

Exploring Perspectives about Sexuality among Ghanaian Youth Living in Canada:  
Understanding the Impact of Cultural Contact

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirements for the degree of

*Master of Arts*

Faculty of Social Sciences, Brock University  
St. Catharine's, Ontario

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## Abstract

Research on sexuality in Ghana has been scanty due to the nature of the Ghanaian society where sensitive issues like sexuality are not openly discussed and researched. This qualitative study examined how social contact with Canadian society has impacted the views of Ghanaian students living in Canada about sexuality. The data for this research study were gathered through in-depth interviews with 15 Ghanaian students between ages 18 to 30 who had been living in Canada for more than one year. This study's findings revealed that religion plays a central role in shaping views about sexuality among young Ghanaians living in Canada. The findings also highlighted the impact of cultural contact in shaping several aspects of sexuality including contraception and same-sex relations. The theoretical implications of this study's results are discussed in terms of how they can help to clarify culturally informed models focusing on the role played by society, religion, family and peers in the development of adolescent perspectives about sexuality. The practical and educational implications of this study's results are also discussed.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the almighty God for the successful completion of this thesis. Without the help, support and guidance of the following people, this thesis would not have been possible.

To my supervisor, Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams, thank you so much for your commitment and direction throughout the thesis writing process. I appreciate your dedication and time, you inspired me a lot and working with you was a great experience, thank you.

To my committee members, Dr. Tom O'Neill and Dr. Dawn Zinga, thank you for the thorough and constructive feedback. Your time and suggestions proved very helpful in the writing process and helped me improve overall as a researcher.

To my external examiner, Dr. Leanne Taylor, thank you for your time, and your prompt and constructive feedback.

This study will have been impossible without the help of the participants who shared their ideas and thoughts with me and permitted me to be a part of their world, I say thank you to all of them.

To the following friends who helped and encouraged me through stressful times, I say thank you.

Anthony Yebuah, Deladem Kalitisi, Vivian Akpety , Issac Oduro-Kwarteng, Owuraku Kusi-Ampofo , Denis Dogah, Rosemary Solomon, Carleigh Sanderson ,Peter Acheampong Boateng and Carleigh Sanderson.

Finally, to my parents and family, I am grateful for your prayers and support throughout the duration of my Masters programme.

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### **Introduction: Understanding Adolescent Sexuality Development**

Sexuality is a topic considered sensitive in Ghana and discussions on this subject may be associated with some level of discomfort. The extent to which sexuality is discussed openly or freely may be dependent on the sexual culture of a particular society. For example unlike Ghana, Sciaraffa and Randolph (2011) state that people in the United States are more receptive to open discussions about sexuality. In Ghana discussions about sexuality are generally done in private and are limited. Ghanaians who travel outside Ghana and interact with people from different cultures may be exposed to sexual cultures distinct from their own which may or may not impact their own sexual views. Sciaraffa and Randolph (2011) state that human sexuality is not limited to procreation but also includes an individual's identity, behaviour, gender, ideas and values concerning intimacy. Some of these components of human sexuality for example ideas and values concerning intimacy may change over the course of an individual's life and may be influenced by different social environments. This thesis research examines the impact of contact with Canadian culture on the sexual perspectives of Ghanaian youth living in Canada.

According to Tolman and McClelland (2011), research on adolescent sexuality over the years has led to the conclusion that sexuality is an integral part of adolescent development. Worthington (2004) explains that sexual orientation, sexual identity, and sexual orientation identity are often used interchangeably but are in reality three different but interrelated concepts relevant to understanding the broader construct of adolescent sexuality development. Sexual identity development is a complex construct in nature, and definitions of sexual identity development must go beyond simply recognizing people as "sexual beings." For instance, sexual

identity development also encompasses aspects of a person's sexual identity which mirrors his/her sexual values, sexual needs, ways of sexual expression, selection and choice of sexual partners, choice of sexual activities, and the acceptance of one's sexual orientation identity (Worthington, 2004).

Sexual orientation is explained by Worthington, Savoy, Dillon and Vernaglia (2002) as comprising an individual's sexuality related tendencies regardless of whether this construct is genetic, biological, environmental, or socially constructed in nature. They posit that sexual orientation alone does not constitute sexual identity. They distinguish sexual orientation identity as the individual's acknowledgement, agreement and identification with his/her sexual orientation. Worthington, Savoy, Dillon and Vernaglia (2002) state that sexual identity is an all-inclusive development which involves defining the person as a sexual being. Sexual identity is explained further as the comprehension of one's body and sexual performance, an awareness of how attractive an individual is to others and an impression of one's self as sexual (DeLamater, 1981). Izugbara (2004) adds to this by asserting that sexuality is an essential part of humanity which comprises sex, sexual orientation, reproduction, gender and sexual identities.

Vrangalova and Savin-Williams (2011) state that if we wish to truly understand overall adolescent development it is important to understand the connection between adolescent sexual behaviours and attitudes and adolescent psychological well-being. Vrangalova and Savin-Williams (2011) conducted a study and the results showed that adolescents who were less sexually active than their peer group reported lower levels of psychological well-being. The exploration of sexuality by adolescents is said to be a possible indicator of psychological well-being (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2011). In a review by Tolman and McClelland (2011) they discussed the changing nature of adolescent sexuality. They stated that previously



adolescent sexuality was regarded as a “controversial topic” but the 21<sup>st</sup> century had created a new comprehension of adolescent sexuality as natural and an essential part of development in adolescence. Further, Moore and Rosenthal (1992) argued that the importance of studying adolescent sexuality also includes gaining an understanding of which factors suppress the sometimes negative effects associated with adolescent sexual behaviours such as acquiring AIDS, and also the many positive effects associated with adolescent sexual behaviours which include creating positive sexual values and promoting psychological well-being.

In light of existing research it appears that the development of sexuality and a sexual identity is a critical aspect of human development especially in the period of adolescence. Paulson and Somers (2000) further highlight the complexity of adolescent sexuality development, but unlike Worthington (2004), they look at three separate components. These components include sexual knowledge, sexual attitudes, and sexual behaviours. Paulson and Somers (2000) refer to sexual attitudes as comprising an adolescent’s perspective on issues and behaviours related to sexuality. They explain that sexual behaviours are usually restricted to evaluations of behavioural expressions of sexuality and experiences with sexual intercourse. These three components of sexuality according to Paulson and Somers (2000) are considered distinct but at the same time interconnected. The different facets of sexuality development highlight the complexity of this construct and the associated challenges for conducting research on issues pertinent to adolescent sexuality.

In order to fully understand the nature of the development of adolescent sexuality, two separate theoretical frameworks will be applied for a deeper understanding. One model will be the subsystem or the micro system being the developmental niche framework entrenched in a much larger or macro system of cultural influence which is the eco-cultural and acculturation

framework. Changes in the eco-cultural framework correspond directly with changes in the developmental niche framework.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Framework: The Developmental Niche Framework

Based on their unique experiences individuals develop different perspectives on various aspects of life. These aspects of life include ideas about what is morally and socially acceptable and what is deemed unfit. Different people within a particular location or even in the same family may as a matter of human personality share different or similar views on a particular idea. One of these ideas is sexuality, since societal norms and expectations regarding this construct differ across cultures and countries. As supported by Kalra, Gupta, and Bughra (2010), what is considered sexually unacceptable and/or aberrant is determined by specific cultures. Worthington et al (2002) state that the societal and cultural conditions defining gender will also impact individuals' sexual perspectives.

