

Sex Feel Good: Enjoyment of Sexual Intercourse by Some Barbadian Teenagers

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ABSTRACT

Within Caribbean societies and Barbados in particular issues on human sexuality are approached from a pathological, controlling, and judgmental perspective. These views resist an acknowledgment that children are sexual beings which manifestations are more evident during the teen years. Despite societal resistance, teenage pregnancies and sexual abuse forced societies to deal even if reluctantly with teenage sexuality. Based on Caribbean conservative approach to matters around sexuality it comes as no surprise that concerns around teenage sexuality is concentrated within discussions, discourses and scholarship about reproductive health, sexual abuse and sexually transmitted diseases. Based on the literature researched for Barbados and the rest of the Caribbean teenage sexual desire, and pleasurable sexual intercourses are virtually none-existent. It is the intention with this paper to contribute to scholarship on teenage sexual pleasure within Barbadian society. For its analysis the paper will utilize data collected from a teen sexuality research done during 2011-2012 among two secondary schools in Barbados. The main objective is to demonstrate that Barbadian teenagers are involved and enjoying sexual intercourse and other sexually related activities despite hegemonic discourses of sexual repression and control.

Brief Introduction



Fig. 1. Sunday Sun May 15, 2011. 24A.

The role of the above newspaper report is to emphasize the entrenchment of hegemonic discourses about human sexuality in Barbados. This report is one of many coming after a statement ran in the *Daily Nation* on May

17, 2011 'Single Sexuality Fine', by Anglican Priest Rev. Charles Morris who was making an attempt to introduce a new discourse on premarital sex.¹

In contrast, the first part of the title of the paper 'sex feel good', captures some of the responses of Barbadian teenagers, and reflects a counter discourse about them engaging in sexual intercourse, information received from their peers and the media that it is a pleasurable activity which needs not to be delayed until marriage.

This counter-hegemonic discourse underscores the neglect of Caribbean scholarship of this aspect of teenage experience since the discussions around teenage sexuality tend to focus on aspects of reproductive health, sexual abuse, concerns about teenage pregnancy, and efforts to reduce teenage sexual activity which is the code word for sexual intercourse.²

The intention of this paper is to demonstrate that teenagers in Barbados are engaging in a number of sexual practices that are considered the "reserve of married heterosexual adults", and many are enjoying it.

The main argument for the discussion is that Caribbean societies including Barbados, have inherited the sexually repressive ideologies from the Victorian era. These ideologies are perpetuated and sustained through the present status quo. Therefore, issues around teenage sexuality will always be of concern and control within this society.³

The paper will discuss and analyze specific data on teenage sexual practices collected from a pilot project conducted between Nov. 2011 to September 2012 on "Teenage Sexuality and Education: A Gender Perspective" by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies: Nita Barrow Unit at the University of the West Indies in Barbados.⁴

This paper is attempting to shift the approach and discussion around teenage sexuality with a focus on teenage sexual intercourse and the pleasure arrived from this activity based on the specific findings from the mentioned pilot study.

Ignoring Childhood Sexuality

Parents in general do not want to acknowledge that their children experience sexual urges, and that playing with their genitalia is a natural form of sexual exploration and pleasurable sensation that begins from that early stage in their lives.

"Childhood sexuality is more active than most parents imagine; it begins during infancy when children explore and manipulate their own genitals and then progresses to curiosity about and exploration of others' genitals. Although parents may find these signals distressing, they are normal (Brannon 2005: 271).⁵"

Unfortunately for too many children the expression of their sexuality is ignored because of preconceived societal ideas constructed and re-enforced to control human sexuality hindering its normalcy, and natural development.

¹For more on the heated reactions see appendix II.

²See selected bibliography on teenage sexuality and their focus Bagley, K. and , Cathleen, K. (1990), Card, J. J. (1993), Glaser, D. and Frosh, S. (1988), Hudson, F. and Ineichen, B. (1991), Jagdeo, T.P. (1984), Knight, J.-J. (1990), Olfman, S. (2009), Richardson, A. G. (1999). Schofield, M. (1965), Vinovskis, M. A. (1988), Barrow, C. (2009), Bruin, M. d. (2009), Rock, L. (2002), Terborg, J. (2002), Crawford, C. (2012), Ellis, H. et al. (1990 Vol 16 Nos 4 and 5), Lashley, L. M. (1991 Vol. 4 No.4), Norville, B. (1984), Ott, M. et al. (June 2006), Payne, M. A. (1991), Russell. B. P. (1998), UNICEF. (2006), UNICEF. (2007), UNICEF. (2008), UNICEF. (2009), UNICEF. (2009), Evelyn, V. C. (2008), Nicasio, A. M. (1991), Skeete Elizabeth, Geraldine. (2006).

