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Maidens, Mothers & Minxes: The Effects of Christianity on Female Sexuality in  
Trinidad and Tobago

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project aims to investigate the link between long-term exposure to Christian-centrism and the free expression and exploration of female sexuality. In Trinidad and Tobago, much of society and culture have been shaped by various religious influences. Thus far, most of the studies have focused outside of the region which hasn't fully explored the nuances of our society. For this study, data would be gathered and analysed inferentially and descriptively. Having identified some of the issues, and having investigated various perspectives concerning the issue, this project aims to add to the existing discourse and prompt further research into the depth of Christian ideology's penetration into the region. It was observed that the fearmongering and sometimes repressive nature of Christian society has had widespread consequences, including but not limited to religious trauma, shame, and a decline in their mental wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Christian-centrism, Female Sexuality, Virgin-Whore Binary, Religion, Gender, Trinidad and Tobago

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Appendix A

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## **Introduction: Centring Christianity and Sexuality in our Society**

### **Background**

The concept of sexuality is dynamic and ever-changing. It can mean different things to different people. For some, it is a spectrum inclusive of all sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions, behaviours, and experiences, while for others it is simply the quality or state of being sexual. Within the context being examined, sexuality refers to the many behaviours and expressions of an individual's sexual state (Rathus 4). The association between religion and sexuality is unmistakable as the characteristic repression of women and the criminalisation of their sexuality is distinct within Abrahamic religions. It can be seen through the vast history of Trinidad and Tobago (Trinbago), that religion has contributed to the societal scrutiny of female sexuality (Carpenter 6).

Throughout Trinbagonian history, colonialism has played a major part in the religious beliefs and customs that were observed. Before the arrival of Christopher Columbus to our shores in 1498, it can be assumed that the Amerindians, much like the majority of their peoples in other regions, practised Animism, which is the belief that all objects, inclusive of the universe, had a soul, spirit or personality. Due to Animism, the indigenous peoples' perception of sex and sexuality lacked the traditionality of Christianity as stated in the written account, "Though all Arawaks had rigid incest taboos and class divisions that kept upper-class women from lower-class men, they did not greatly value chastity. Males and females were initiated into sex at puberty, and females were expected to have considerable sexual experience before they were married." (Craton and Saunders 39) After Trinidad and Tobago's colonisation by the Spanish, Roman Catholicism was implanted among the enslaved Africans and indentured workers that were forcibly brought to the country. When later colonised by the British, Protestantism took root and coexisted with Roman

Catholicism and the myriad of other religions brought by the enslaved Africans and indentured workers such as Hinduism and Islam.

However, this research paper focuses on the effects of Christianity on female sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, Christianity, along with the evolution of female sexuality, should be adequately discussed and centred within the societal framework. Before Christianity became widespread, after 30 A.D., Paganism was the most practised religion outside of Hinduism. Although Paganism still exists in modern society, it is not as prevalent as it once was. The broad term 'Paganism' refers to any polytheistic or pantheistic nature-worshipping religion. Notably, Paganism regards female sexuality as something that is to be celebrated, instead of controlled and views the sexual liberation of women as a necessity for changing the deeply entrenched association of female sexuality and sin (Hedenborg-White 326-27), an association that is quite prevalent in Christian ideology. Within the Christian dogma, the association between woman and sin is clearly distinguished in the very first book of the Holy Bible, specifically, Genesis 3:6. The failure of Eve to resist the serpent's temptation began a vicious cycle of women in the Christian faith taking on the burden of being the progenitor of original sin. The connection between women, sexuality, and sin is quite apparent through the constant comparisons between Mary, virginal Mother of God and Eve, progenitor of original sin, and the numerous mentions of prostitutes in the Bible that are normally meant to refer to the straying of God's people away from his divine will. These comparisons gave birth to the Madonna/Whore dichotomy (Greer) which has persisted throughout time through media and ideology. This dichotomy refers to "...a nesting doll of archetypes, as it is a binary structure that upon deconstruction contains many smaller and alternate versions of the original outer doll. The outer doll is the Madonna and the Whore, containing inside the Virgin

Mary, the Fallen Woman, Eve, the Femme Fatale, the Angel of the Home, the slut, the prude, and any other label that is applied to woman due to her sexual behaviour or expression.” (Greer 3)

In Trinidad and Tobago, our society is largely formulated on the values, morals, and ideals of Christianity even though our population consists of different religious beliefs. It forms the basis for our education, our laws, our perspectives, and even the way we view the topics of sex and sexuality. Therefore, it is quite easy to see how our perception of such a delicate topic has been skewed by a religion to which we may not even ascribe. From socialisation to the education system, Trinbagonian women and girls are inducted into a generational shame brought upon by the ‘hush-hush’ culture that surrounds all things sex.