The developmental niche framework put forward by Super and Harkness (2002) provides an interesting background to understand the importance of culture and society in human development. The framework outlines three main operational subsystems: "the physical and social settings, the historically constituted customs and practices of child care and child rearing and the psychology of the caretakers" with emphasis on parental ethnographies which are shared with the community (Super & Harkness, 2002; Harkness et al, 2007). They also put forward that culture helps the course of environmental development. Three organizational aspects of the developmental niche are identified, namely contemporary redundancy, communication and chaining. *Contemporary redundancy* is explained as the repetition of particular activities during the developmental period. The developmental period is a time in which particular skills necessary for survival in an environment are acquired by individuals, which may include learning a particular dance or a skill of bargaining. Linking contemporary redundancy to how the

environment impacts perceptions of sexuality, children may be exposed to particular and culturally “acceptable” notions about sexuality. For example, children may learn that being heterosexual is more culturally “desirable and acceptable” than being homosexual and may thus hold onto this former type of sexual orientation and suppress any same-sex feelings. Children and youth may in turn hold on to these sexual ideals and values well into adulthood because they have been culturally socialised in this way from early childhood.

The second organizational aspect of the developmental niche is termed *communication* and refers to a process whereby children are able to acquire and give meaning to particular systems and cultural rules in their environment (Super & Harkness, 2002). Communication is an important way in which children learn about most things including sexuality. Through communication, they are able to develop a sexual identity based on the kind of messages they are given and these cultural beliefs and practices shape their ideas about sexuality. Through communication with parents, peers, the media or society, ideas about sexuality are formed by children and these ideas become a part of their sexual understanding into their adult years. Communication about certain practices such as the appropriate age for dating may be conveyed through parents who may set a particular age for dating; this standard might be further enforced by people within society who may frown on adolescents who start to date earlier. Adolescents may perform self-regulatory roles themselves and refrain from dating in a bid to conform to societal and family messages. For example, the age for dating may vary from country to country, while the age for dating may be set higher in some societies like Ghana and other West-African countries, it may be set lower in other parts of the world.

The third of the organizational aspects is identified as *chaining*. It is explained that different elements of the environment come together to create a new occurrence, which cannot

be achieved by a single element alone. Instead, it is thought that the interaction of various elements is required to achieve a particular outcome. The interaction therefore of societal elements like media, peers, family, religious values, are all fused together to create the specific sexual attitudes and behaviours that children and youth will develop; in this way, one's overall sexual perspective is dependent on several interactive elements and its outcome on one's personal life. For example sex before marriage is something that may be considered wrong in some societies and the media through movies and programmes on TV may portray it as unacceptable, friends and peers can accordingly shun and dissociate from people who engage in premarital sex. The family can try to regulate the behaviour of its members and encourage them to abstain from premarital sex, as put forward by Ojo and Faubba (2005) the traditional system in Southern Nigeria served its role of deterring young people from indulging in early sex by putting the fear in boys that they will become impotent, and telling girls that they will be barren if they engaged in pre-marital sex.

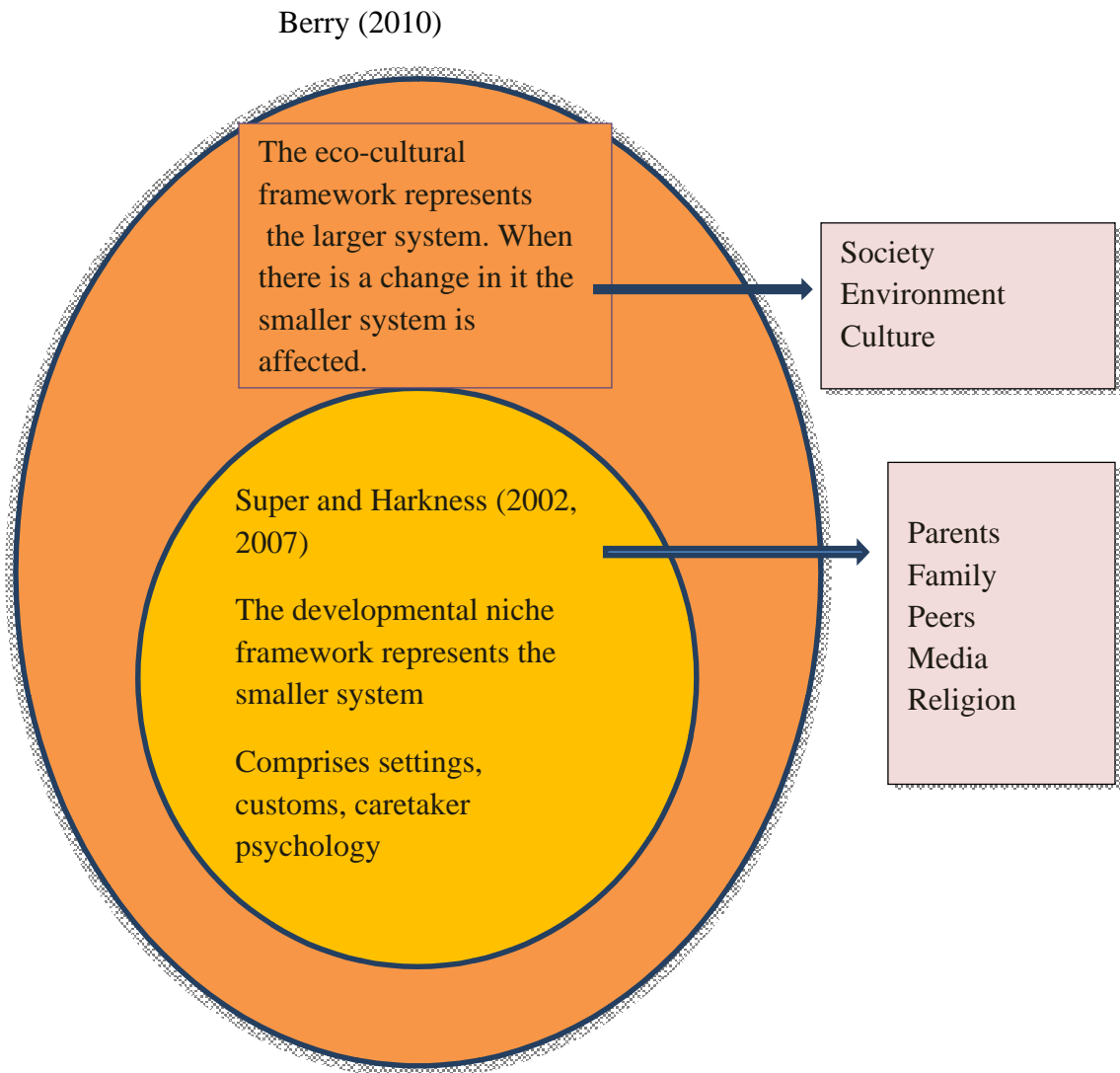
The church constantly admonishes its members to live chaste lives, and in a society as religious as Ghana this message will impact its members heavily. Various agents of society disseminate similar messages on particular issues for example the age of dating. It is the interaction of all these societal elements and its resultant effects on the members of the society that Super and Harkness (2002) describe as chaining. In the same way, if sex before marriage is considered "right" in other societies then the interaction of the elements will produce the effect that this practice is culturally accepted by members of this society.

