, claps hands]. So, well, it’s quite hilarious. (Ruty, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

It is interesting that some young African men in New Zealand have the perspective shared by Jessica and Ruty. It may be that they see the changes in beliefs and intentions of young women to not compulsively abide by cultural norms in the diaspora as a threat to their privileged position in their original culture. On the other hand, it may just be that opposites attract as Jessica observed. Another possibility is that being in relationship with White women may give migrant African men access to opportunities that being with another African cannot, as Sarafina shared:

... Life is a race. But, depending on your starting position, there are levels of difficulties. In Africa, we are all kind of, we’re only competing against each other. It’s a different sort of competition. It’s whether you’re rich, or you come from this background or that background. It’s a different kind of competition. In Europe, the continental world, where there is a culture between Blacks and Whites, you not only have already the basic problems like you are facing in Africa as in whether you are rich or you are poor, but you also have the color of the skin, and this, and there’s a lot of stigma attached to black people, you know this ... but there’s always a little less racism for women than there is for men because ... it’s a sexual thing. You know, it’s a lot easier to want to take that woman than you want to take that man to bed. So, there’s that, but I know that generally, I mean, I have brothers as I said, and I know I’ve seen the struggle that they have to go through living in a white world. It’s a struggle, it’s a daily constant struggle.
And who’s there to help them? The woman standing behind them. And as Africans I feel as we feel that more, ... even a Black man who was married to a White woman, she still has to face that struggle to have the man move forward, but she would not feel the same pain as I feel that an African woman would have. (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over)

The quotation from Sarafina above gives context to the observation of attraction of opposites in the choice of partners by Ruty and Jessica. It suggests that African migrants may choose not to be in relationship with Africans like them, due to an expectation that their struggles may be alleviated by being in relationship with Caucasians. It is also an important reminder that women’s constructions of identity and resistance to domination in Western contexts must be read against the background of the legacies of colonization, multiple patriarchies and racial discrimination, contexts which are always present even in Western hosts that welcome migrants, because they are White spaces in which Blacks relate but do not belong (Russell, 2011). Being constituted through reproduction of everyday practices, Brah (1996, p. 183) also observes that diaspora as a concept is constituted through reproduction of everyday practices and is a site of contestations of power, “which differentiate diaspors internally as well as situate them in relation to one another.”

Thus, as with other observations in the current study, life across cultures is not simplistic. The explorations show how identities are plural and adaptive, although constructed by people as fixed. Some participants wanted to retain their link to Africa or ensure that a future return is not problematic. For example, Usher evaluated her relationship experience with Caucasian and African men and shared her preference. She said:
We’ve now been together six months. But we’ve been involved with each other for a year and a half. Yeah. I just wanna keep saying because he’s African, but the reason why I say that is because Africans are more family orientated. They, you know, it’s not party, party, party. The parents are strict, their parents have rules, the parents are religious, whereas in New Zealand [sighs], I can’t say why people aren’t religious, but I don’t know, I just, Africans they still have the culture, you know, they still keep it real, the original, [exhales] I, I don’t know. (Usher, teens, Single, East and Central Africa, 10 years and over)

Usher was born in New Zealand and had only visited her family in her country of origin in Africa. However, she seemed to prefer the African approach to family and spirituality in many respects. Retaining connection to Africa and the possibility of returning in old age was also a nuanced issue, which required a consideration of the life partner that such a plan may resonate with in New Zealand. The explanation from a participant enunciated this desire:

I think we all come from somewhere, you have to go back to where you come from. You have to go back to your roots. You have to know your roots. I don’t mind my children being part White or anything if that’s the case, if that’s what’s in the cards for me, and I’m hoping their father will be half West African half White if that’s the case or so the conversation of him coming home with me will be very easy. [Laughing] Because I can sell his West African side to him, or he’s West African, just not from my own country but I think maybe it has to do with tradition. …I have a lot of respect for tradition. It sets someone apart from the other. Your tradition, your heritage, what you know. That’s why I have a lot of admiration for Nigerians in the way they portray their culture. They hold on to their tradition. (Earth, 30s, Single, West Africa, 10 years and over)
The desire to accommodate their attachment to origin further limits the pool of eligible men to partner with, and consequently, requires more compromise in their relationship practices. The frustration became reason for considerations to explore relationship opportunities beyond their New Zealand home. The conversation between a participant and I was as follows:

Sarah: Oh no, from nowhere, I just wouldn’t want to be any older [than 33] when I have kids. Yeah.

Toyin: Okay.

Sarah: Hmn. I want still to be able to run around and do all those kinds of stuff, even if it’s just me. [Laughing] Probably need to be able to run around if it’s just me. [Laughing].

Toyin: Okay. So, let’s talk about eligible men?

Sarah: Okay. There’s not many of them. [Laughing]

Toyin: Well, that’s what I’m asking. It seems to me that, what’s coming through to me is that there are not that many who fit the bill? Is that it?

Sarah: Not really, yeah. Hmn. Which I think is probably another driver for me wanting to live somewhere else to see if it’s just me or the pond is small.

Toyin: Too little fish in the pond?

Sarah: Yeah, too little fish in the pond. [Laughing]. If I go to a bigger pond, let’s see what happens [laughing]. (Sarah, 20s, single, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

The perspectives quoted in this section put into context the way participants responded to the challenges and opportunities of their diaspora space in their
relationships. A woman who desires marriage is unlikely to quit a relationship she has challenges in when the likelihood that she would get a more suitable partner was low because of the small population in New Zealand. Bourdieu (1990a) posits that shared interests and desires in accordance with what the society defines as valuable determine power relations between people in a defined society. Such become the focus of conflict and struggles as people compete against other equally interested parties to achieve them. The outcome is an unending tension that is constantly reproduced and becomes the taken-for-granted, necessary component(s) of interactions in the field. The research conducted for this thesis demonstrates the complexity of intimate relationship practices and how this linked to identity negotiations for migrant African women, but also on the perception of New Zealand as a space of limited opportunities for intimate relationships. Identity construction was based on a normative belief system; however, the women’s practices of identity were influenced by a mix of cultures and mediated through their experiences of New Zealand as a place in their transnational experiences.

This observation suggests that women’s adherence to traditional norms that privilege men is not as rigid as some research (Afonja, 1990; Ajiboye & Yussuff, 2017; Arisi & Oromareghake, 2011; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Leclerc-Madlala et al., 2009; Physicians for Human Rights, 2007) would lead us to believe. In his concept of habitus, Bourdieu (1990b) argues that individuals are enmeshed in the field in which they live, actively adjusting to its demands at a certain time. He posits that how a person may respond to specific interactions is also limited to what the field permits. Therefore, the socialized habitus changes in response to the demands of a field different from the environment that created it. As Hall (as cited in Fornas, 2017) argues, identities are formed at the intersection of individual lives and historical narratives, creating tensions and difference that need interrogating with “ever-unfinished
conversations” (p. 182). The observation in this thesis that a small population from which to draw eligible men may contribute to relationship practices and identity negotiations by diaspora African women needs more research. In the next section, I examine how the labored negotiations of norms and practice contribute to how the women perceive African men.