Sex and sexuality within Trinidad and Tobago, as it exists elsewhere in the world, is a fluid and ever-evolving construct. With the addition of religion, it is unnaturally constrained by religious parameters. In the case of Christianity, the rules are extremely strict, especially considering female sexuality and the inherent patriarchal and puritanical structure that defines it. Considering Trinbagonian adherence to Christian principles in most of our societal norms and values, it is easy to see how deep the perception of sex and sexuality has been skewed.

Now, the evolution of female sexuality must be centred within the societal framework. Female sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago can be examined from the Amerindians. As aforementioned, although there were strict social divisions, chastity was not valued (Craton and Saunders 39). Consequently, the assumption can be made that it was only after the colonisation of Trinidad and Tobago by the Spanish, following Christopher Columbus’ dreaded arrival, that sex and sexuality, which were once freely expressed, were now forced to fit the rigidity of Catholicism that was imposed by Spain and Great Britain. The religious European principles were very strict when it came to female sexuality. Purity and chastity were highly valued, and they were endlessly

tied to a lady's honour; an honour that once it was lost, marked her forever. It is worth noting that although men profited from this complicated relationship between religion and sexuality, as it was formed in the patriarchal nature of Christianity which was created by them, this excludes those within the ranks of the clergy. Henceforth, this set the standard regarding the tense relationship between religion, sex, and female sexuality from then until now. This, hereby begs the question, what are the exact effects of the Christian-centric Trinbagonian culture and society on female sexuality?

## **Rationale**

There are two reasons for pursuing this line of research: to add to the discourse about sex, sexuality, and religion within the region and to investigate the true depth of Christian ideology's penetration into Trinbagonian society.

The academic value of this project is apparent as the constant evolution of sexuality and religion among newer generations has given rise to many different veins of discussion that deserve to be given a platform and the importance conferred to one religion within a multicultural and multireligious state should be investigated. As there is a deficit within the discourse surrounding the impact of Christianity on sexuality in the Caribbean, it is important to discuss these experiences.

## **Aims and Objectives**

This project aims to investigate Christianity within Trinbagonian society and culture as it relates to the open exploration and expression of women's sex and sexuality. Also, it intends to explore the terse relationship between women and faith, which can seem forced and dictatorial in their daily choices and options. Lastly, this project aims to evaluate the discussions

surrounding the ever-evolving concept of sex and sexuality in a contemporary multicultural and multireligious Trinbagonian.

## **Methodology**

This research project will make use of both primary and secondary sources, through which the aims and objectives will be explored. These sources shall be analysed through a critical lens, thereby centring the criticism of the Christian effect on female sexuality. This methodology was chosen so as not to add to the many prominent religious opinions thereby enabling the work to truly speak for itself. This is important as the conversation about religion and its ties to how we perceive sexuality deserves to be highlighted, especially from the Trinbagonian perspective.

In order to collect information about the topic, a questionnaire was disseminated using the Google Forms platform for ease of distribution, garnering 95 responses from persons of various backgrounds including sex, religion, and age with 74% of respondents being Christian women. It consisted of 21 questions, kept completely anonymous, and mixed between multiple-choice and short responses. The gathered data was interpreted using descriptive and inferential data analysis methods which were informed by secondary sources in order to corroborate the mental impacts of Christianity on female sexuality.

## **Chapter Outline**

This project consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 examines the context of Christianity and female sexuality in terms of the implementation of Christian ideals into the Trinbagonian view of sex, sexuality and women compared to other religions; as well as the creation of the Christian-centric society and its impact on the foundation of the Trinbagonian woman. Chapter 2 analyses the effects of Christianity on female sexuality, along with the manner in which a lifetime of

exposure to this ideology affect women. Lastly, Chapter 3 explores the place of faith concerning sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago's contemporary society, specifically, deconstructing the mentality and morality of Christian-centrism and dealing with the fallout of this action.