³See Miller (2012) publication on *The Power of Pleasure* where she discusses how this hegemonic discourse is played out in Barbados.

⁴The study was conducted in two secondary schools in Barbados. The teenage participants included 166 students from the ages of 12 to 18. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected through questionnaires and focus groups. The author of this paper was the principal investigator on the project. Detailed information can be found in Working Paper by Carmen Hutchinson Miller and Charmaine Crawford 2013 (forthcoming).

⁵See Sigmund Freud discussion on "Infantile Sexuality" and "The Transformations of Puberty".

This hypocritical⁶ attitude can be better understood in Michel Foucault's discussion as to a time in human experience when sexuality was a free expression. 'At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common...' (Foucault 1990: 3). It appears that during this period children's sexuality was not ignored. He continues,

"It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourses, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingle at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies "made a display of themselves." (Foucault 1990. 3). "

He discusses that this period came to an end during the Victorian era silencing both adults and children's expression of their sexuality. About the underage he sarcastically observes that, 'everyone knew, for example, that children had no sex, which was why they were forbidden to talk about it' (Foucault 1990. 4).

This silencing and disregard of children's sexuality and by extension teenage sexuality is perpetuated during the 20th and 21st century in our societies including the Caribbean. Repressive hegemonic discourses around human sexuality are still evident in our societies today.

"Cultural proscriptions surrounding adolescent and premarital; intercourse retain much of their potential to arouse public outcry, despite and because of the profound change in the numbers of young unmarried people engaging in sexual intercourse (Laumann 1994.322)."⁷

Barbadian Society's Sexual Repression and Control

What I find interesting and even frightening about certain societal outcries, is the effective control and influence of conservative, stereotypical, exploitative, and repressive hegemonic ideologies on the masses to the extent that they are unable to see dissonance between ideological discourses and everyday life realities.

Within Barbadian society the hegemonic ideology and discourse is saying that children are not "supposed" to be sexually active, yet the evidence speaks to the contrary.⁸ When the evidence is startling as in the case of teenage pregnancies; instead of dealing with the socio-economic, family, and power relations which characterizes these cases, the status quo proceeds to demonize teenagers, pathologizes the treatment and tightens its societal control, as evidenced by some of the reactions against Rev. Morris stands on premarital sex in 2011.⁹

Specific examples of Barbadian status quo ensuring to keep its young people from engaging in 'pre-marital sex' is evidenced between 2008 and 2011 where there were heated debates and concern expressed in the written media. Not surprisingly these reports were condemnatory of teenage sexual behaviour.¹⁰

Fortunately they are those who defy conventions within Barbadian society, and recognize that children are 'sexual beings'. Sometimes they are lone voices problematizing teen sexuality, however assuming the responsibility by offering possible solutions as in the case of director of the Family Planning Association Mr. George Griffith whose opinion was voiced in 2008. Weekend Nation reports that,

"The head of the local family planning body, George Griffith, has called for "**comprehensive sexuality education programmes in all schools**. The "comprehensive" programmes would cover all aspects of sexuality, including puberty, the whole question of human growth, emotional and sexual maturing and why people were attracted to each other, Griffith said' (Trevor Yearwood. *Weekend Nation*. Friday April 4, 2008. 28)."

⁶What I mean by hypocritical attitude is that on one hand the society preaches that children are asexual, while on the other hand some adults are secretly sexually abusing infants and teenagers. See UNICEF 2006 and 2007 reports and selected newspaper reports on sexual abuse on children in Barbados and the Caribbean in appendix III.

⁷See, Phillips et al. *Sexualities in History*, for further explanation on historical societal control on human sexuality from different vantage points.

⁸One un-refutable proof of sexual activity is pregnancy. Within the Barbadian print media there are reports of teenage pregnancy. See appendix IV.