6.7 Women’s Perspectives on Relationships with African Men

The blame for the perceived inequalities between men and women in intimate relationships was often laid on patriarchal ideology reinforced through beliefs of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a term for the set of social norms that represent societal expectations to which men are thought to aspire (Shefer et al., 2007). In African cultures, the norms of masculinity work side by side with the norms of femininity to give men power over women and also construct men who do not subscribe to such norms as inadequate (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Many of the women in this study perceived men as “selfish”, “not nice”, “not fair”, and prone to ‘cheating’:

... [I]n my past relationships, one thing that I have realized is it’s not easy dealing with the African man. I don’t know, sometimes I have a way of classifying them, I say they have that inbuilt selfishness, you know? ... That’s how I feel, so they are all the same. They have that inbuilt selfishness, you know, that pride, that ego, I’m a man, I’m a man. I think they are not being fair to us. Yeah, so in my relationships, I’ve had like such experience, yeah. (Angel, 30s, single, West Africa, less than 10 years)

Earth shared similar sentiments:
Because right now, from my experience from relationships that I’ve had, I think men are not nice people, especially black men. They are not nice people. They are good as friends, but they are not nice people to entrust with your heart…. I don’t know about any women who have had a good time with African men throughout. And that includes, within my [family] …my friends tell the same story of cheating, some of them unfortunately are married when these things are happening in their homes, yeah. (Earth, 30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Participants who were married mostly shared similarly uncomplimentary perspectives of men as the single women. Tiri (40s, married, Southern Africa, 10 years and over) talked about how men are “gaining out of” women’s double work and did not care “whether you break your legs or your back”. Tiri’s perspective addresses the stress of the double work women do when they work outside the home and do domestic work at home. Smith (2009) observes that women expect their husbands to be good providers, as an expression of love. A situation where a woman must “work very hard” to bring money to a husband, as Tiri described, would be problematic. Some participants’ experiences, and awareness of other people’s experiences, also generated quite extreme views of African men; such participants talked about men being narcissistic, promiscuous, and abusive, and some, possibly murderous. Bey (30s, single, Southern Africa 10 years and over), for example, said that, “these days, oh, they [men] kill …. don’t just stay there and do stupid things because your mother told you to.”

These perspectives expressed by the participants reflect beliefs of masculine hegemony that categorizes adult males as “bad men” (Morrell, Jewkes, & Lindegger, 2012), when research has shown that there is not one type of man, and men often express multiple identities in different contexts (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Cornwall, 1997). I would argue that the men were
informally socialized through learning by rote, watching older men and how they conducted their relationships with women. For example, Smith (2009) observes that although infidelity by men is generally condoned in African cultures, the men soon learn from other men that such behavior must not undermine the man’s role of provision and upholding the social reputation of his family.

Women, as well as men, contribute to the reproduction of masculine norms (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Talbot & Quayle, 2010). Some participants, however, blamed older men for not giving men a socialization equivalent to that which older women gave to younger women on how to behave in supportive intimate relationships:

> It always is up to the woman whether or not peace is being made, even if it [the problem] is not her fault…. I think there is a big lack in, not discipline, but in upbringing and advice for African men on how to treat the African woman. And like, how to be in relationships instead of just having the woman drive the relationship, and them just being a part of it. … And I feel like the fathers of our African men need to be more involved in their sons [lives] when it comes to emotional dealing and relationships and talking about women, instead of just talking to them about safe sex. They need to also talk to them about how to respect and how to treat a woman, instead of just worrying about, “oh is my son going to win in his soccer match this weekend”, you know? (Daneel, 24, in a relationship, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Another participant expanded more on this perspective. She suggested that the fathers of the current generation of young men have failed Africans in not ensuring that men in contemporary times behave as African traditions expect of them:
… [T]he men should try and stand up a bit more. They should try and be like their grandfather’s father, not like their fathers, because I think our African men are losing what … they were brought up with traditionally, I think. They are refusing to be men now. They pretend, … I think there’s too much room here in this side of the world … to pretend you don’t know what you’re about. The freedom that they get here, they misuse it. Whereas back home, you’re not gonna follow someone’s daughter knowing you’re just gonna play with her. Her brother would be watching you. Her parents and your parents are watching you. In some places, if you misbehave, you treat a girl badly and the two families have a good relationship, you’re ruining that relationship, you know. (Earth, 30s, single, West Africa, 10 years and over)

The participant highlighted that spatial separation from the watchful eyes of their origin societies amplified a declining tendency for fathers to socialize their sons to expected roles, which enabled African men in the diaspora to behave in ways that were not consistent with expectations of African traditions of intimacy. In other words, Earth was blaming older men for not socializing contemporary men on traditional expectations that men would provide for and treat women with due care and respect. This is interesting because participants only focused on men’s provision role when they shared about African cultural norms that frame how they are expected to behave in relationships. They did not emphasize men’s traditional role of care and protection of women, including respecting their integrity. Earth’s contrasting of African men’s behaviors in New Zealand to back in Africa may, however, represent a removal from developments in sub-Saharan African countries, where contemporary influences

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As I noted in chapter four, men are also policed for appropriate behaviors in African cultural settings, especially to ensure that they fulfill their role of provision and preventing shame to the family, although they are allowed more freedom than women. See also Smith (2009).
are shifting norms of intimate relationships. Smith (2009), for instance, observes in a study in southeastern Nigeria that the policing of traditional norms has been made ineffective due to factors including later age at marriage, changing cultural acceptance of premarital sex and rural-urban migration among others. Smith observes that the women considered that men were deceptive and untrustworthy in their relationships and the women responded by ensuring that they benefitted materially from the relationship rather than expect love and faithfulness.