In addition to these integrative properties of culture, another set of second-order effects exists. The meaning attributed to individual traits for example *sex* and *temperament* can be understood differently in different cultures. For example, developmental consequences for

particular individual traits have different effects in different countries (Harkness & Super, 2002). For example being an aggressive child in Canada may evoke a different response as opposed to being an aggressive child in Ghana. A male child in Ghana may have different expectations from society as opposed to a male child in the Western world. One other second order effect mentioned is the different effect of *peculiar parenting behaviours* on other parts of the developmental niche. The effects of parenting style are also dependent on other aspects of the environment already spoken of including communication, physical environment, and contemporary redundancy. The second-order effects in relation to sexuality speak to the fact that there is not a single expected outcome for sexual behaviours, and in this way children may go through the same processes but may end up with different outcomes. This process is best described in relation to the concept of multifinality, wherein similar pathways may exist but with different end results. A child in Ghana might have authoritative parents and might grow up abstaining from pre-marital sexual activities, whereas a child in another part of the world might grow up with authoritative parents but indulge in sex before marriage. In this way, the pathways highlighting children's sexuality development are not definite, and in addition to parental influence, personal traits and values also interact to reach an end result.

Theoretical frameworks diagram

Figure 1



*The Ecocultural and Acculturation Frameworks (see Figure 1).* The *Ecocultural and Acculturation Frameworks* developed by Berry (2010) highlight *universalist* and *adaptation assumptions*. The universalist idea is the belief that all societies share some common and fundamental cultural and psychological features. According to this framework, human psychological processes such as problem solving and reasoning are said to be common among human beings, with individual differences being a result of culture which causes diversity in experiences throughout the life course (Berry, 2010). For example, the approach that a teacher in a Ghanaian classroom might take to handle a student causing trouble in class might differ from the approach adopted by a teacher in a Canadian classroom; however, both will have been involved in a common psychological process of problem solving regardless of the approach used. Individual experiences may determine how either of the two teachers went about solving the issue at hand.

Along with the developmental niche framework, Berry's ecocultural framework is ideally suited for exploring the changing sexual perceptions of Ghanaian youth in Canada. Despite differences in ethnic backgrounds, Ghanaian youth like young people in other parts of the world experience basic psychological functions such as thinking and experiencing sensations of happiness or sadness. The disparities in their psychological activities derive from the nature of the society and the environment in which they live which in turn impacts their daily living. In other parts of the world similar activities engaged in by Ghanaian youth may be performed differently based on societal expectations and what is viewed as appropriate. Similarly, young adult's ideas about sexuality and actual sexual behaviours will be based on what is evident in the society in which they currently live, and when they enter a new environment these same ideas may be reshaped accordingly. Dating is generally a common occurrence in countries all over the



world, but specific and local dating practices will differ from society to society. While in Ghana people may date for several months before thinking about courting and/or getting married, this process may be expedited in other countries and individuals may consider getting married much sooner.

Despite some of the commonalities that societies often share in terms of language, values, and the justice system, Berry (2010) advances the perspective that there are also individual and group differences in the portrayal of these commonalities. These differences are said to be a result of ecological and sociopolitical factors of which cultural and biological features are adapted to. On the sociopolitical front, Berry (2010) suggests that the sociopolitical climate informs cultural contact in which case individuals have to adapt to several contexts. Berry argues that psychological distress occurs when individuals have to adapt to two contexts that may be conflicting. Holistically the ecocultural framework regards both the cultural and psychological aspects of human diversity as both individual and group adaptations to context (Berry, 2010). Cultures are said to be adaptations to ecological and sociopolitical effects. The ecocultural framework is said to be beneficial because it creates room for the analysis of human diversity without fear of being classified as ethnocentric since diversity is acknowledged. In this way, within the ecocultural framework, diversity in psychological processes can be seen as culturally based and as a result of different social and environmental contexts. The behaviours exhibited by people are as a result of the situations they find themselves in which affects them socially and psychologically. With respect to psychological and cultural variations, differentiation in cognitive life is said to help people become better adjusted. An individual who is characterized by greater social and psychological differentiation is likely to experience more positive outcomes such as easier intercultural and acculturation processes (Berry, 2010). Acculturation stress

however is said to be experienced differently among diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Millender, 2012).

Within this ecocultural framework, acculturation is considered important in culturally plural societies because of the existence of a multitude of languages and cultural values and practices among groups of people. In spite of the dominance of one group over another, individuals still have to come to an agreement to enable successful co-habitation. Berry (2010) speaks about two models of cultural pluralism, the melting pot model in which a dominant group exists with minority groups who remain minority until they are drawn into the dominant group. The second is the multicultural model in which the larger society absorbs the needs of the different cultural groups and the society functions together. Any changes experienced among Ghanaian youth living in Canada in terms of their sexual attitudes and behaviours might be said to be partly attributed to the new context in which they find themselves and similar to what Berry (2010) advanced, they may have adapted to their new contexts. Adaptation may come as a way to deal with a new environment because it makes it easier to settle and get along. This framework is well suited in its description of culture and change for exploring the changing perspectives about sexuality among Ghanaian youth now living in Canada. The importance of culture and the environment cannot be understated in any circumstance.

Sam and Berry (2010) further explain the acculturation process and highlight two separate factors of importance in understanding the type of acculturation strategy that any person might adopt. The first factor involves the extent to which an individual desires to keep the culture and identity of his/her home country. The second factor involves the extent to which an individual desires to communicate with people who do not belong to his/her unit and to, in turn,

participate in the broader society. Individual choices in relation to these two situations help us to understand the different acculturation strategies that can be adopted by new immigrants.

Sam and Berry (2010) outline four acculturation strategies namely: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. The assimilation strategy is explained by Sam and Berry as the strategy whereby individuals search for attachments in their new environment and may also embrace the norms and values of the new society. The separation strategy describes individuals who wish to maintain the culture of their country of origin and therefore stay away from communication with the people in their new society. People who wish to keep the culture of their countries of origin and at the same time communicate with other people in their new society are thought to adopt the integration strategy. This strategy enables them to keep a part of their cultural heritage and also be a part of the new and larger society (Sam & Berry, 2010). Lastly the marginalization strategy is characterized by the individual's lack of interest in maintaining their original culture or as a result of having been forced to lose their cultural heritage and might also have minimal interest in interacting with other people frequently based on reasons of either exclusion or discrimination. Sam and Berry (2010) state that these adaptation strategies and their end results are not fixed and may change as a consequence of particular situations. The Ghanaian youth involved in this study may have adopted any of these four acculturation strategies as outlined above.

Wayland (1997) states that Canada is one of the official multicultural countries in the world and therefore multiculturalism remains a part of the Canadian identity. Berry (2012) describes the multicultural model in Canada as allowing people of diverse nationalities to settle successfully into Canadian culture without any form of discrimination. The Canadian cultural context which has already been discussed as being culturally diverse then implies a mix of

different cultures, different attitudes and different behaviours. This multicultural context can impact the views of Ghanaian youth in Canada, as they will likely learn different behaviours, actions, and attitudes from their new environment. The nature of the Canadian society is an ethnically diverse one and this is much different from the environment in Ghana, which also includes people from different nationalities, but because there are more people from the West African sub-region people may have some things in common. When considering the cultural context of the youth participants in this study we must consider that these youth are attending Brock University which makes it easier for them to be exposed to a more liberal culture, in comparison to other perhaps less urban parts of Canada where things may not be same (Chinell, 2011). For example, homophobia still exists on some University campuses, so then the specific environment surrounding the youth participants in this study informs their behaviours and perceptions. These behaviours and perceptions may differ depending on the part of Canada in which youth find themselves.