⁹See, recent example on societal control about human sexuality in Barbados and the Caribbean. Tony, Best. "No to Same Sex Unions". *Saturday Sun*. May 4, 2013. 17, Ricky, Jordan. "Hell No!: Church leaders say they would never give in to marrying same-sex couples. *Weekend Nation*. Friday May 17, 2013. Front page, 3.

¹⁰See appendix V for selected media reports on teenage sexuality in Barbados.

While Mr. Griffith is advocating for 'comprehensive sexuality education in all schools' I argue that implied in his statement is the recognition that children are 'sexual beings' who at a certain period in their human and sexual development will be experiencing emotions, will be curious and will be engaging in sexual experimentation to learn about their sexual self, fully enjoying some of the pleasures they discovered during infancy.¹¹

Unfortunately as Foucault discusses, since childhood sexuality was silenced and ignored, the educational system according to Mr. Griffith, should be the one responsible to help teenagers prepare for this important and exciting stage in their lives. Regrettably the educational system along with all the other social institutions are accomplices in this silencing and sexual repression, and will not be effective in helping teenagers navigate this difficult stage in their lives. Instead, they will be blaming bad behaviors on 'early sexual activities' as reported in the written media.¹²

The Barbados print media during 2011 was reporting the connection between bad behaviour and early sexual activities, to which Mr. Griffith who had his say three years earlier, reiterated the need for a proper sexual education stating that,

"Part of what is happening in the school system has to do with the sexual maturing of the children and the fact that we have not institutionalized any strategy for making sure that children are prepared for the stage of development and they understand how to deal with it (*Saturday Sun*. October 22, 2001).¹³"

I argue that institutionalized strategies will not be put in place to deal with the sexual maturation under the existing societal system because of what has been previously stated throughout the development of this paper, the hegemonic ideology that renders teenagers asexual beings. Fortunately during 2009 others were joining Mr. Griffith in recognizing that they are indeed sexual beings.

"Representative of UNICEF for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Tom Olsen, maintains that the adults have to stop fooling themselves that the young people are not sexually active and exposed to dangers of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. "So I think **the schools are extremely important**...if the teachers are not willing to talk about the bees and the flowers, then bring in somebody who can do that" (Janelle Riley-Thornhill 2009. 11 and back page)."

Mr. Olsen as well as Mr. Griffith recognized the important role that the educational system should play in teenage sexual education; he also acknowledges that it would be a difficult undertaking for some of the teachers, based on hegemonic social constructs. We only become agents of change when we begin to question existing norms especially when these are discriminatory, exploitative, and disempowering.

The account that some teachers will find it uncomfortable to deal with the real issues confronting Caribbean, and Barbadian teenagers speaks to the fact that some of these educators accept and conform to the existing repressive hegemonic ideologies around human sexuality. In his insistence that this education should be provided, he goes on to suggest that if they are unable to help the children in this regard, they should get the necessary support from other professionals who would not find difficulties in dealing with this issue, implying by this the existence of counter hegemonic ideas.

Mr. Olsen's contribution appears as a positive shift in ideology, but it is not enough because the focus continues to be on treating all issues around human sexuality as pathologic as well as making all efforts in preventing teenage sexual activities without unbiased training as shown in the existing scholarship and popular discourses evidenced through media reports in Barbados.

The following example will suffice as a way of underscoring the pathological approach and efforts to control of teenage sexuality. A 2009 study done by Ellis, et al "A Knowledge Attitude Belief, and Practices Survey in Relation to AIDS amongst children ages 11-16 years old in Barbados" indicates that,

¹¹See Freud in his discussion about infantile sexuality.

¹² See appendix I.

¹³See other reactions following on the comments of Mr. Griffith Holder-Olutayo 2011, Sealy 2011, and Riley-Thornhill, 2009.

“There is evidence that sexual activity which can lead to transmission of HIV starts at an early age, more so for boys than girls, and that **education should be taken into the primary schools...**Television and parents, particularly mothers are a vital source of influence amongst school children and will need to be used even more in the educational drive. The study has shown where additional emphasis needs to be placed on the education of children, and encourages continuation of the efforts so far in reducing the sexual activity amongst children (11). “

This reference, like the previous ones underscores the importance of the educational system and suggests that it be done from primary school. Focus on this particular education should be geared at preventing sexual intercourse. There is also the recognition that children and teenagers are engaged in sexual intercourse, but the silence around their sexual enjoyment is deafening.