In contrast to most participants who viewed men as not nice, participants who mostly opposed the deliberate socialization of African women to privilege men were cautious about making stereotypic representations of men relating to issues such as marital infidelity. Jessica, who was living with her non-African partner, recalled her mother’s advice based on her own experience; she subtly questioned learnt stereotypes of the African man’s sexual appetite:

... [T]he thing is she wants me to be dating an African boy... but she would rather me not marry anyone from [a southern African country]. Just from ... her experience with my father. I’m like, I have a partner. My dad, he cheated on her, a lot of times. And she was unaware for a very long time, I think. Just from that experience, she’s just like, no, don’t date [citizen of southern African country]. Obviously, it’s putting a pigeon on a big group of people, but the experience was that traumatic for her that she would rather I should just avoid going through the same thing. (Jessica, 20s, co-habiting, Southern Africa, 10 years and over)

Notwithstanding the trauma of her mother’s experience, Jessica categorized her father’s behavior as an individual failing rather than a collective attribute of African men. Like Jessica, despite the widespread use of statements that express a belief that African men are naturally promiscuous (M. W. Carter et al., 2007;
Leclerc-Mdlala, 2008), Sarafina (30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over) was more explicit in rejecting the stereotype of the African man, alone, as an unbridled stud:

You know, it was never [about] being with an African person, it was just [about] being with that person. The only time I ever felt like this is really big here, and in my head ... [that] obviously only a black man would do a shit like that, was because, when you find out that the guy is dating five, six other women ... And I'm thinking, oh my God, what kind of idiot is that? But now, you know, I have friends who are married ... to White men, and they tell me that they discovered these things about their husbands, and this and that. So, you know, it's just people are people. People would act as stupid or as smart or as selfish or as open or as friendly as whatever they are, whatever they choose to be. My relationships with other African men, well, they were as bad or as good as any other. Because I’ve dated many out there. I’ve dated white man, I’ve dated black man, before I got married to my husband. I’ve dated Asians, so they were just the same really. He’s either a good guy or a piece of shit. (Sarafina, 30s, married, West Africa, 10 years and over)

Another participant’s evaluation of her relationship experience and observation of others’ agreed with Sarafina’s perspective. The participant said that:

Hmn, yeah, for a long time I just kind of had enough African men, Black men in general. I just didn’t think. I just thought they are all the same, like you keep hearing the same stories, cheating on the wife, baby mama or that. But I think, you know, not everyone is the same, and it took me a while to understand that. ... And I think I just had to recognize what the red flags were. Like, the signs of a person rather than their color. ‘Cause you could be with a White man and he could treat you the exact same way
as what my bad ex did. So, I think it’s more about the characters they have, the character of the person and their values and who they are and what the physical side of things is, yeah. ... So, it’s about the person and the person you are and the things that you want, and to make sure that you don’t like compromise what you want for a man. Yeah. (Stacy, 20s, single, East & Central Africa, 10 years and over)

In summary, most participants blamed men’s attitudes for their concerns about the emotional and social aspects of intimacy that were challenging in their relationships, without acknowledging their own role in the way things were. This is because they considered that women are already burdened in intimate relationships involving Africans and men need to do more to support them. However, the women did not acknowledge that they seldom took advantage of being in a different cultural environment to bolster their ability to have more equitable relations with their partners.

6.8 Concluding Comments

In the chapter, I discussed participants’ negotiation of their cultural norms of sex and sexuality in practice as diaspora Africans in New Zealand, in relation to sexual health and relationship goals. I examined how risk-related strategies manifested in practice in the context of differential power between men and women and how lay people who were subjected to them resisted and negotiated the risk in their everyday lived experiences. I also discussed the women’s perception of vulnerability to risk of HIV and their perspectives on its prevention methods. In the study, participants occupied risk spaces that they were reluctant to rupture for fear of losing influence in their relationships. The women’s negotiations of the risks in their relationships were explored from the perspectives of their socialization to privilege men but was also mediated by the
characteristics they associated with New Zealand as a place that has cultural expectations and practices that differ somewhat from those of their origin countries, and where occurrence of HIV infection is minimal. The medley of contestations and adjustments to social norms that participants made (or which they perceived that others made) to attract or retain the patronage of men gave rise to mostly uncomplimentary, stereotypic perspectives of African men. This impacted their perspectives and attitudes about men, risk, and sexual health. However, a re-articulation of personal desires was evident in the narratives of young participants who had lived most of their lives in New Zealand. The women exercised sexual agency according to what was important to them. This suggests that sexual agency is also about women’s aspirations rather than mostly anchored by cultural norms of engagement with men as in the literature (See cf. Harrison, 2018).

The women in the study did not seem to have a specific consciousness of disease prevention for its own sake. They were rather concerned with disease prevention within the context of the desire to achieve equitable relations and enjoy intimacy with their partners. In the context of low probability and high consequence of HIV risk, participants did not seem to revert to a “pragmatic acceptance” (Giddens, 1990, p. 133) of the risk of HIV. Their responses to the risk of HIV were reflexive and grounded in self-exploration of the knowledges available to them, including expert and lay knowledges based on contextual social and relational factors. Nevertheless, participants’ inability to consistently use condoms and an unwillingness to focus attention on HIV testing may have been implicated in the way they conceived the peculiarity of their new environment (that is, New Zealand) in relation to the perceived low prevalence of HIV. This is even though they reported practices of early sexual debut by young women, multiple sexual partnerships by men, and inconsistent condom use in their relationships. These are also some of the practices that drive the HIV epidemic in their African
homelands (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Leclerc-Madlala et al., 2009). Further, participants had a range of responses to the likelihood of using PrEP; the women’s differing responses to the appropriateness of the use of PrEP were engendered by the uniqueness of their relationships and circumstances. An important observation in the study was also that the perception of competition for African men in New Zealand suggests that New Zealand is a “small pond” that does not offer enough opportunities for suitable intimate relationships.

Therefore, participants’ perceptions of HIV risk through the lens of place introduced “competing logics” (Lupton, 2013, p. 44) that appear to show inconsistencies in their culturally mediated perceptions of risks, but which are grounded in knowledge of their Western host country as a place. Sociological research investigating the ways in which logics of risk are established, maintained, or revised as part of individuals’ location within specific sociocultural settings point to the complexities and ambiguities of such knowledge formation. Participants’ perspectives show “… that these alternative rationalities [about risk], typically portrayed by experts as inaccurate or irrational, often make sense in the context of an individual’s life situation, … and the institutions and social structures within which individuals are placed” (Lupton, 2013, p. 152). Just as Lupton (2013) observed, therefore, the way that people make sense of risk also change as their access to other sources of knowledge and personal experiences change.
Chapter 7
Conclusion And Recommendations

If we assume that women are automatically victims and men victimizers, we fall into the trap of confirming the very systems we set out to critique. We fail to acknowledge how social agents can challenge their ascribed positions and identities in complex ways, and indirectly, we help to reify or totalize oppressive institutions and relationships (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p. 11).

7.1 Introduction

The thesis explores the character of heteronormativity and how it contributes to gender inequality, and argues in a Bourdieusian approach that pursuit of personal interest provides the impetus to transcend regulating norms for agentic behavior without transgression of the norms as would be expected in socialization theory. In the thesis, I examined how gendered cultural norms and identities are drawn on and contested in the negotiation of intimate relationships of Black African women in New Zealand. Participants' constructions of identity and gender roles as diaspora African women were partially a product of their socialization. The ways participants disciplined their sexual bodies to the dictates of cultural norms and practices of African femininity were learned through the same process. Older women served as the conduit through which gendered norms were perpetuated for the purpose of eliciting acceptable social behaviors from young girls. The behaviors are ordered and maintained by the symbolic capital of their societies, which is, attainment of wifehood and
subsequently, motherhood, through acquiring the cultural competence of behaving according to expected roles and responsibilities for women.