### **Adolescent Sexuality Development in the Ghanaian Context**

Anarfi and Owusu (2011) note that in African societies issues pertaining to sexuality are viewed as highly confidential. Sexual matters are considered taboo in Sub-Saharan Africa and for this reason little communication exists between parents and children on this issue (Kawai et al., 2008). In a study in Nigeria and Kenya on adolescent sexuality, Barker and Rich (1992) found most of the youth who participated in their study were uncomfortable when it came to sexuality and found it hard to discuss it with parents or members of their families. As stated by one participant, *“It is easier discussing sex with young people, because the older people want to know where you first heard about it and from whom. They shut us up and say we want to start doing Ishekuse (bad things) before growing up”* (Barker & Rich, 1992). Recent research

however shows that exploration of sexuality is a normal part of adolescence (Vrangalova & Savin Williams, 2011, Tolman, & McClelland, 2011). In a related study, Izugbara (2004) puts forth that Nigerian culture disapproves of the discussion of issues relating to sexuality. Bosmans, Cikuru, Claeys and Temmerman (2006) noted in their research in the Democratic Republic of Congo that programme officers and trainers in peer education programmes with a focus on sexuality argued that in Congolese culture, sexuality was unspoken of and same sex relations are thought to be non-existent. They also observed the discomfort with which adults talked about “sex” and “sexuality” and the two words were avoided. As in other African societies, in Ghanaian culture there are spoken and unspoken rules governing sexuality, and thoughts on sexuality are generally discussed behind closed doors and out of public domain. Research by Kumi-Kyereme et al (2007) among Ghanaian adolescents showed that parent-child communication on sexuality was not a common occurrence. Moreover, when communication about sexuality did occur it was limited to instructions given to children by parents with no room for a real conversation. In light of such limited communication about sexuality, some adolescents reported an unwillingness to inform parents about sexual abuse for fear of its consequences which included the possibility of being blamed (Kumi-Kyereme et al., 2007). The development of adolescent sexuality in the Ghanaian context then seems to be almost shrouded in secrecy. Van der Geest (2001) has argued that sexual socialisation in Ghana is undertaken in secrecy. Similarly, Majied (2013) found that African American parents report withholding information about sexuality from their children based on the belief that they can persuade their children to refrain from engaging in sexual activity if they simply avoid discussing the issue and if they warn their children about some of the possible negative consequences associated with engaging in sexual activity.

### **Changes in Cultural Experiences through Cultural Contact and Acculturation**

Foster (2001) asserts that individuals have emigrated from one country to another since the beginning of time. The immigration of Africans including Ghanaians to other countries is not a new occurrence (Konadu-Agyemang, 1999). Additionally Watson and Khana (2005) allude to the fact that Canada comprises culturally diverse populations, with a lot of immigrants coming into the country year after year. In this way, Canada is also regarded as a highly multicultural society, one that is open to receiving new immigrants (Maticka-Tyndale, 2008). In May 2012, the government of Canada made reference to the bilateral relations existing between Ghana and Canada. In light of this the Canadian government stated that the Ghanaian diaspora in Canada is about approximately 80 000.

The Canadian government emphasises that the cultural exchanges between these two countries can lead to a greater knowledge of and understanding between members of these two cultures. With the interaction between Ghana and Canada evidenced by the number of Ghanaians in Canada, there will definitely be a fusion of cultures. Quan-Baffour (2008) affirms that the media and trade between countries are ways through which different cultures meet. Ghanaians continue to immigrate to Canada both for work and school and in 2010 the Canadian government recorded 2,145 temporary resident visas, 79 work visas, and 153 student visas issued to Ghanaians. Canadian culture may impact the perspectives and behaviours of Ghanaians immigrating to Canada and staying for an extended period. In view of this, Ghanaian immigrants come into contact with different people and cultural practices as they settle in their new Canadian environment and this contact can affect them in diverse ways.

Ghanaian youth living in Canada may be affected in areas of their lives such as sexuality. Ghanaian youth immigrate to different parts of the world for a variety of reasons including work

and education. Vasta and Kandilige (2010) posit that migration of Ghanaians into the UK is largely based on their desire to work and the presence of a large Ghanaian community which acts as a social support base. Kaba (2011) states that the post-world war II era saw an influx of Africans to developed nations and these immigrants were thought to be either schooling or working in developed countries. Cheng, Cheung and Yeun (2010) posit that since the 1990's the number of international students studying in different countries all around the world has increased tremendously. Coe (2012) found that the desire to immigrate overseas in the future is evident among Ghanaian children with whom he conducted research. One of the reported reasons for wanting to immigrate includes the desire to work in order to secure a better standard of living. Tarlebba (2010) also points out that African immigration into the United States has been ongoing for many years and is still in progress.

Living in Ghana for an extended period and having to switch to a new culture with distinct expectations can affect individuals in different ways. Dalgard et al. (2006) state that the social and cultural environment is associated with the impact of immigration on mental health, however, in the absence of these two environments immigration itself may not pose an inherent risk. Khawaja & Mason (2008) also describe the process of immigration as a traumatic experience affected by psychosocial elements such as social loneliness and self-esteem. Four stages of trauma experienced by immigrants identified in recent literature are described by Foster (2001) as pre-migration trauma, traumatic events during transit, and traumatogenic experiences during resettlement and substandard living conditions due to unemployment. The process of migration then seems to pose a significant psychosocial stressor to immigrants for example they may suffer from depression or anxiety (Foster, 2001).

Further, students travelling to study in a new environment may experience loneliness as a result of being detached from a family-based support system, particularly when they may still feel isolated from their new social milieu (Hunley, 2010). Furnham and Alibhai (1985) also note that travellers are often subjected to different social values in their new culture milieu, which might cause significant adjustment-related stress. Similarly, Baffoe (2010) found in his research with African immigrants living in Canada that most of the participants expressed feelings of marginalization and social exclusion while living in Canada. In light of immigration rates which indicate a steady rise in the number of Ghanaians immigrating to Canada it is important to consider the psychological and socio-emotional impact of cultural contact with Canadian culture among Ghanaians.

According to Berry (2005), migration is one of the factors that can cause change; cultural and psychological changes occur over a long period and may take years, generations, and centuries. It has also been documented that sexuality is important in the process of migration, (Bhugra & Kalra, 2011). There is limited empirical research focusing on the sexual perspectives and behaviours of youth living in Ghana. Most research carried out in this area centers around sexual abuse, sexually risky behaviours, parent-child communication about sexuality, and adolescent reproductive health (Boakye, 2009; Agyepong, Adu-Opare, Owusu Banahene &, Yarquah 2011; Awusabo, Bankole & Kumi-Kyereme 2008; Stephenson, 2009; Anarfi & Owusu, 2011). The paucity of literature on sexuality in Ghana makes this particular study important in addressing a socially important and understudied area of research. The findings from this study may also be fundamental in explaining why this area is seemingly “off-limits.”

In this study, cultural contact was defined as youth from Ghana immigrating to Canada and now experiencing aspects of Canadian culture. In outlining the importance of cultural



contact, Berry (2010)'s ecocultural framework which sees culture as a progressing adaptation to ecological effects and sees individual traits in a populace as being culturally adaptive was well suited to addressing the research goals of this study. How far then has cultural contact with Canada helped in shaping and/or changing the sexual perspectives and behaviours of Ghanaian youth living in Canada? In this study, dominant views about heterosexuality among Ghanaian youth were explored while Homosexuality, which is considered by the majority of Ghanaians to be an unacceptable form of sexuality, was also examined.