## **Literature Review**

The profound effect of Christianity on female sexuality within Trinidad and Tobago has become increasingly prevalent over the years. Due to the religious components of our history and the influence it holds in the current day, this is not surprising. Christian values and principles tend to influence much of our socialisation, thereby directly impacting the way we perceive morality, sex, and sexuality. According to Karen Carpenter, a scholar of gender and sexuality, although there is “no one way in which the population views sexual diversity or sexual freedoms” (Carpenter 9), there undoubtedly exist parameters in which this diversity and this freedom must abide. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago's society and culture, Christianity and its denominations hold the majority thereby dictating many of our moral alignments. This has been seen in cases such as the Sexual Offences Act of 1986 whereby the organisation of the Act saw legislators begin to glimpse the interconnectedness of gender, sexuality, and society, along with the notions of generating ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’ citizens which had “particular implications for women and for persons who did not conform to normative sexual behaviours.” (Tambiah 1) Other cases whereby the connection of religion, gender and sexuality may be seen are the attitudes concerning laws dealing with consensual same-sex activity, abortion, immigration, and the free movement of persons belonging to the LGBT+ community and various other state-sponsored homophobic legislation. Although Carpenter and Tambiah examine the impact religion may have on the expression of sexuality, they do not comprehensively analyse the psychological effects of long-term exposure to the dogma on the female psyche. However, this deficit is covered by Yaniv Efrati, a lecturer at Bar Ilan

University, who draws upon both the theological and societal impacts of Christianity regarding free sexual expression finding that the presentation of sexuality as unclean during adolescence and formative years, increases the risk of a psychological ‘rebound’ in later years whereby compulsive sexual behaviour or declining mental health may become an issue. This view is also supported by the experiences of some respondents.

Aside from the legal aspect, it can be assumed that religion affects female sexuality through society and culture. Christianity has given birth to the Madonna-Whore dynamic (Greer), also known as the Virgin/Whore binary (Blyth 5). As aforementioned by both Caroline Blyth and Whitney Greer, academics in the field of religion and law respectively, the Madonna-Whore dynamic refers to the product of mind/body dualism that became gendered when associated with women and their ability to create life, which gave men the pretext to declare them the weaker sex (Greer 2). Furthermore, the Virgin/Whore binary refers to the arguably normalised categorisation of women which places them into opposing divisions.

The ‘Virgins’ are the ‘good’ women. They only express their sexuality within culturally sanctioned and patriarchally defined boundaries of marriage. For example, Mary, the Virginal Mother of God. She is defined by her virginity, the absence of sexuality. Her worth is intrinsically tied to her desexualised body and her virginal maternity (Goh 226). By making her synonymous with virginity, she is denied sexuality and made into an agent of the patriarchal agenda of the Christian dogma, making it possible for her to embody the impossible role of both Virgin *and* Mother. She becomes the icon of subjugation to the male imagination and sexual fantasy where women are idealised and fantasised to be sexually pure and submissive. The eternal desexualisation of Mary leads to the continued denial of female sexual agency, sexual autonomy, and self-identity. This segment of the dichotomy clarifies the logic behind Church-sanctioned

purity culture as it strives towards the creation of their ideal of the perfect woman thereby, unintentionally burdening women within the religion.

This grouping also automatically labels all other women as ‘bad’ or morally corrupt; they are the ‘Whores’. According to psychologist, Dr Teguh Wijaya Mulya, if women dare to exist on the ‘wrong’ side of this binary, they have been shown to suffer from the patriarchally and societally mandated repercussions of disobeying the cultural and societal norms of patriarchally defined purity and chastity (Mulya 51). This is exemplified in the existence of Eve and the Whore of Babylon. Eve is the first ‘Whore’. She is the epitome of lasciviousness, sexual deviancy, and inability to control desires and weaknesses. She is the force that brought the Original Sin. She is the perfect example of female sexual choice and paternal uncertainty. As aptly noted by Vladimir Tumanov, a professor of literature, she’s the first to disobey the ‘divine’ (Tumanov 515). As she embodies female sexual choice, she causes and is the representation of male anxiety. This remaining part of the dichotomy further explains the actions of the Church in promoting abstinence and chastity to the masses.