This social order reflects a patriarchal system that places men above women. The entrenchment of the social order thus created the women as *life-easers*, with a habitus disposed to privilege men, even when they consciously or subconsciously contested the gendered ideologies of their origins. The women’s gendered practices and sexuality was thus not determined by just men or even by themselves, but also by the ideologies of acceptable womanhood their societies taught them to value. Therefore, power is also vested in the cultural community through socialization of women to privilege men. Notwithstanding a habitus from original socialization, it is in the New Zealand Western space context that questions of cultural identities, belongingness, and perspectives on risk to identity, relationship and disease are mediated. The participants’ handicap from being ‘woman’ were reduced with their sophistry at using their internalized cultural socialization of relationships, and amassed capital, to achieve agency. What the women lacked in ascribed cultural power, they looked to social (relational) capital to gain.

The observations in this study, therefore, invite us to rethink what is considered as the social reality of African women, how they exercise agency in their intimate relationships, and how these impact on their life experiences. Though often ignored in gender studies, the explorations enabled by Bourdieu’s theory of practice in this thesis also highlight the relevance of Bourdieu’s theory to explorations of gender and is worthy of attention by feminist scholars.

In subsequent sections, I elaborate on participants’ (re)making of identities in the diaspora and how this relates to contemporary thinking on the status of women, and on identity representations. I thereafter argue the relevance of their
(re)making of identities to the challenges in HIV prevention and the sustainable
development goal of achieving no new HIV infections. I then discuss some ways
to promote empowerment strategies to women, highlighting further areas to
explore in research before concluding the thesis.

7.2 (Re)making of Identities in The Diaspora

The women struggled to balance socialized expectations of “the good African
woman” against their reality as migrant women in Western cultural space. They
were ambivalent towards some of the norms and practices of the belief system
they held, which prompted some men to deny them recognition as African
women, declaring them the unrecognizable ‘Other’, neither Black nor White.
However, the women in my study also tested the usefulness of traditional
discourses and the stability of a gendered identity in the way they negotiated the
tensions in their relationships. Participants engaged in complex negotiations of
norms and identity as diaspora Africans, (re)making their identities in a manner
that situated them in a third space, where the African and Western host cultures
meshed in a messy, fluid milieu. Their perceptions about how to relate with men,
their cultural ties and their expressions of sexuality were impacted by strategies,
which they used to negotiate power with their partners.

As participants used belongingness in two cultural fields to negotiate the norms
of their African origins, their disposition to privilege men had an impact on the
women’s perspectives on sexuality and intimacy, vulnerability to risk of HIV
and strategies to prevent infection. The participants’ reflexive evaluation of low
risk and perception of New Zealand as ‘safe’ because it has a low prevalence of
HIV kept their minds off protective strategies, although they were sexually
active in a context of suspicions of multiple sexual partnership practices by some
of their male partners. The perception of New Zealand as a ‘small pond’ for the
purpose of having stable intimate relationships also caused some women to modify their preferences to achieve or stay in relationships. The participants mostly resisted the idea of PrEP as daily pill for HIV prevention, except for episodic need.

The varied ways the women engaged with the construction of an African woman ideal in the stories they told also belies the idea of a stable culturally acceptable African woman. Instead, it supports the argument by Mazrui (1986, 2013) that African cultures and identities were formed at the crucibles of the meeting of various historical and social influences with the indigenous beliefs and practices of Africans. The women in my study engaged with its various pressures in admirable ways. Participants’ stories thus conflicted with research (Leclerc-Madlala et al., 2009; Physicians for Human Rights, 2007) that conceives African women as being unable to respond to constraints engendered by their traditional cultural environment that is skewed in favor of men. Their stories also highlighted Adichie’s (2009) concern about “the danger of the single story” (13:45) regarding Black Africans, because it represents a critical misunderstanding that creates stereotypic, incomplete stories of their lives. The fluidity and difference observed in Black African women’s experiences as shared in this thesis cannot be distilled into a semblance of the unified African woman identity that participants had constructed as guide for their practices in relationships. Though some participants used the understanding of an authentic African identity strategically to suit their circumstances, that ‘African woman identity’ is a construction articulated through socialization and often does not travel well. Instead, belief in its norms and expectations underwent sundry contestations and transformations in the diaspora field and was sometimes even opposed, serving as a pivotal point for change.

Some participants contested the norms through “pragmatism” and “marginal resistance” strategies that furthered what they wanted, but which nonetheless
reproduced existing inequitable relationship practices. This observation is not necessarily negative. In Bourdieu’s thinking, the participants who used accommodation strategies to get what they wanted are the stars of their culture. One may consider that such participants were approaching Bourdieu’s perspective of excellence in transcultural matters. He argues that excelling in such matters involves “being able to play the game up to the limits, even to the point of transgression, while managing to stay within the rules of the game” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 78). Bourdieu’s argument is that although socialization creates a certain disposition in an environment, it is nevertheless amenable to change in different settings or with different interests. Bourdieu (1990a, p. 79) argues that “one has to refrain from seeking in the productions of the habitus more logic than they actually contain. The logic of practice lies in being logical to the point at which logical would cease being practical.” The ability of these participants to relate with their cultural narratives in such a sophisticated manner calls to question the treatment of African cultures as essentialist and uncivilized. Indeed, Brah and Gill (2014) argue that an analysis of gender in conjunction with other axes of power could show that non-western cultures are not essential and uncivilized. The effective use of non-voice agency in the accommodationist approach of pragmatism also complicates the emphasis on ‘voice’ promoted in feminist research. As some scholars (Hardon & Posel, 2012; Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2013) argue, silence and secrecy as agentic expressions by women have their uses.

Other participants used “dissidence” to respond to the cultural power of men. Such women exemplified difference in that they refused to be socialized into a compulsive embodiment of African gendered beliefs. They rejected the logic in the practice of norms in which they found no value, thereby shifting what was culturally valuable to them as Africans. The women shared experiences of their opposition (although they did not name it as such) to roles and expected
behaviors, their socialization, and the policing of norms. To achieve opposition, participants needed to discountenance dominant discourses of expectations of women in their cultures. Bourdieu (1990a) argues that dominant discourses always rely on common sense, glossing over complex matters. He observes that such discourses present the risk of “being misunderstood” (p. 52) as people continue to reproduce their own understanding of what society expects of them through the use of dominant discourses, which they may not have a full understanding of (Bourdieu, 1990a). Therefore, as long as women are unquestioning of society’s expectations of them and just do as they had learnt, they reproduce the norms that contribute to inequality between men and women.