The late president of Ghana Prof. John Evans Atta- Mills mentioned that homosexuality will not be tolerated or legalised in Ghana and stated that homosexuality had the potential to tear down the Ghanaian society (myjoyonline, 2011), and on August 19, 2011 a minister in the Western region of Ghana called for the arrest of homosexuals in this region after numerous directives against homosexuality which led to a public outcry on the human rights of homosexuals in Ghana (myjoyonline, 2011). Therefore, these latter events make it particularly important to consider youths' perspectives about homosexuality in this study. Consider as an example of the extent to which the ideas on the issue of same-sex relations still varies, in March 2013 a psychiatrist in Ghana was of the view that the scientific community was mistaken about homosexuality and revealed that individuals in same-sex relations suffered from a psychological illness that needed to be treated (myjoyonline, 2013).

The above events underscore a strong propensity for many Ghanaians to view homosexuality as being culturally and socially based or determined. However, contrary to this view, research also supports the role of biology in determining an individual's sexual orientation. Nevertheless, Alexander (2000) points out that until relatively recently much of the research focusing on the biological basis of homosexuality has been largely ignored. Jannini, Blanchard,

Camperio-Ciani and Bancroft, (2010) further explain that biology may impact an individual's sexual orientation but that this may not always be the case.

Specifically, Jannini et al. (2010) argue that sexual orientation can be viewed from two different lenses, with one lens highlighting the inherent and unchanging nature of sexual orientation and the other lens highlighting the more malleable and changing nature of sexual orientation. The latter lens would allow room for change in a person's sexual orientation over the lifespan. Haslam and Levy (2006) expand by explaining the constructionist and essentialist positions on sexual orientation. They clarify that essentialists believe sexual orientations are based on biology, and are therefore hard to change regardless of the cultural setting in which one lives. In contrast, constructionists believe that sexual orientation is culturally and socially constructed and as a result there may be differences in sexual orientation in different cultures.

Hewitt and Moore (2002) conducted research with Canadian students and their results indicated that Canadian students believe that sexual orientation can be understood best when considering both biological and social psychological reasons (i.e., a blend of both, rather than only one). A study by Landen and Innala (2002) in Sweden also revealed that more people were beginning to accept biological explanations in understanding homosexuality as compared to previous years when less people believed in biological theories. The two positions on sexual orientation therefore cannot be overlooked and this study considered the views held about sexual orientation by Ghanaian youth living in Canada.

In this study, sex before marriage was also considered. Because chastity before marriage is highly revered in Ghana puberty rites that used to exist among some ethnic groups were to ensure that adolescents did not engage in sex before marriage (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011). This study also explored how various agents of influence such as parent-child communication, sexual

culture, religion, and society impact changes in sexual perspectives and behaviours among Ghanaian youth living in Canada.

### **Understanding Agents of Influence on Changing Perspectives about Sexuality among Ghanaian Youth**

As part of Ghanaian culture, issues of sexuality are not openly discussed despite implicit acceptance that people engage in sexual activities (Van Der Geest, 2001, Anarfi & Owusu, 2011, Kumi-Kyereme et al, 2007). This type of covert environment impacts sexual attitudes and behaviours and highlights the need to consider the “culture” of sexuality as an important agent of influence. Parent–child communication and parental control will be examined as an agent of influence because children are likely to be impacted by the kind of messages they receive from parents and parent-child communication about sexuality has been documented as being limited (Epstein & Ward, 2008, Bastien, Kajula & Muhwezi, 2011). As supported by Harkness and Super (2002), *peculiar parenting behaviour* has its own effect on children. Religion, an important and integrative element of African society, including Ghana will be considered as another influence on youth sexual perspectives.

Anarfi and Owusu (2011) state that African Societies usually examine sexuality from the viewpoint of morality, and therefore religion remains at the centre of most issues regarding sexuality. It will be then impossible to examine sexual views without looking at religion in Ghana which is a highly religious society. In one study of youth influenced by Christianity or Islam, youth reported that issues regarding sexuality were challenging to discuss and that sexuality remained a taboo topic, one that was not open to family discussions (Yahyaoui, Methni, Gaultier, &Lakhdar-Yahyaoui, 2013). Worthington (2004) states that religious training is one of the ways in which individuals develop social sexual identities, and he notes that

sexuality and religion are interconnected since most religions control sexual behaviour among its members. Therefore, sexual identity perspectives will be shaped by the values learned among the members of a particular society. Ghanaian society with its values, norms and expectations will be explored as it will impact the attitudes and behaviours of its members.

### **Purpose and Goals of the Present Study**

With the purpose of addressing the above noted gaps in the literature, this research explored the following three research questions: 1) How do Ghanaian youth living in Canada understand the influence of Canadian sexual practices on their developing sexual views and behaviours?, 2) What role does religion play in the sexual views and attitudes of Ghanaian youth?, and 3) What is the self-perceived impacts of both Ghanaian and Canadian social, cultural, and family-based influences on the sexual views and attitudes of Ghanaian youth? In this study, particular emphasis was accorded to understanding if cultural contact is associated with self-reports of meaningful changes in the sexual views and behaviours of Ghanaian youth, or in the maintenance and strengthening of more traditionally Ghanaian beliefs about sexuality. Ghanaian youth who took part in this study were selected from undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate program and were living in Canada. Taking into account that most of the participants for this study came to Canada for academic pursuit and desire to return home after schooling, they will be referred to as “travelling students.”

## Methods

### The piloting process

Two separate interviews were conducted with Ghanaian youth living in Canada. The first interview was conducted with a young female aged 28 years who had completed a Brock University degree and was currently enrolled in a PhD programme at the University of Dalhousie in Halifax. The second interview was conducted with a young man aged 27 years who had also completed a Brock University degree and was still deciding what he wanted to do the next year. My initial plan for data collection was to recruit youth between the ages of 18 and 25 years. However, following the piloting process, I determined that it made sense to increase the age limit to 30 years. The rationale for this decision was based on the observation that Ghanaians are generally older than Canadian youth when they attend post-secondary studies. Also, due to the compulsory national service that Ghanaian youth have to complete after University in Ghana, most Ghanaian youth currently attending Brock University to complete graduate level studies are between the ages of 18 and 30 years.

In view of this I increased the age limit to accommodate Ghanaian students currently enrolled in graduate level studies at Brock University. Before the start of each interview I spent time building rapport and discussing current events in Ghana, all topics that I shared some common knowledge about with the interviewees. The process of rapport building unfolded for at least 10 minutes prior to beginning each interview, which helped to create a welcoming, open, and positive mood for both the interviewer and interviewee. This process was adopted with all subsequent interviews to obtain answers to intimate questions and topics that are generally not spoken about in Ghanaian society. In addition, the piloting process led me to make several key adjustments to the interview protocol questions. For example, when I asked the questions about

religion and sexuality, I soon realised that even if I had not mentioned religion participants would have been likely to do so since it proved to be a central part of their responses. I also noted two questions that seemed quite similar at first blush but that actually generated somewhat different responses and these were: 1) “In what ways do you think Canadian society has interacted differently with your views about sexuality,” and 2) “Have you noticed any differences or similarities between these two societies with regards to sexual attitudes and behaviours”. Therefore, these questions were not modified for subsequent interviews since it was thought that they would help to uncover a rich array of interviewee responses.