In retaliation, the male psyche seeks out their Madonna, a female under complete male domination to alleviate this threat. As Eve represents the first ‘Whore’, this title is passed along through various women in the Christian Bible until the Whore of Babylon in the Book of Revelation. Denoting a powerful, wealthy, and sexually seductive woman with the power to conquer kings, she challenges and threatens the patriarchal foundation of Christianity which identifies itself as the sole power and authority of sexuality and society. Although existing on the ‘wrong’ side of the dichotomy, she incites fear and desire which may be interpreted as the inexplicable attraction to women who are open about their sexuality and own it even if it makes them outcasts within society (Mulya 53). At the end of her narrative in Revelation 17, she is

violently destroyed, made desolate and naked, her flesh is devoured, and she is consumed by flame (Mulya 56). This can be construed as the Church making sure that the narrative functions as they have written it; the Madonna must always triumph over the Whore just as Good must always triumph over Evil. Thus, this ideology has perpetuated a culture and society in which women are forced to stifle their sexual expression and exploration for fear of reproach. The repercussions of the free expression of sexuality that goes against socially accepted norms, indicates the suppression of all that is considered 'other' in terms of the heteronormative, cisgendered reality.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Christianity and Female Sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago

#### 1.1. Religiosity in Trinidad and Tobago

For many individuals in Trinbagonian culture and society, religion underlines many of the views and opinions they have about the world and what they consider to be ‘normal’. From birth, depending on one’s parents, one will be inducted into one of the many creeds of the nation and be expected to follow that creed in order to be a morally upstanding citizen. Many aspects of our society and culture are a lasting remnant of colonialism and foreign, religious ideology transplanted by those who were once our colonisers. Our society is arguably inherently Christian-centric. Everything, from our laws to what we consider ‘normal’, has been defined by the religion of our former colonisers. For example, the basis of our laws can be assumed to be directly copied from the central tenets of Christianity while simply being edited and amended to keep up with contemporary times. This can be seen in the example set in Leviticus 18:22, in the laws given by God to Moses, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” This was directly adapted into Trinidad and Tobago law, namely Sexual Offences Act, Section 13, Chapter 11:28 which outlawed sodomy<sup>1</sup>.

Regarding sex, gender and sexuality, the law and society, being influenced by Christian ideology with “its intolerant and repressive attitudes toward inappropriate desire and sexual difference” (O’ Callaghan 130), is very rigid in their definitions and dealings with those who fall outside of the accepted ‘norm’. From birth, women are inducted into a moral code that was decided upon by their elders, that defends and champions a patriarchally created and defined morality. They are initiated into a culture of shame that teaches them that their sexual oppression, often of

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<sup>1</sup> This law was struck down in 2018 after being recognised as unconstitutional.

their parents or their own-making due to religious reliance, is only to help them become ‘good’ members of society. This conservative, Caribbean rhetoric, forces women into an ‘in-between state’ so much so, that some women may choose to seek comfort *elsewhere* in order to escape confinement from the restrictive *here*<sup>2</sup>. Due to the Abrahamic-influenced moral fabric of our society, the mere expression and exploration of female sexuality and sensuality are considered degenerate and an act of debauchery (Mulya 52). The punishment for this ‘wilful’ deviation from the societal norm is swiftly administered with the surprisingly implicit agreement and support of other women. As the Abrahamic God punishes his straying consort, Israel, so too do women within Caribbean society chastise those who fall on the ‘wrong’ side of the Virgin/Whore binary.

### **1.1.1. Christianity in Trinidad and Tobago**

Within the Christian denominations and their biblical texts, obedience is the overarching concept that forms the foundation of their faith and their rigid approach to sexuality. There are numerous references to sexuality within the Holy Bible and most of them serve to condemn the exploration and expression of sexuality outside of their accepted norm. Such references are made in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20<sup>3</sup> whereby so-called sexual immorality, which seems to refer to any sexual relations occurring outside of marriage, is condemned. This is followed by further condemnation

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of Caribbean society being so restrictive that women choose to go abroad in order to experience freedom of self and sexuality. See Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*, and María Cristina Rodríguez’s *What Women Lose* for further insight into the condition of ‘elsewhereness’.

<sup>3</sup> “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your body.”

in Hebrews 13:4<sup>4</sup> and Colossians 3:5<sup>5</sup> of sexual immorality and sexuality outside of the heteronormative standard<sup>6</sup>. This further strengthens the argument of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy perpetuated by Christianity as women are tightly bound to the decrees set forth by their faith and the patriarchal structure in which it was created. This view is supported by some respondents as they report experiencing feelings of suppression and oppression within religious environments in relation to sexual expression. But how does this patriarchal social norm compare to the other major religions practised in Trinidad and Tobago?