The perspectives of the participants who refused to embody the socialization of African women, signaled a stand of opposition and violation of the beliefs and behaviors (Bourdieu, 1990a) regarding expected cultural competence for women from African societies explored in this study. Cultural competences (“goods”) are attributes that give people who have them competitive advantage in societies where such competences are valued (DiMaggio, 2000, p. 39); the consumption and differential distribution of such competences mark them as cultural goods, and hence, a form of capital that can be exchanged for other forms of capital in society (Bourdieu, 1986). The ability to appropriate such goods depends on a person’s position and affects their life trajectory in the future (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Goldthorpe, 2007; Prieur et al., 2008). The accumulation of cultural capital is also an avenue for gaining mastery of the knowledge, preferences and processes that are of symbolic value in a defined field (Lizardo, 2008; Prieur & Savage, 2011). A challenge to the importance of such cultural capital, or lack of knowledge about its relevance, signals a devaluation of its symbolic importance in such a society (Prieur & Savage, 2011). The “dissident” participants, who refused compulsive embodiment of their socialization,
therefore, consciously defined their own kind of African woman in their diaspora field, a transformative, direct exercise of agency.

All participants were therefore agentic, whether directly and expressive or otherwise. Bourdieu argues that a person’s agency is the same as “their choice to evaluate and define what is important to them in a cultural field” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 115). He further argues that whereas societal structures can be limiting, people’s responses to the structural constraints in their environments can take numerous forms, because “[t]here are … as many forms of interests as there are fields.” (Bourdieu (1990a, p. 48). Despite the entrenched nature of cultural norms, therefore, people have the capacity to manipulate their shared belief systems for change as Warmoth (2001) also argues; though the success of the transfer of practices from one field to the other varies (Bourdieu, 1990a). Bourdieu (1990a) posits that shared interests and desires in accordance with what the society defines as valuable determine power relations between people in a defined society. Such become the focus of conflict and struggles as people compete against other equally interested parties to achieve them. The outcome is an unending tension that is constantly reproduced and becomes the taken-for-granted, necessary component(s) of interactions in the field.

I argue that it is not that women are unable to respond to norms that constrain. It is women’s interest in winning the culturally symbolic marriage and motherhood “game” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63), itself an expression of agency, that secures women’s compliance with discomforting rules of their socialization. The same is what makes the transformation of their men-privileging habitus challenging. The desire and quest to achieve or maintain wifehood and motherhood at any cost is promoted by older women (including in their New Zealand African community) and secures African women’s complicity and unwitting legitimization of their own domination.
It has been argued after all that institutional male dominance is produced from both sexes interacting (I. M. Young, 1997), and that naturalized male dominance obscures the way in which male and female individuals reproduce or renegotiate oppressive practices through their actions (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003). However, contrary to Battersby’s (2013) suggestion to view patriarchy as a structuring system that will dissipate over time because there is no central logic to it, I argue that patriarchy is a structuring principle logically maintained through a deliberate socialization system that women reproduce and perpetuate even in the diaspora. It will dissipate when women, with support of communities, begin to renegotiate prevailing discourses and understandings of gendered division of labor in the way they socialize their children. Most participants’ focus on men as the problem (“African men are not nice people”) is therefore, a “misrecognition” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 118) of society and women’s role in the socialization to privilege men. It is women who help to perpetuate the unequal power practices that structure women’s lives, making the possibility of a different way of relating in intimate relationships problematic. However, “dissident” participants who opposed their “mothers’” attempts to socialize them into norms that they did not attach value to provide examples that it is also possible to refuse participation in what one finds discomfiting to one’s disposition, without rejecting one’s community values in their entirety.

While participants’ (re)making of identities created space for them to either accommodate or oppose the norms that they did not like, their fear of losing influence in their relationships prevented them from troubling the fragile spaces of trust and fidelity that they occupied in the relationships they chose to remain in; this suggests that loss of relationship was the main risk that they were concerned about, not risk of disease acquisition.
7.3 Health Promotion for HIV Prevention

The observation of place-mediated perceptions of vulnerability to risk in this study brings into focus the complexities of negotiating safe and equitable sex, which discourses on the intersection of gender, race, age, and class tend to oversimplify for Africans. The participants demonstrated a contextual understanding of risk which impacted on their perspectives on relationships, risk, and HIV prevention methods. Participants’ location in a Western social space with low prevalence of HIV gave them space to ignore or shed the specter of stigma of HIV associated with Africans and focus on enjoying or desiring pleasurable sex. They mapped their risk of HIV to its characteristics in New Zealand rather than to their places of origin in Africa; they thereby lived the argument that risk is local rather than imported. It is therefore pertinent to map interventions for diaspora Africans to spatial, migratory contexts rather than primarily to their place of origin since vulnerability to risk of HIV tends to be low in Western countries.

Low risk is not no risk, however. While participants were correct in their perception of low risk of HIV in New Zealand, research has shown that significant new HIV infections occur in African migrants after they arrive in their Western host countries, despite targeted community mobilization for HIV prevention in their diaspora homes (Alvarez-del Arco et al., 2017; Fakoya et al., 2015). It is helpful, in such a low risk environment, to encourage regular HIV testing and counselling that keeps the issue in the consciousness of women, especially where there may be concerns that sexual relations involve multiple partners or back and forth travel to their homelands. Whereas condom use remains the most cost effective way to prevent acquisition of HIV, there also needs to be an acknowledgement that there are many women who do not like condom use, but who also consider that daily dosing of a prevention drug that has risk of side-effects is not appropriate for their circumstance. The safety and
efficacy of flexible dosing and exposure-linked administration of PrEP thus needs to be explored to expand choices for women. Participants in the study were also careful about managing their fertility, even when they were unconscious of HIV risk. This makes it pertinent to fund the research and development of multiple prevention technologies (MPT) that is linked to the contraception methods women are already familiar with, but which also incorporate an HIV prevention opportunity.

The relevance of the community as a power holder also has consequences for HIV prevention efforts. Community mobilization is argued to have a better impact in the response to the problem of HIV/AIDS (C. Campbell & Cornish, 2010; Parkhurst, 2012), and there are arguments for developing HIV resilient (African) communities based on the concepts of social capital, dialogue and empowerment (C. Campbell & Cornish, 2010). Community mobilization moves beyond individual focus and peer education approaches to focus on building the social cohesion needed to support individuals in the community. There is thus greater potential to increase the success rate of interventions. Taking a community mobilization approach to building HIV/AIDS resilience involves an assumption that community members have autonomy to make their own decisions. However, participants’ stories in this study suggest that power is inscribed into a community in which women are socialized to privilege men. As Navarro (2006) argues, such scenarios represent an invitation to decision making spaces in which members are already handicapped because the community is the power holder. Therefore, the approach of C. Campbell and Cornish (2010) is problematic in its reliance on social capital, which has the potential to activate the pressure on individuals to conform to the expectations of others in their society. Non-compliance with norms may also lead to stress and stigmatization for such community members. Henrickson et al. (2016), for example, highlight the dialectical forces of support and isolation inherent in the collectivist cultural
practices of migrant Africans in New Zealand. Henrickson et al. (2016) point out that, while the New Zealand African community’s belief in collectivism allows members to lean on its social capital for guidance and support, it also creates tensions and restrictions that isolate Africans perceived by their own community as “spoiled”.