Overall, through the piloting process I realised that participants tended to feel more at ease as the interview progressed. Even though I had given participants an opportunity to review the questions in advance, it seemed that they were still a bit nervous (i.e., nervous laughter) about sharing more intimate information regarding their sexual attitudes and behaviours (e.g., “Did you experience a stage of sexual exploration before achieving your sexual orientation status?”). At the end of the piloting process, I was excited about starting my interviews. My goal at this point was to practice establishing rapport with the interviewees and the interview protocol questions, rather than simply collecting data. It was especially important for me to first establish rapport with the interviewees because they were being asked to think about issues about sexuality for the first time; these were also among the first interviews that I conducted as a researcher. Also, the first two interviews helped me to realise that some of the interview protocol questions defied easy understanding and would need to be rephrased somewhat (e.g., “Do you think religion has helped to shape your sexual development in anyway”). Overall, the piloting process proved to be a success and adequately prepared me for what lay ahead when conducting subsequent

interviews, and highlighted the interview questions that would require additional attention or probes to obtain more detailed responses from the participants.

### **Participants**

Participants for this research interview were recruited solely from the Brock University campus. The Brock University Ghanaian Association (BUGA) for students played a key role in the process of recruiting participants for this study. The research ethics board at Brock University provided clearance for the recruitment of participants and recruitment flyers were posted on most of the notice boards on the Brock University campus (see Appendix B). Participants were recruited from the beginning of January 2013 through to the end of January 2013. To be eligible to participate in this study, individuals had to be Ghanaian students aged between 18 to 30 years who were currently studying at Brock University and who had lived in Canada for at least one year. A number of flyers were handed out at a BUGA meeting at the beginning of January and interested individuals were invited to contact me via the email provided on the recruitment flyer. Through the BUGA and the flyers posted on notice boards across campus, I was able to recruit five participants for the interview. After the first five interviews, I asked participants to tell other Ghanaians they were in contact with about this research, and through this snowballing method I was able to recruit seven more participants. Interestingly, a number of individuals expressed interest initially but were reluctant to discuss the topic of sexual attitudes and behaviours, and therefore declined their participation. Three more participants sent emails expressing their interest and they were interviewed bringing the overall number of participants to 15.

Altogether, a total of five female and ten male participants participated in this research study. The participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to 27 years ( $M = 22.9$ ). In this study a

decision was made to focus on students who have been living in Canada for a period of at least one year. This time frame was deemed appropriate as it allows time for changes to occur in individual perspectives about sexuality among Ghanaian youth. As explained by Berry (2005), change is a process that continues long after original interaction has occurred in societies that are culturally plural. Therefore, it was thought that a time span of at least one year living in Canada would be required for participants to reflect meaningfully on changes in their sexual attitudes and behaviours. In this study, the participants had been living in Canada for a period of time ranging from 1 year to 13 years, ( $M = 4.46$ ). A more detailed description of participant characteristics can be found in Appendix E.

The Niagara region is situated in the middle of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, and borders the Niagara River in the Southern part of Ontario in Canada with a total land area of 1,852 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 427, 421, (“Niagara Region”, 2013). It is linked to the State of New York in the United States by 4 international bridges and is made up of 12 different municipalities. The Niagara region has a population rich in diversity and comprises people from various races, cultures, religion, and sexual orientation (“Tourism Niagara”, 2013). This is evidenced by the number of non-official languages in this region which total 58, 100. (“Statistics Canada”, 2011 census) and the existence of “Pride Niagara,” a community in the Niagara region that exists to acknowledge and celebrate the sexual diversity of the Niagara population. (“Pride Niagara”, 2013). One of the municipalities of the Niagara region is St Catharine’s. With a population of 131,400 (“Statistics Canada,” 2011 census) St. Catharine’s is the largest city of the Niagara region and the 6<sup>th</sup> largest urban area in Ontario (“St Catharine’s time”) It is also known as the garden city and the heart of Niagara. It is bordered to the West by the city of Hamilton and to the East by the American border (“city of St Catharine’s”, 2013). Brock University is situated in St



Catharine's and provides a unique learning environment to students. There is a diverse population of students attending Brock University with 7.8 % of students coming from outside Canada and representing 90 countries. The population of African students at Brock University, both undergraduate and graduate, who were not permanent residents in Canada as of 2011, was 6% ("Brock Institutional analysis", 2012).

The social and cultural context of Brock University can be said to be diverse and welcoming of different sexual orientations. This is evident by the positive space campaign currently at Brock University. This campaign was created with the intention of raising the awareness, respect and a welcoming environment for individuals of diverse sexual orientations, and was created not just for students but also for staff members of such sexual orientations. Among its main objectives is to create an educational environment that is peaceful and comfortable for its members. This space was instituted in 2004 and as at 2013, it boasts of over 700 members. The office of human rights and equity services administers this space and it is open to all lesbian, gay, bi, Trans, two-spirited, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) members in Brock University (Positive Space, Brock University 2013). It can be inferred from the existence of this movement on campus that Brock University offers a liberal environment for individuals who may be gay for example to feel free have a comfortable educational experience. What this also means is that being in Brock University may have given Ghanaian students in this study a certain amount of exposure to different forms of sexuality than they may have experienced had they attended another University

### **Interview Protocol Development**

A qualitative research methodology was employed in this research study, specifically semi-structured interviews. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) imply that the aim of an interview as a qualitative research method is to comprehend ideas of the daily world from the participant's

point of view and that is what this research study intended to achieve. The interview in this study was designed to tap into areas covering homosexuality, heterosexuality, sex before marriage, views about contraception use, and other influences on sexual attitudes and behaviours including religion, society, self-image and peer interactions. These particular areas were explored in order to understand the totality of what constitutes influences on the changing perceptions of sexuality among “travelling Ghanaian youth” in Canada. As stated by Jones (1996) the purpose of a research interview is to comprehend social and psychological developments that have taken place in a specific environment or with people who share certain experiences. Therefore, the utilisation of in-depth individual interviews was deemed to be well suited to addressing this study’s research goals.

Bolderston (2012) states that qualitative research seeks to uncover the ideas, perspectives and thoughts of participants. Rowley (2012) affirms this by stating that interviews afford the researcher a chance to understand viewpoints, behaviours, experiences, and attitudes. It is argued that a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis therefore represents an ideal methodological approach in moving forward. Individual interviews are also thought to be appropriate for use in this kind of study because the focus involves examining sexuality, a topic considered sensitive among the participants. Gilham (2000) asserts that sensitive topics require trust and confidence between the participant and the interviewer in order for information to be divulged. Gilham also argues that other methods of data collection such as the use of questionnaires may not offer sufficient time to establish meaningful interviewer-interviewee rapport to enable trust and confidence, and it is thought that intricate experiences of human beings cannot be easily revealed in organized ways such as with questionnaires. On the other hand, in-depth individual interviews grant this kind of opportunity (Gilham, 2000). Interviews

are said to give participants opportunities to privately express their perspectives without the imposition of a view point by the researcher. It is also a very flexible method since the interviewer may be able to delve into arising topics and shape the line of questioning accordingly, all of which may be more difficult or impossible with the use of other data collection methods (Bolderston, 2012). The purpose of using semi-structured interviews in this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject matter. Bolderston (2012) again states that the use of semi-structured interviews as a form of qualitative data collection gives room for further inquiry and interpretation of some ideas that may emerge in the interview process. Aksu (2009) supports this by asserting that semi-structured interviews give both the interviewer and the participant more liberation to make further enquiries.