I argue that one of the reasons why teenagers defy the existing hegemonic discourse around human sexuality in Barbados is because of the pleasure they experience from sexual intercourse. When this fact is accepted by the status quo then sexual education will be more effective, since it will include also discussions about sexual pleasure as something normal and not as dangerous and exclusive to married heterosexual individuals.

Barbadian Teenager Sexual Practices

Based on the literature reviewed for Barbados and the Caribbean, and confirmed by the 2011-2012 pilot study, teenagers continue to be engaged in sexual intercourse practices. Some adults and especially parents would be horrified at the notion that their children and teenagers are sexually active because of the entrenched idea that ‘children are not sexual beings’. Certainly the results of these findings will make most very uncomfortable.

Based on figure five some Barbadian teenagers began their sexual debut at age five, which would indicate that some were sexually abused at an early age.¹⁴

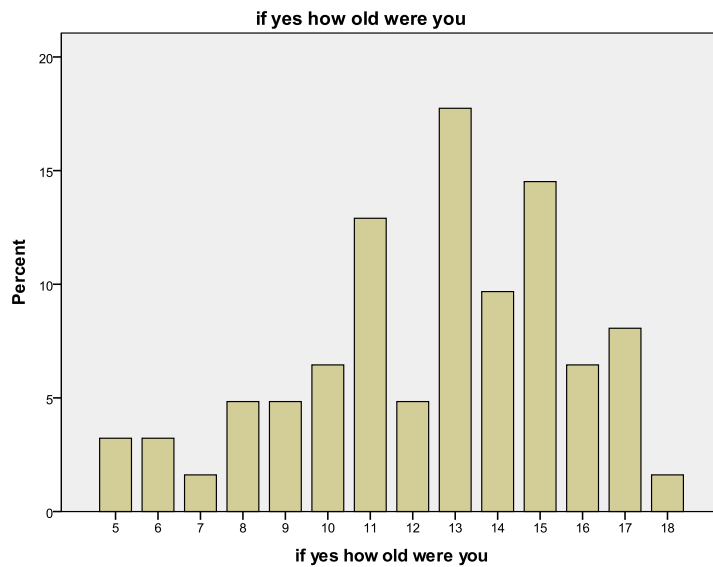


Fig. 5. Age first sexual intercourse.

The finding indicates that 48.1 % of teenage boys and 27% of teenage girls from 11 to 18 years old from the two secondary schools who participated in the pilot study had sexual intercourse.¹⁵ These figures are important since they underscore the “dreaded” fact that teenagers are sexually active. See table 1.

¹⁴See work done by UNICEF on sexual abuse in Barbados.

¹⁵Note, full details on the pilot study, is found in the forthcoming working paper by Hutchinson Miller and Crawford 2013.

Table 1 Over-All Frequencies by Sex: Teenage Sexual Activities

| Sexual Intercourse | Male | | Female | | Total | |
|---------------------------------------|------|-------|--------|------|-------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Have Had Sexual Intercourse | | | | | | |
| Yes | 39 | 48.1 | 23 | 27.4 | 62 | 37.6 |
| No | 38 | 46.9 | 58 | 69.0 | 96 | 58.2 |
| No response to had sexual intercourse | 4 | 4.9 | 3 | 3.6 | 7 | 4.2 |
| Total | 81 | 100.0 | 84 | 100 | 165 | 100 |

The study also reported that 27.3% of Barbadian teenagers indicated ‘liking’ the experience. Based on the responses of some of the teenage girls, continued sexual enjoyment would be dependent on the results of the first sexual experience as one indicated,

“Like if you really didn’t like it you probably wouldn’t. But then some people might be like ‘but dah [that] might only be the first time the next time may be better’ (Focus group participant 2011).”

Many could be the reasons impacting on teenagers not ‘liking’ their first sexual intercourse (understanding that these are not sexually abused situations), which could include, situations like guilt, frigidity, painful intercourse, concentration because of anxiety, and space (bathrooms, parent’s house, back of car seat). All of these variables could have impacted on the experience being a pleasurable one.