### **1.1.2. Islam in Trinidad and Tobago**

There is a strong Islamic presence in Trinidad and Tobago as it is practised by 5.6% of the population and is widely considered one of the major religions practised in the nation. When considering Islam, many may draw on the examples given by popular media and think that it is an oppressive religion that has impossibly strict rules for the women who observe and practice the faith. However, Islam has empowered women since the 7th century by recognising them as equals although different and by giving them rights and privileges. Despite that, Islam shares a similar rigidity concerning sexual exploration and expression as Christianity. While women and men are encouraged to dress modestly to control lustful urges and discourage immoral or improper behaviours, it is abundantly clear that sexual relations are only to occur between heteronormative, married couples (“Sex and Sexuality in Islam”). Similarly to Christianity, sexual exploration of self is ‘haram’ or forbidden. Same-sex attraction is also ‘haram’. Regarding Islamic women,

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<sup>4</sup> “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

<sup>5</sup> “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”

<sup>6</sup> For further examples of condemnation of sexual immorality within the Holy Bible, see 1 Corinthians 7:2-6, 1 Peter 3:1, and 1 Timothy 1:10.

although they are given rights and privileges that can be considered equal to men in the Qur'an, they are still held to more rigid standards than men. Open sexual expression is 'haram' and the 'sins' listed above would be cause for repentance and rightful punishment.

### **1.1.3. Hinduism in Trinidad and Tobago**

Hinduism is the second-largest religion practised in Trinidad and Tobago with 18% of the populace identifying as believers. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism doesn't have one central, accepted religious text. The religion has many canonical texts that give believers parameters in which to live their life. Although there are central texts that deal with the law such as the *Manusmriti* and *Arthashastra*, there are also widely accepted texts that mention sex, gender, and sexuality such as the *Kama Sutra*, *Sushruta Samhita*<sup>7</sup>, *Ramayana* and *Mahanirvana Tantra*. Hinduism deals with the topic of sex and sexuality more leniently than Christianity or Islam. Although certain texts that dictate the law state that homosexuality and pre-marital sex are forbidden, in other law-making texts and Sanskrit literature, the central argument falls in favour of homosexuality, sexual expression and pleasure by citing it as a necessary part of a person's *svadharm*<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> A medical text dating back to approximately 600 B.C. which makes mention of gender re-assignment surgeries among other procedures.

<sup>8</sup> Personal destiny or individual journey.

## 1.2. A Culture of Shame

The oppressive nature of Christian ideology in Trinidad and Tobago restricts female sexual citizenship<sup>9</sup> and the punishment for sexual ‘transgressions’, whether true, falsely perceived, or simply deemed too ‘other’ for polite, God-fearing society, are the result of “fundamentalist Christian rhetoric of sin and retribution” (O’Callaghan 130). Women and girls in Trinbagonian society are inducted into a culture of shame and fear concerning sex and sexuality, perpetuated by their elders and religious leaders, from birth.

This environment of fearmongering and shame is a classic tactic of Christianity. Throughout the history of Christianity’s spread across the world, fear played a key part in establishing its dominance. Fear is the most useful tool for creating obedience through the spread of the more morally dubious parts of the Holy Bible, such as Deuteronomy 20:16<sup>10</sup> and Numbers 31:15-18<sup>11</sup>. Within the Catholic Church, religious leaders used fear as an expedient way to control women and ensure their obedience to the Church, men and their dogma which created and contributed to societal values of obedience and extended the parallel between the Madonna and the Whore by drawing reference to the punishments bestowed on women (read: whores<sup>12</sup>) in the Holy Bible as a result of straying from the Abrahamic God. By creating and preaching the concept of hell and perpetual punishment, Christianity preyed on the fear of death and Christian-centric

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<sup>9</sup> Defined as the concept of being able to be one’s true self without being subjected to an ‘infallible’ moral code.

<sup>10</sup> “However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes.”

<sup>11</sup> “Have you allowed all the women to live? He asked them. They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD’s people. Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that when the Christian Bible refers to ‘whores’, the widely accepted interpretation is in reference to Israel straying away from the Abrahamic God, drawing swift retribution resulting in divinely mandated genocide.

fear for one's immortal soul in order to mandate the actions and choices of women through the binding of their sexuality to sin.