## **Procedure**

### **Ethical Considerations**

Olson (2011) notes that it is crucial for researchers to understand and reflect on the benefits and the risks that participants take when engaging in a research study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) affirm that information derived from interviews are from humans and it is imperative then that great care is taken to avoid any kind of harm to them. This research study involved a very sensitive subject matter, namely adolescent perspectives about sexuality and therefore raised some important ethical issues. Caution was however taken and ethical guidelines followed in the process of conducting the research. After obtaining ethics clearance from Brock University's research ethics board (File # 12-098), letters of invitation were sent to each participant prior to the interview to enable them know what the research involved before agreeing to participate if they were comfortable with the subject matter.

Flyers which were posted on notice boards outlined the main focus of this study and contact information was also provided. Participants who had questions concerning the nature of this research study were invited to contact the principal investigator to obtain further information via email. Shank (2002) suggests that ethical conduct in the process of doing qualitative research involves informed consent, and others have noted that before data is collected from participants they must be asked if they are willing to be a part of the study (Olsen, 2011). In this study, consent forms were provided to participants prior to the beginning of each interview, and these were carefully read and signed by each participant prior to beginning the interview sessions. Before the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded of their right to skip questions that they felt uncomfortable answering and also of their right to withdraw from the interview at any point in time if they desired to do so.

Participants were invited to provide their email addresses if they wished to receive a feedback letter, with a summary of this study's findings, upon completion of the study. The interviews were audio recorded and it was made known to participants that the recordings will be stored in a safe place. The issue of anonymity cannot be guaranteed in a face-to-face research interview, and as noted by Olson (2011) participants cannot be guaranteed confidentiality by the researcher which is one of the most vital ethical issues. However, in this study there was only one researcher and one faculty supervisor with access to the data collected, and this served as a safeguard for the confidentiality of the participants' responses. Perhaps of deeper concern in this study was the discomfort that some participants felt in expressing their viewpoints on a subject that is typically considered very sensitive in nature, as outlined in a previous section. Any potential discomfort might have been minimized by the fact that the researcher was also of the

same country of origin as the participants; this might have worked to create a more relaxed interview environment.

The location of each participant interview differed. Eight of the interview sessions were held in the Brock University library in one of the quiet study rooms, and seven of the interview sessions took place in the participants' homes to maximize their level of comfort. After initial contact with all of the participants through email, letters of invitation (see Appendix C) were sent out directly inviting participants to participate in this study and providing them with the complete details of the nature of their participation. On the days that interviews were held with participants, they were given consent forms (see Appendix D) to read and to sign. All participants agreed to have their interviews audio recorded. Participants were reminded at the beginning of each interview about their rights to withdraw from the interview at any point in time, and were also reminded of this again at some sections when questions asked tended to be more personal in nature.

All of the interview sessions were conducted by the author and no one withdrew their participation from this study. Some participants, especially the female participants, were particularly anxious about the kind of questions to be asked and wanted to have a fair idea of what to expect. To this effect they were given the interview protocol and allowed to review the questions and ask for clarification where the questions seemed ambiguous to them. At the beginning of each interview, I spent about ten minutes chatting with participants about things in general and building some rapport in order to make them feel at ease throughout the interview. This detail I had picked up from my piloting process as a way of relaxing participants and emphasizing that we shared the same cultural background which tended to make them more open. As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), it is important to create rapport with participants

in order to understand the circumstances from the viewpoints of participants rather than from the academic viewpoints of the researcher, since viewpoints of the researcher may include preconceived notions.

The duration of the interview sessions varied, lasting from between 15 to 50 minutes each; the length of each interview session depended on how much a participant had to say. As Jones (1996) notes, there is often a great deal of variation in interview length since interviews provide the platform for the interviewer to revise the question ordering based on responses given by specific participants and the order of the interview questions. In three of the interview sessions, the participants asked me to pause the recorder because they wanted to verify if they could be candid about their opinions without upsetting anyone, to which I responded in the affirmative, and then the interviews continued and they openly disclosed what they wanted to say which was also audio recorded.

At the end of each interview participants were given a ten dollar gift card redeemable at Wal-Mart and thanked for their participation. Two of the participants declined the gift card. Participants who had given out their emails to receive feedback on the research results were once again told that these results would be made available to them once the research had come to a successful completion.

### **Interview Protocol Questions and Themes**

An interview guide was developed (see Appendix E) to answer the research questions posed in this study. In some cases, interview questions were modified depending on participants' answers to previous questions. Each interview began by gathering basic demographic information (e.g., participant age and length of residence in Canada). Participants were then asked about the programmes they were enrolled in at Brock University and general differences or

similarities they had noticed between Ghana and Canada, if they had experienced any cultural shock since being in Canada and if so what type, and if they had dated any Canadians since being in Canada.

The interview guide was structured around themes with the goal of addressing the main research goals and questions posed by this study. In this way, the next set of interview questions involved the theme of religion. The interview questions about religion sought to uncover if participants considered themselves religious, if they came from religious families and their perspective on the influence of religion on their sexual attitudes and behaviours. Religion has been found to be a central part of discussions related to sexuality and Addai (2009) posits that religion has for a long time been an integral factor in shaping sexual behaviour. In light of this, religion could not have been overlooked in this research study.

The next set of interview questions focused on trying to uncover participants' views about the influence of both Ghanaian and Canadian culture on sexual attitudes and behaviours, with a goal of comparing the relative influence of both of these cultures. In this way, the focus was on understanding the differences and similarities between these two cultures with regards to shaping sexual attitudes and behaviours.

Interview questions also focused on the theme of contraceptive use, with the goal of uncovering participants' knowledge about and attitudes toward the use of contraceptives. It is noteworthy that in Ghana issues regarding sexuality are rarely discussed (Van Der Geest, 2001, Anarfi & Owusu, 2011, Kumi-Kyereme et al, 2007). Therefore, it was vital to uncover participants' knowledge about and attitudes towards the use of contraceptives and whether they felt that greater awareness about contraceptives is needed in Ghanaian culture.

Another set of questions focused on the importance of self-image and peer influence to uncover if participants considered their sexual attitudes and behaviours as being impacted by society's views about sexuality, if participants felt comfortable in discussing sexuality with their peers, and if participants felt that discussions about sexuality with their peers impacted their own sexual behaviours and attitudes. Here, additional questions focused on other factors that might influence sexual attitudes and behaviours including the type of communication about sexuality (i.e., open and positive or strained and negative) that participants had experienced with their parents, and if participants had been influenced in any way to adopt particular behaviours or attitudes about sexuality (e.g., homophobia).

The next line of questioning focused on uncovering participants' views about sex before marriage, and if they thought their views had changed at all since living in Canada. Participants were also asked to reflect on questions about their sexual orientation and if they had ever experienced a stage of sexual exploration before achieving the sexual identity status they identify with at this time. Participants were also asked to reflect on whether they felt that their sexual attitudes and behaviours were affected by the dominance of heterosexuality in Ghanaian culture and if they had experienced any changes in this regard as a function of living in a Canadian context. Relatedly, the interview protocol included questions that focused on same sex relations or homosexuality since same sex relations are generally not considered "acceptable" in Ghana, but are generally more "accepted" in Canadian culture. The questions on same sex relations focused on uncovering participants' views about homosexuality and whether they felt that their views were affected by the dominance of heterosexuality in Ghanaian culture and if they had experienced any changes in this regard as a function of living in a Canadian context. The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix E.