In view of the foregoing, developing interventions for building HIV resilient communities by relying on a sameness of the social reality of African women or on a coherent social capital in communities will likely continue to be ineffective. Observations in this study show that women embody African gendered role expectations in complex and multiple ways. The lives of the women in this study were as different as their dispositions and desires. Their stories suggest that it is helpful to expand choice for women rather than pursue a prescriptive focus on established intervention strategies that we know some resist. Therefore, the expansion of choice, in recognition of difference, needs to be central to HIV prevention interventions. Ending new occurrences of HIV infection therefore requires the building of services and societies that recognize the diverse attitudes and perspectives of individuals in communities that may seem to be homogenous in many ways. What is needed to facilitate eradication of new HIV infections is an embracing and promotion of the diverse ways that diaspora African women embody the culture and their agency in responding to its demands on them.

7.4 Promotion of Empowerment Strategies

I argued in this thesis that there is a need for a shift to a woman-centered approach that promotes choice and respect for difference and dissent as respectable responses to socialized ways of being an African woman. This approach also presents the ingredients that a robust response to the HIV epidemic needs, to explore choice and respect for women’s human rights in HIV
prevention efforts. This shows the importance of getting women together to have candid conversations about their lived experiences.

Empowering individuals to relate according to their own preferences in a cultural community, through strategies that embrace their aspirations as well as aspects of their cultural orientation, requires a sharing about how other community members do life. In this study the common language for indicating constraint in marriage was, “how would it be….?” The statement is an acknowledgement that participants as diaspora Africans in a Western context exist within an environment of original cultural expectations. They are socialized agents doing as expected of them. Thus, findings from this study can be promoted for individual change through talks and workshops at community level. At such gatherings, women can share their experiences of doing relationships to show that it is acceptable to do as one prefers. Such conversations are also pertinent to highlight and celebrate difference in the ways that women engage with cultural expectations.

As African society is a promoter of motherhood as a positive contribution by women, the society bears responsibility for making the choice for normative access to motherhood less demanding for women. Women’s experiences of coping with the demands of patriarchal norms of intimate relationships need to be made legible and visible in forums for promoting change. Women may need safe conversation spaces, which the society should provide, to share and learn with each other about responding to norms that constrain. They may thereby appreciate how what they teach their daughters, nieces and female friends contribute to reproducing the beliefs and practices that they have had to struggle with. Such experiences may encourage them to consider modifying the dominant discourses, beliefs, and their practices of an African woman identity for better outcomes for women and the society.
One important potential outcome of such candid conversations would be that it is a way of helping women, as mothers and aunties, to fashion the socialization of their children to the ways of their cultural origins in a manner that leaves its prescriptions and expectations open to user interpretation. While socialization may not be revised quickly, such intervention through women sharing experiences at talks and workshops may gradually empower the generations to relate with their cultural identity without feelings of ambivalence or guilt. The conversations should encourage other women to respect dissenting women’s refusal to embody mainstream cultural norms and practices in their entirety. This approach may create safe spaces for questioning norms that prevent the development of communities that accept difference.

Such interventions also need to be mapped to context. For example, African women are expected to not talk openly about matters of intimacy. Therefore, opening safe spaces for conversations about intimate relationships may require that such activities occur as opt-in breakout sessions within programs of events for women. This will ensure inclusivity while providing opportunity for abstentions, because women are differently disposed towards the pace of change in cultural matters. The conversations may also take off with talks and plays examining existing dominant discourses and their counter constructions shared by women in this study. As Thompson (2006) argues, making space for change is slow but gainful work that requires an unsettling of existing ontologies and discourses as a precursor of what could be radically different in the future. It is also important to take the gentle approach to empowering women in order to show respect for the beliefs that they and others in society may cherish.

Effective health promotion empowers people to take charge of their health, although the relevant issues may be complex and require multiple approaches (Signal & Ratima, 2015; World Health Organization [WHO], 1986). Though the work may be challenging, there is a benefit to engaging with the complexity of
the work of empowering women to live their own lives rather than the dictates of others, including in their approach to managing their relationships, risks and preventing HIV. As Bass (2018) highlights with regard to HIV prevention, the “messy work” (p. 3) of the HIV response is only partly medical; interventions should address making “agency and action seem possible in societies where those things are not often granted to girls and young women, gay men, transgender people and so many others” (p. 3).

It is also pertinent to consider that many of the issues faced by my research participants are shared by all women. Despite the tensions, the diverse identity performances of participants disturb the notion of an essentialist African woman identity, and invites a questioning of the belief in African exceptionalism, the notion that African women’s experiences are unique and cannot be usefully interrogated by current understandings of feminism. As Mama (2001) argues, the notion of a unified African identity overlooks the complexity of African lives and contributes to a mentality of segregation. Sharing information about the different ways women respond to gendered norms can help to create community social capital that is more accepting of difference. This is needed to develop HIV resilient communities.

7.5 Commonalities and differences in research with African women

The agential strategies identified in this thesis are broadly consonant with paradigms developed within African femininities in three studies in Africa (Jaji, 2015; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; O. Oloruntoba-Oju & Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013), although the different nomenclatures used also reflect the reticence of scholarship on Africans to link women’s empowerment to feminism, which some consider to be for White women. An example is the concept of “conservative femininities” theorized from empirical research in South Africa by
Jewkes and Morrell (2012). Jewkes and Morrell identified the “conservative femininities” of acquiescent women (p. 1734), which has some similarity with the concept of “pragmatism” elaborated in this study. They also put forward the concept of “modern femininity” (p. 1735) and the rejection of acquiescence (c.f Barlow et al., 2005), which is in consonance with the notion of “dissidence” in the current thesis. And finally, they put forward a middle ground third type of African femininities based on negotiation and accommodation of the norms which they referred to as “femininities in transition” (p. 1735), an approach similar to “marginal resistance” in the current study. The strategies are also congruent with the three categories of “essentialism entrenched”, “essentialism confronted”, and “essentialism negotiated” in models of identity construction by African women theorized from postcolonial literature (O. Oloruntoba-Oju & Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013, pp. 5-16), as well as two broad categories of “accommodationist” (p. 21) and “confrontational” (p. 26) African femininities theorized from popular culture in Nigeria by Oloruntoba-Oju (2006). Jaji (2015) similarly identified “normative”, “agitated” and “rebellious” femininities among East and Central African refugee women settled in Kenya.