### **1.3. The Assumed Effect of Christianity on Trinbagonian Women's Sexuality**

All things considered, it would be surprising if Trinbagonian women were untouched by the Christian-centric rhetoric that has permeated Trinidad and Tobago's society. It can be assumed that the fear-mongering and repressive nature of Christian society would have widespread consequences, including but not limited to religious trauma, self-repression and a continued, if not unacknowledged, reliance upon the Christian maxims learnt in their childhood (Russell 8). In order to confirm this hypothesis, the thoughts and perspectives of Trinbagonian women must be consulted.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **The Effects of Christianity on Female Sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago**

#### **2.1. Breakdown of Questionnaire Results**

A total of 95 persons responded to the given link containing the online questionnaire. Responses were based on experience, observation, and opinion, with a female majority of 85.3%. The respondents ranged from younger than 18 to 40+ years of age with the majority being the latter at 45.3%, which was closely followed by respondents between the ages of 21 and 25 years at a percentage of 34.7. Those who identified themselves as Christian or any of its denominations again held the majority at 83.2% with 71.6% of respondents being practising believers. For the majority of the respondents, their understanding of the concept of sexuality appears to be contingent on their gender identity and sexual orientation which seems to be heavily influenced by their religious affiliations and socialisation. There was a clear association between schooling, religion and the perspective held concerning gender identity and sexuality due to 55.8% of respondents admitting that their understanding of sex, gender and sexuality was influenced by their religion.

#### **2.2. Connection Between Christianity, its Tenets and Impact on Respondents**

With 52% of respondents having attended Christian faith-based schools, there appears to be a clear connection between Christianity and female sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not surprising that this conservative mindset, characteristic of Christian ideology, has permeated the Trinbagonian mentality as respondents appear to have lasting impacts from the combination of socialisation, schooling and personal belief that were heavily underpinned by Christianity. 59% of respondents have claimed that religious education and fearmongering by their educational

institutions led to the suppression of their sexuality. Although 40% say that their schools shied away from discussing sex, gender, and sexuality, 64% do admit to school-sanctioned purity culture and the forced suppression of their sexual selves, expression and exploration. Most of what they were taught about sex, gender identity and sexuality was geared towards the cisgender, heteronormative standards of our Christian-centric society which were heavily underpinned by abstinence and purity culture. 18.7% of respondents did not go to any religiously affiliated schools but claim that they have noticed how some of their peers seemed to 'let loose' once admitted to university and that students who were finally allowed to express and explore themselves without parents and religious expectations dictating their behaviour seemed to either become heavily hypersexual or change belief systems. This observation is further supported by Efrati, in his discussion about the inevitable rebound individuals experience when sexual behaviours and thoughts are presented as unclean in their adolescence (147).

Efrati's perspective about the repression and suppression of sexual thoughts, identity and orientation were also highlighted by respondents. When asked about the influence religion has had on their understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality, 55.8% of respondents admit to experiencing feelings of shame and fear towards sexual urges and deviation from the societal norm. Many respondents also affirm that discussions concerning sex and sexuality were frowned upon, with abstinence until marriage being the only option taught to them. However, when asked whether they have experienced shame as a result of their religious beliefs about sex, gender and sexuality, only 31.8% admitted to it. Rather than express the feelings to which they admitted before, respondents preferred to deny any shame when asked outright. Interestingly enough, 61.7% of respondents later admit to their shame and repression openly when asked whether their religion has impacted their identity in terms of their sexuality with one respondent affirming that they "hide

their sexuality from others” so that they won’t be an outcast. This further proves the working hypothesis that Christianity has a negative impact on the expression and exploration of Trinbagonian women’s sexual selves. It can be inferred from the responses submitted, that these impacts are greater than originally thought as even those outside of Christianity have either observed or experienced the expectations of Christianity in regard to their sexuality due to the make-up of our society.