Despite these variables, many were expecting ‘the next time may be better’, and others found it pleasurable, because ‘it depends on who it was the first time’, or, ‘I think most people stay sexually active because of the pleasure that comes from it’ (Focus group females 2011). See table 2.

This last intervention underscores the need for scholarship on this aspect of teenage sexual experience which would help in providing a new and positive approach to human sexuality in general.

Table 2 Selected Over All Frequencies: First Sexual Experience

| Teenager Sexual Behaviour and Feelings | Total | |
|--|-------|------|
| | f | % |
| How did you feel? | | |
| I liked it | 45 | 27.3 |
| I did not like it | 7 | 4.2 |
| I was afraid | 13 | 7.9 |
| I was nervous | 37 | 22.4 |
| Total | 102 | 61.8 |

The high percentage of teenagers indicating deriving pleasure from sexual intercourse can be attributed to having more exposure to technology like the internet, access to online videos and chat groups. These would have exposed them to more, and varied information about sexuality. Added to the exciting stories from their friends about how pleasurable it is to engage in sexual intercourse.¹⁶

It seems that availability to internet technology, and the influence of their friends, have greater impact than the hegemonic discourses against Barbadian teenagers sexual activities. These would have made, I argue, many teenagers very comfortable when engaging in sexual intercourse resulting in a pleasurable experience. Boxes 1 and 2 list opinions gathered from the teenagers participating in the study on information received through the media and from friends.

¹⁶The 2011-2012 finding reveal that knowledge about sexuality indicates higher percentages for friends, and internet.

Information from the Media

Box 1.

- 'Rap it Up'
- 'Sex is fun'
- 'Appears to be 'fun' activity'
- 'different ways type and ways to have sex'
- 'Don't be gay'
- 'don't discriminate homosexualities'
- 'Everything'
- 'feels good'
- 'I learn about all the positions and how much fun sex is and how to make love'
- 'I learned that you must wait your turn and be protective'
- 'Homosexuality just aint right'
- 'If you have sex use protection'
- 'If you love him then that should come naturally. Its a good thing and you should do it if you don't do it you are lame'
- 'It is a form of expressing feelings towards the opposite sex'
- 'It is ok to be gay'
- 'it's ok to have sex before marriage'
- 'It's ok, once you have protection'
- 'sex is dangerous for teenagers'
- 'sex is portrayed as action with no strings attached'
- 'sex makes you popular and if you don't have sex you're a loser'

Information from friends

Box 2.

- 'Be careful not to be too slutty'
- 'Feels good, be careful who you do it with'
- 'Friends say its ok as long as you are safe and both agree'
- 'Friends say sex is good and you should have it every day'
- 'From my friends past relationships (and current) I learned not to be foolishly dragged into a relationship just because of peer pressure'
- 'Go along and do it if I want it. It's not my C*** and I know I waiting but I will tell you now wait till marriage'
- 'Hate all homosexuals'
- 'Have sex as you get the chance'
- 'If you were ever a lesbian you are still my friend but don't do nothing funny around me'
- 'Have sex whenever you want to'
- 'It feels good'
- 'Its cool and funny'
- 'It's nice'
- 'Man to man, gat to gal that wrong'
- 'My friends and I don't talk about sex'
- 'Sex feels good. Some of my friends are excited about it and are not worrying about STD's'
- 'Sex is an enjoyable experience'
- 'Sex is fun and to use a condom each time so you don't catch anything or get pregnant'
- 'sex is great'
- 'Sex is okay, once it's with someone who looks good'
- 'It gets you respect from your peers'

While there is concern about teenagers engaging in sexual activities risky because of STIs including HIV/AIDS and un-wanted pregnancies. Based on the findings many ensured to use at least one protection, condom. In this way,

challenging the ever present hegemonic discourse as was shown in the heated debate about a suggestion for condom used in Barbados secondary schools to help the scourge.¹⁷

Meanwhile officials are in heated discussions, teenagers are using the necessary precautions for avoiding both pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Some explain how they manage to access condoms while being minors who 'are not supposed to be having sex'.

They indicated that, 'you are under age and cannot go and buy, but you get from the events', 'boys have condoms in their wallet and stuff from their parents, 'they are some parents would be like, I know my son doing this so leh [let] me gi [give] he [him] a little just to make sure he ain't [is not] getting no girls pregnant' (Focus group teenagers 2011).