Although Jewkes & Morrell’s (2012) “modern femininities” category was more aspirational than concretely demonstrated in their research, the congruence of the findings as expressions of multiplicity of identities across the four pieces of research support the claim of a dynamic nature to African womanhood agency, and highlights different ways of being African women. Unlike Jewkes & Morell’s observation of a non-hierarchical perspective of the different strategies by their participants, however, analysis in the current study shows a graduation in the way the women preferred to exercise agency. Most of the participants who used the dissidence approach had previously used pragmatism, followed by marginal resistance approaches until it no longer supported their interests or aspirations as they progressively became more reflexive and questioning of gendered norms.
and unequal power gradient in their relationships. Participants who resorted to the “dissidence” approach considered it a less burdensome way of being an African woman. They commended the approach to other women even as they did not shed the cultural expectation of motherhood as a component of their African womanhood identity.

The observations in the current thesis also support Shefer’s (2016) positing that the agent/victim binarism narratives of the lived experiences of Black African women in research is a misrepresentation, which risks perpetuating the discourses that underpin normative gender practices. The congruence in the practices of notions of femininity and African womanhood in research with women on the African continent and her diaspora, historical and recent, also raises the issue of whether these practices of socialization to an African womanhood are a component of the deep structure of African cultures before the contact with other cultures. As Bourdieu (1990a) argues, strategies are always part of matrimonial exchanges, and matrimonial rules have a long history. While some may consider the strategies that the women used to put limits on the cultural power of men (as identified in this thesis) are only accommodations by diaspora Africans to privilege their Western culture environment, there is evidence of variants of these strategies known in Africa’s oral traditions. This observation of congruence in expressions of agency in the current research and types of femininities in other research on the African continent need to be further explored as part of explorations of feminism in African scholarship.

7.6 Conclusion

This study is focused research on participants’ understanding of themselves as African women in intimate relationships in the diaspora in New Zealand. In agreement with African scholars (Mekgwe, 2008; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994), who
advocate use of any theories that help to advance the goal of empowering Black women, I used Bourdieu’s theory of practice and social reproduction to examine the narratives of 22 participants. The explorations enabled me to make the cultural norms of femininity that anchor the women’s negotiation of intimate relationships explicit, and show that women are agentic in advancing their interests of preparing young women to gain cultural competence that wins them marriage and eventually motherhood, a key interest valued in their society. The young women in turn became socialized agents, who maintain the privileging of men as they have learnt from their “mothers”, reproducing the societal structures that keep the balance of power firmly in favor of men in intimate relationships. The requirement to privilege men was burdensome and women used three empowerment strategies that I codified as “pragmatism, “marginal resistance”, and “dissidence” to manage the constraints they experienced in their relationships.

I argued that the community is also a power holder behind intimate relationships and women anchor its socialization of people as agents in it. I showed that the focus on men as the problem is a misrecognition of the role of women in perpetuating institutionalized male hegemony through socialization of their children. I recommended that members of African communities need to be talking to each other through scheduled talks and workshops at community level to understand how they anchor socialization of their community to inequality between men and women, so that they may modify the stories and lessons they teach their children. As Bourdieu argues, new or modified beliefs and practices that were previously overlooked may topple old ones.

I also recommended research into flexible dosing of PrEP and investment in multipurpose technologies (MPT) that combine contraception and HIV prevention in order to expand choice for women in HIV prevention in low risk diaspora. I further observed that the challenge of young women navigating
traditional African norms of sexuality and modern neoliberal notions of empowered women able to negotiate consent and refusal of sex needs further exploration.

Overall, the thesis contributes theoretically and empirically to the body of literature on the agentic responses of African women in the diaspora to the constraints of gender inequality within the context of heteronormativity. Contrary to Battersby’s (2013) suggestion to view patriarchy as a structuring system that will dissipate over time because there is no central logic to it, the thesis argues that patriarchy is a structuring principle logically maintained through a deliberate socialization system that women reproduce and perpetuate even in the diaspora. However, the thesis challenges accounts of stable African identity as an over-emphasis, arguing that significant boundary erosions enable fluid identities and agential responses to the cultural power of men. Arguing in a Bourdieusian approach, the thesis establishes that the pursuit of personal interest provides the impetus to transcend regulating norms for agentic behavior without necessarily transgressing the norms as would be expected in socialization theory. Therefore, patriarchy may dissipate when women, with support of their communities, begin to renegotiate and empty prevailing understandings of gendered division of labor of meaning in the way they socialize their children.

With regard to New Zealand, the thesis establishes fluidity of identities as the participants related with homeland and diaspora home beliefs and practices, in the process fostering a hybrid identity that is incongruent with their constructions of a fixed, essentialist African woman identity. The thesis also weaves the women’s constructions of identity and resistance to domination in Western contexts with the background of the legacies of colonization, multiple patriarchies and racial discrimination. Even in welcoming Western host countries, these remain White spaces in which Blacks relate but struggle to
belong. The thesis establishes a model of femininities and corresponding agentic behavior for women in the African diaspora, with New Zealand as the empirical base. The model comprises a fluid cline that ranges from pragmatism through marginal resistance, to dissidence, with the fluidity of the identity practices presenting a potential for transformation and change. In the final analysis, the thesis establishes the need for a theoretical reorientation towards examining health practices in social fields rather than the erstwhile focus on health behaviors. The research conducted for the thesis demonstrates the complexity of intimate relationship practices and how this linked to identity negotiations for migrant African women, but also on the perception of New Zealand as a space of limited opportunities for intimate relationships. Identity construction was based on a normative belief system; however, the women’s practices of identity was influenced by a mix of cultures and mediated through their experiences of New Zealand as a place in their transnational experiences.

To my knowledge, this research is the only one to identify these three kinds of femininities as agentic expressions in an African diaspora. In codifying the strategies that participants used to negotiate identity and power as observed in their narratives, I have been mindful that agentic strategies exist as dispositions that may also be transient. Indeed, some of the women in this study used different empowerment strategies, not just one. Some also used the strategies in a progressive manner, from pragmatism, to marginal resistance, through to dissidence. Further, identifying the agentic responses of the women is not to assert that the women were always victorious or got what they wanted. That would be oversimplifying the challenging and complex nature of their engagement with African gendered ideologies in their intimate relationships in the diaspora. It does show, however, that African women are not always victims of their men in intimate exchanges and neither are they always successful at resisting domination. Notwithstanding that the causal beliefs are undergoing
transformations, the specter of a unified African woman identity continues to haunt the present for diaspora African women in this study, creating tensions that interfere with their aspirations for a healthy and fulfilling intimacy.


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Participant Information Sheet

(enter further details if necessary e.g. for Parents/Guardians, for child participants etc)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study title:</th>
<th>Agency of Black African women living in New Zealand in negotiating relationships and risk of HIV infection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal investigator:</td>
<td>Name: Gillian Abel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Department: Department of Population Health</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Position: Head of Department</td>
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<td>Contact phone number:</td>
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<td>(03) 364-3619</td>
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Introduction

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully. Take time to consider and, if you wish, talk with relatives or friends, before deciding whether or not to participate.
If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and we thank you for considering our request.