### **2.2.1. Effects of Lifetime Exposure to these Ideals**

Summarily, a lifetime of exposure to a black and white way of viewing sex, gender and sexuality appear to affect respondents in completely opposing ways. Respondents appear to have either become extremely sexually repressed or become accepting of their sexuality. These results intersect with those who have either distanced themselves from the religious beliefs of their youth, those who have stopped practising completely and those who have plunged further into religion. However, the majority of the results affirm the hypothesis so far, that the fear-mongering and repressive nature of Christian society have widespread consequences, including but not limited to religious trauma, self-repression and a continued, if not unacknowledged, reliance upon the Christian maxims learnt in their childhood.

Regarding sexual repression and suppression, it seems to have been the natural result of the culmination of a lifetime of exposure to Christian tenets. Throughout respondents' schooling and active religious practice, there appears to have been a disconnect between their sexual self, their identity and the idea of the ideal person their religion illustrated as the example to strive towards. The resulting cognitive dissonance between normal bodily urges and the suppression of these thoughts has created a disruption within their sexual self-schema (Andersen 217) thereby

causing religious trauma and either an extreme withdrawal from their faith or further dependence. This cognitive dissonance is also present in the aforementioned Virgin-Whore dichotomy between the Virgin Mary being endorsed by the Church and society as the standard for women in the faith to model themselves after while the fear of somehow becoming one of the denounced 'Whores' lingered in their subconscious.

As analysed in Efrati's work, the long-term repression of sexual thoughts and urges causes the emergence of mental health disorders such as depression and compulsive sexual behaviour (147). This observance syncs with the remarks made by respondents concerning the hypersexuality exhibited by those who were finally outside of the Christian faith-based spaces. Efrati's observation is also supported by some respondents who postulate that a perceived deterioration in their mental health may be linked to the repression and fear that was imposed on them in their youth. Therefore, it can be inferred that the Christian view of women, sex, and sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago has had a negative impact on the expression and exploration of female sexuality.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **The Future of Faith and Female Sexuality in Trinbagonian Society**

#### **3.1. Faith and Sexuality in Contemporary Society**

After compiling and analysing the data collected from the disseminated questionnaire, it becomes apparent that there is a severe disconnect between faith and sexuality within contemporary Trinbagonian society. The concept of sex and female sexuality has been ever evolving whereas Christianity seems to remain in a state of suspended animation. However, it was deemed necessary to get the perspective of religious authority. Thus, a different questionnaire was shared with a pastor of the Pentecostal denomination of Christianity in order to get his unique viewpoint.

His mindset appears to be diametrically opposed to that of the hypothesis. The assumption of this study centred on the effects of Christianity as it relates to female sexuality, specifically, the negative effects. The attitude of His Reverence broached the topic in the opposite way, citing that the term ‘Christian’ in the contemporary context has devolved into “a nominal expression of a diverse caricature of some unbiblical mentality that needs to be deconstructed” in its own right. Accordingly, the hypothesis must adapt to include this theory. However, that will have to be investigated in another study.

Regarding faith and sexuality in contemporary society, His Reverence questioned the necessity of biblical Christianity keeping up with an ever-evolving narrative and what lessons society could gain from moving the ‘goal post’ in the name of progressive human expression of sexuality. A view shared by Jason Evert, a chastity advocate, who believes in the virtue of chastity as an expression of love towards a future spouse and family. The claim can also be made that the

trauma respondents experienced is the fault of a perverted ideology being taught in schools, at home or in the church itself. This claim while being supported by Evert, it can also be supported by the view of Celeste Little, a feminist writer, regarding abstinence as a choice based in empowerment, similarly to the empowerment that free sexual expression and exploration can bring. These perspectives were backed by some respondents who viewed the principles and laws laid out by their faith as something that gave them legitimacy and empowered them. Rather than viewing the restrictions as oppressive, they viewed it as a way to guard their beauty and as a way to gain certain freedoms.

### **3.2. Deconstruction of Faith-Based Mentality and Morality**

After considering the data given by respondents, and inferring the interconnectivity of their trauma, self-repression and a continued, conscious, or subconscious reliance on the various Christian maxims learnt in youth, is it possible to deconstruct the societal mentality and morality that is based on faith? According to respondents, such deconstruction is necessary in order to prevent the repetition of the cycle. On the contrary, His Reverence is of the opinion that this “collective consciousness of morality and support for meeting the material needs of society”, being faith, while “prohibitive of promiscuous expression” is a “functional prerequisite” for the wellbeing and continuity of society. However, the findings expressed and supported by respondents and various scholars contradict this belief. Efrati, Greer, and Mulya, present compelling evidence that the allowance of the existing Christian ideology and how it is taught have contributed to a faith-based mentality and morality that have and will continue to aggrieve those experiencing it. This point of view is further corroborated by the shared experiences of the majority

of respondents. Thus, the question no longer remains at the baser level of simply the effects of Christianity on female sexuality but rather, how can they be mitigated?