Others commented, 'Yes, somebody was telling me just the other day that the grandmother give their friend a whole bag of condoms from overseas', 'people like does give them away and thing you know!', 'you have stores that sell them now', 'but you must remember a lot of our 14 years old look like 18 year olds so when you go and buy a condom no body ask 'can I see your ID? Is your ID blue, yellow so...', 'you are 16, you got [have] your license, you go to the supermarket or probably you get a friend or something so...'(Focus group discussion, 2011). See table 3.

Table 3 Over-All Selected Frequencies by sex: Protection used in first sexual intercourse

| Teenager Sexual Behaviour and Feelings | Male | | Female | |
|--|------|------|--------|------|
| | f | % | f | % |
| Type of protection used | | | | |
| Condom | 26 | 32.1 | 16 | 19.0 |
| Birth Control Pills | 1 | 1.2 | 1 | 1.2 |
| Withdrawal Method | 4 | 4.9 | 4 | 4.8 |
| Total | 31 | 38.2 | 21 | 25.1 |

Other Sexually Related Activities

With the strong influence of the media and friends it would be naïve to believe that sexual intercourse would be the only activity young people would be involved in especially when they have indicated that they get fun out of it.

The study shows that the categories oral sex, sex for fun with no strings attached, and sex for fun with friends, reported the highest percentages among the teenagers. This is an indication I continue to argue of the pleasurable experience of sexual intercourse that is mute within Caribbean scholarship and society. See table 4.

Table 4 Over-All Frequencies Selected: Type of Sexual Activities

| Teenager Sexual Activities | Total | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| | f | % |
| Oral Sex | 89 | 53.9 |
| Anal Sex | 42 | 25.5 |
| Sexual Intercourse for money | 37 | 22.4 |
| Sexual Intercourse with older boy | 50 | 30.3 |
| Sexual Intercourse with older men | 43 | 26.1 |
| Sexual Intercourse with older girl | 42 | 25.5 |
| Sexual Intercourse with older women | 25 | 15.2 |
| Sex for fun with friends | 65 | 39.4 |
| Sex for fun with no strings attached | 74 | 44.8 |

¹⁷See *Weekend News*. "School no place for condoms". Friday, March 11, 2011. 40, Carol, Martindale. "No place in school for condoms". *Sunday Sun*. March 13, 2011. 16A.

Reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse and other sexually related activities

The reasons identified for engaging in sexual intercourse, is a strong indication that the hegemonic discourses to avoid such sexual activity is in-effective within Barbadian society. Their biological development, their curiosity and peer pressure combined in making sexual activity attractive and desirable. See table 5.

Table 5 Selected Frequencies Selected by Sex: Teenage Sexual Behaviour

| Types of Sexual Behaviours | Male | | Female | |
|--|------|------|--------|------|
| | f | % | f | % |
| Experimentation | 107 | 64.8 | 99 | 60 |
| Curiosity | 109 | 66.1 | 103 | 62.4 |
| Forced | 26 | 15.8 | 86 | 52.1 |
| Peer Pressure | 96 | 58.2 | 112 | 67.9 |
| Feel Obligated because someone older is giving money | 12 | 7.3 | 35 | 21.2 |
| Fell Obligated because girl/boy- friend invited and pay for everything | 12 | 7.3 | 66 | 40 |

There is a counter hegemonic discourse that is influencing some Barbadian teenagers who are challenging traditional views on sexuality. This counter discourse is giving them license to consciously and fearlessly engage in sexual intercourse and other sexually related activities. The counter discourse is also allowing them through the easier access of obtaining condoms, friends telling exciting tales, and internet access to experience pleasurable sexual intercourse.

I do believe that Barbadian teenagers are not unique in this situation, what is worrying is that since entrenched ideologies are difficult to change, within Barbadian society it will be a while before teenage sexuality is accepted as normative, and teachings which will include the notion that 'sex feel good'.

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APPENDIX I
Selected Newspaper Clippings



Fig. 2. Weekend Nation. "Centerpiece" Friday April 4, 2008. 28.



Fig. 3. Sunday Sun. "Sex Link..." October 22, 2011. Back page.



Fig. 4. The Barbados Advocate. Wednesday April 15, 2009. Back page.

APPENDIX II

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