**What is the aim of this research project?**

We want to find out how Black African women living in New Zealand understand the risk of HIV infection and how they negotiate their relationships for managing this risk. We want information on how living away from Africa affects the ability of women to handle their relationships in a way that allows them to avoid becoming infected with HIV. The findings from the study may help inform policy or health promotion programmes to minimise the spread of HIV amongst Black African women in New Zealand.

**Who is funding this project?**

This study is funded by Department of Population Health, University of Otago, Christchurch.

**Who are we seeking to participate in the project?**

We would like to talk to Black African women who know or believe that they are HIV negative and are between 18 and 55 years old. We will ask you about your HIV status, but we will not ask you to take an HIV test as part of the study.

**If you participate, what will you be asked to do?**

We will ask you to take part in an interview that may take about one hour of your time. We will interview you at a time and place that would be suitable for you. This could be in your own home, in our University offices or another place that is appropriate. We will ask you to confirm if you meet the criteria to participate in the study. We will collect information on your age, area of
residence in NZ, area of origin in Africa, relationship status, length of residence in NZ, work/study status. We will ask you some questions and record your conversation with us so that we do not lose any relevant information. The information we collect from you will be private and confidential. We will not personally identify you in any way in the report and the information collected will be destroyed at the end of the research. We will give you a short summary of the findings at the end of the research if you have agreed to do so. We will also invite you to attend an information session where we will share the findings with people from the African communities and other relevant parties. We will give you a grocery voucher of $30 for time given to the research.

Is there any risk of discomfort or harm from participation?

We will interview you and record the interview using a Dictaphone. We do not foresee any risks to you if you participate in this study. If you do not wish people to know you are participating, you may choose when and where you want to talk to us so that only you know you are participating. You may feel a bit uncomfortable talking about your private life. However, you will be talking to an adult who also has responsibility to keep your information private. You may also refuse to answer any question you do not wish to give information on. It will be clear in the leaflet advertising the study that we are talking to people who believe they are HIV negative, so you will not be stigmatized if you tell people you are participating. We assure you that all the information you give will be used for research only. It will be kept confidential, private and will not identify you in the reports or in any other way.
What specimens, data or information will be collected, and how will they be used?

This research involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning will be about your experiences negotiating your relationship with your partner, including the negotiation of safe sex. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked has not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the Department of Population Health is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question.

What about anonymity and confidentiality?

Your name will not be reported in any publications arising from this research. If any interview reveals unexpected and unsolicited information which may have legal consequences, such information will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Your data will be coded so that you may not be identified in anyway. We will store the audio tapes and transcripts in locked, fireproof cabinets in our department. Only the researchers named on this form will have access to the information. The audiotapes and transcripts of the interview will be destroyed ten years after the completion of the study, according to University protocol. The information obtained from the study will be used for research purposes only.
If you agree to participate, can you withdraw later?

Your participation in the research study is voluntary. You may ask questions on the study at any time. You may withdraw from participation in the study at any time and without any disadvantage to you. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please let us know within one month of the interview date and we will destroy any information collected from you.

Any questions?

If you have any questions now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact phone number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toyin Kolawole</td>
<td>022 428 1097</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position: PhD Student (Public Health)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department: Population Health</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Lee Thompson</td>
<td>(03) 364-3644</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position:</td>
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<td>Department: Population Health</td>
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<td>Associate Professor Gillian Abel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position: Head of Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department: Population Health</td>
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This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (Health). If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may
contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (phone +64 3 479 8256 or email gary.witte@otago.ac.nz). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
Agency of Black African women living in New Zealand in negotiating relationships and risk of HIV infection

Principal Investigator: Associate Professor Gillian Abel. (gillian.abel@otago.ac.nz; +64 3 364 3619)

Consent Form For Participants

Following signature and return to the research team this form will be stored in a secure place for ten years after completion of the research.

Name of participant: .................................................................

1. I have read the Information Sheet concerning this study and understand the aims of this research project.
2. I have had sufficient time to talk with other people of my choice about participating in the study.
3. I confirm that I meet the criteria for participation which are explained in the Information Sheet.
4. All my questions about the project have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.
5. I know that my participation in the project is entirely voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without disadvantage.
6. I know that I can withdraw from the study up to one month after the date of the interview and that my information will then be destroyed.
7. I know that as a participant I will give information on my age, area of residence in NZ, area of origin in Africa, relationship status, length of residence in NZ, work/study status.
8. I know that the interview will explore my experience of handling my relationship(s) to manage my health and my risk of exposure to HIV, and that if the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s), and/or may withdraw from the project without disadvantage of any kind.

9. I know that when the project is completed all personal identifying information will be removed from the paper records and electronic files which represent the data from the project, and that these will be placed in secure storage and destroyed after ten years.

10. I understand that the results of the project may be published and be available in the University of Otago Library, but that either (i) I agree that any personal identifying information will remain confidential between myself and the researchers during the study, and will not appear in any spoken or written report of the study or (ii) I agree to be named or identified in the study and will sign a waiver form.

11. I know that I will receive a $30 grocery voucher for my time.

   Signature of participant:   Date:

   

   

   

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Agency of Black African women living in New Zealand in negotiating relationships and risk of HIV infection

The research study will explore Black African women’s experience of handling their relationship(s) to manage their health and their risk of exposure to HIV infection.

We need Black African women who know or believe that they are HIV negative and are between 18 and 55 years old to participate in the study. We will ask you about your HIV status, but we will not ask you to take an HIV test as part of the research study.

We will give you a grocery voucher of $30 for time given to the research. We will share the summary of the research findings with you privately if you wish, and in selected forums to which you will be invited without being identified as a participant in the study.

The interview will take about one hour.

Contact Details: Toyin Kolawole, PhD Student (Public Health), Department of Population Health, University of Otago, Christchurch, PO Box 4345, Christchurch, New Zealand, Tel: +64 3 364 3681 mobile: 022 428 1097, e-mail: kolol009@student.otago.ac.nz

[This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee, (Health). Reference: ###/###]
Agency of Black African women living in NZ in negotiating relationships and risk of HIV.
Study Interview Guide

Toyin Kolawole, University of Otago

Black African women interview guide: New Zealand 2016

Question One

“I’m really interested in relationships between Black African men and women and if they are any different when they are living outside of Africa. What do you think about this?"

Prompts

- Have you noticed any change in your relationship?
- Why do you think that is?
- Is there any difference between talking about general family issues and talking about sex?
- Why do you think that is?

Question Two

“A lot of people say that Black African women don’t feel able to ask their partners to use condoms. What do you think about that?"

Prompts

- Do you ever feel worried about getting HIV?
- Tell me more about this?
- If there was some safe sex method you could control would you use this?
- What if it is a cream that you could apply?
- What if it was a daily pill you could take?
- What do you think your partner would say about that?
• Can you talk about HIV and safe sex with your partner?
• How do you have these conversations?

Question Three

How would you advise a young Black African woman starting a relationship with a Black African man in New Zealand?