## CONCLUSION

This project has examined an assortment of concepts and issues relating to the effects of Christianity on female sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago. From the Christian-centrism of Trinbagonian society and culture, along with the link between long-term exposure to Christian principles and the resulting religious trauma along with the repression of self and sexuality, the lasting repercussions of this will take years to unravel, not to mention those who have been driven further into religious reliance.

The religiosity of Trinidad and Tobago as it pertains to the policing of female sexuality is undeniable. Women and girls suffer from a faith, which they may or may not have chosen for themselves, that instructs them in all aspects of their life and obligates them to embody the impossible, the role of the Virgin when they have already spent a lifetime being indoctrinated into the inescapable ideology of the Whore. This contradictory division of self and perceived nature culminates in a cognitive dissonance that rends the individual from their sexual self, a part of their self-schema which manifests in a decline in mental health or the development of issues such as compulsive sexual behaviour.

The place of faith in an ever-advancing contemporary society becomes blurred. The developing concept of sex and sexuality progresses rapidly yet, Christianity remains fixed in tradition. The desire for the Church to preserve the tenuous balance between dogma and modernity may be impossible when considering the current state of affairs. There is work to be done regarding deconstructing the mentality and morality of the masses, and the ensuing fallout will have to be approached carefully. It is not easy to question what has been presented as infallible or unquestionable. The experiences and traumas that the respondents have faced are only a minor part of the larger problem which is the influence and impact afforded to Christianity in an increasingly secular world.

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## APPENDIX A

**This is the questionnaire that was disseminated to the public for the respondents to answer.**

### **1- Questionnaire on the Effects of Christianity on Female Sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago**

#### **Pre-requisite for participation**

- Do you consent to participate in this survey?
- Will you be answering from experience, observation, or opinion?
- What age range do you fall into?

#### **Section 1**

- What do you identify as? (Female/Male/Other)
- Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself?  
(Straight/Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Figuring myself out/Other)
- Are you open about your sexuality?
- What does your sexuality mean to you?

#### **Section 2**

- Do you consider yourself to be:  
(Christian/Hindu/Muslim/Rastafarian/Agnostic/Atheist/Deist/Other)
- Are you a practising believer?
- Do/ did you go to a religious school or a non-denominational school?
- Can you expand on the type?
- Do you think your schooling impacted your understanding of your sexuality? Explain?
- Do you believe your religion has influenced your understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality?
- If yes, please explain.
- Have you ever experienced shame as a result of your religion regarding sex and sexuality?
- If yes or other, please explain?

-Regardless of your religion, do you believe that Christian ideology is prevalent in Trinbagonian society?

-If yes or other, how?

-Do you believe your identity is linked to your sexuality or religion? Explain?

-How do you think you've been impacted by your religion in terms of your sexuality?

**Due to availability, this questionnaire was only disseminated to a pastor of the Pentecostal faith in Trinidad and Tobago.**

## **2. Questionnaire on the Effects of Christianity on Female Sexuality**

- Do you consent to participate in this survey?
- Do you consent to your name & title being used in this survey?
- What is your name & title? (Provided you consent to it being shared)
- To what denomination of Christianity do you belong?
- Were you raised in the faith, or did you convert in your later years?
- What is your view concerning Christianity in Trinidad and Tobago?
- What are your thoughts concerning the role of Christianity as it intersects with sexuality?
- How do you think Christianity has impacted Trinbagonian women and girls regarding their gender and sexuality?
- What do you think is the place of faith in contemporary society?
- In a previous questionnaire, respondents claimed that attending Christian faith-based schools led to the development of religious trauma, shame, and sexual repression. Do you think that these effects could have been mitigated in any way? If so, how?
- How do you think Christianity can keep up with the ever-evolving concept of sex and sexuality?
- Assuming that we live in a Christian-centric society, do you think it's possible to deconstruct that mentality?
- If so, how?
- Assuming this deconstruction occurs, how would you suppose we deal with the fallout?
- Are there any other perspectives, or thoughts you would like to add?