### **Qualitative Data Analysis Plan: Coding Process**

Olson (2011) posits that after the interviewing process has been completed, the next line of action is to have the data which has been audio recorded transcribed to aid analysis. The data collected through interviews in this study were transcribed to create some order and structure to the data collected. Because the names of participants were kept strictly confidential it was important that transcripts were confidentially numbered. After the transcription process, each interview transcript was carefully read while listening to the audio recording and any errors made in the process of transcription were corrected. Olson (2011) notes that this latter strategy helps the interviewer check for accuracy in the interpretation of transcripts. The interview transcripts were then carefully read to ensure accurate interviewer *knowledge* of each participant's transcript.

As supported by Creswell, (2012), the reading of an interview transcript leads to understanding of the material. The researcher then carefully made notes of each transcript, detailing the general ideas of each participant. These notes were helpful in examining the interview material (Creswell, 2012). Throughout the process of taking notes, major themes for each question arose across all transcripts. These themes included issues such as cultural shock, general differences between Ghana and Canada, and parental communication on sexuality. Shank, (2002) asserts that thematic analysis is important for discovering patterns in the data collected. After these themes had been developed, participant responses were carefully analysed to look for similarities and differences. For each research question, themes were explored. For example, "In what ways do Ghanaian youth understand the influence of Canadian sexual practices on their developing sexual views and behaviours?" was best reflected by the theme of reported differences between the two countries in terms of sexuality. Overall this process of

analysis enabled distinct ideas in the data to be brought to the fore and also affirmed some of the existing literature on Ghanaian sexuality for example; matters of sexuality are not openly discussed in Ghana (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011).

### **Research Findings**

Recall that the main research questions guiding this study were: 1) How do Ghanaian youth living in Canada understand the influence of Canadian sexual practices on their developing sexual attitudes and behaviours?, 2) What role does religion play in the sexual attitudes and behaviours of Ghanaian youth?, and 3) What is the self-perceived impact of both Ghanaian and Canadian social, cultural, and family-based influences on the sexual attitudes and behaviours of Ghanaian youth? The findings related to each of these three research questions are separately addressed in the following sections. In addition, although not originally a focus of this research study, some key gender differences were noted in the participants' views about sexuality and these are also reported.

#### **First research question: How do Ghanaian Youth Living in Canada Understand the Influence of Canadian Sexual Practices on Their Developing Sexual Views and Behaviours?**

The following three themes emerged from the participant interviews in relation to the first research question: 1) Differences in sexual culture, 2) Interaction with Canadian culture and new ideas about sexuality, and 3) Views and ideas about contraception.

**Differences in sexual culture.** Canadian sexual culture was recognized by the Ghanaian youth in this study as being distinct from Ghanaian sexual culture. The participants in this study believed that Canadian culture grants individuals the opportunity to fully explore their sexuality; however, their belief was that in Ghanaian society, restrictions on sexuality prevented such exploration. In Ghana, societal labelling of youth as “deviant” or “bad” if they are found to be engaging in sexual activities has created a situation whereby people refrain from such acts or engage in them secretly. They compared this Ghanaian attitude to the freedom in Canada where

people engage in sexual activities as they desire. One participant (#13, female) summed this up by saying:

P: there are kind of differences because like in Ghana there are so many things that you do, everybody will be like this girl is a bad girl, this boy is a bad boy but here it's like a normal thing,

Freedom to openly discuss sexuality was considered a key feature of Canadian society, whereas in Ghanaian society such discussions were said to be considered private. One participant implied that Ghanaians engage in the same kinds of sexual activities in which Canadians engage, but that the difference lies in the fact that Ghanaians hide their activities while Canadians openly discuss them. Faithfulness to a partner was considered as being a more serious concept in Ghana, than in Canada. A distinction was revealed by one participant (#5, male) in relation to the expression of interest in the opposite sex by females. He noted that among Ghanaian females, their interest in a male will be sufficiently hidden and girls try to create the impression that they are not interested even when they were very much interested in the boys. He also noted in the quote below that with the few Canadian girls he had come into contact with there was no shame associated with expressing their interest in him:

P: like a Ghanaian girl if even like she likes you, she's not gonna pull too much weight for you to know she's a loser or something but here no its different you know and that's one major difference like they don't really mind telling you if they are down, doesn't matter the time they met you or how long they've known you, if you are a nice person you are a nice person you know and they don't feel bad.

The reason why youth may secretly indulge in sexual activities could be as a result of how parents react to such acts. One participant (#8, male) explained that Ghanaian parents often hold more negative attitudes about youth sexual activities, as reflected in the following quote:

P8: I think back home it's different, like if you try it, like if maybe your parents hear that you have sex with someone? They will have some attitude towards you but back here like if you have sex with someone and like you use a condom for instance? They might say it's wrong to some extent but they will still think its fine like you are an adult and you can make the right decisions.

Similar to this, another participant (#11, female) mentioned that in Ghana parents will not allow the boyfriend of their female child to sleep over in their house but that in Canada some parents have no problem with this arrangement. This point is reflected in the following quote:

P: your parents like when you are in your house your boyfriend can come to sleep over in your house but in Ghana no, your parents will not agree to that so yeah.

Participants also noted that people tend to hold more restrictive attitudes about sex before marriage, whereas in Canadian society it was suggested that people are granted greater social permission to have sex before marriage but advised to use protection. The existence of transgender and transvestite people in Canada was also noted as “non-existent” in Ghanaian culture by a male participant and therefore a concept considered very nouveau. It was suggested by one participant (#15,) that sexuality in the Ghanaian context is shaped by biological factors. Canadian society was however described as liberal evidenced in people openly identifying as transgender, gay, and transvestite. The existence of gay people in Canada was pointed to in further explaining how liberal the Canadian sexual culture was in contrast to how same sex-

relations are regarded disdainfully in Ghana; one participant (#7, male) shared his view on this latter issue, as reflected in this quote:

P: to this day homosexuality is something that I can't speak to my parents about and I sometimes pose questions to my mum, oh what if my little brother kwesi was gay, would you accept him or not and she's always like "oh *firi ho nom ko*", don't ask me, always trying not to answer that question or think about that so I see it's like very taboo. Here is more acceptant of a lot of different things, I was taking an advanced human sexuality course recently and certain things that go on here will probably never be spoken about in Ghana and Ghanaian society so I can see major differences, more so than similarities.

In summary, the main differences in sexual culture outlined by participants in this study included the sexual liberation that participants in this study associated with Canadian culture, which stands in sharp contrast to the rigid and controlled nature of sexuality in Ghana as apparent from the quotes offered by this study's participants. Most of the points raised in comparing the two cultures fell under the blanket of sexual freedom such as the acceptance of different sexual orientations and parental attitudes about youth engaging in sexual activities.

**Interaction with Canadian culture and new ideas on sexuality.** Interviews revealed that interaction with Canadian culture had shed a new light on sexuality to most of the Ghanaian youth in this study. A participant (#3, male) stated that previously he viewed sexuality in a negative perspective but after having lived in Canada, he now had a different perspective, which is reflected in the following quote:

P: I think before I came here, my view about sexuality was different and having been here for more than a year, my experiences here has actually, I mean much has been added to it, and some negative perception about sexuality has been changed which I wouldn't

want to go into details, but I think interaction with the Canadian society has helped and influenced my perceptions about sexuality

Similarly, another participant (#14, male) also revealed that Canadian culture had enhanced his outlook on sexuality and made it more understandable to him. The idea that Canada is an uninhibited society in terms of sexuality was again raised by a participant (#5, male) who stated that it was easier to have more interaction with the opposite sex in Canada, and this participant also mentioned that females in Canada were more open minded than females in Ghana. The following quote expresses this participant's view in this way:

P: I think Canada will make it more easier you know for you to explore or maybe date girls or hang around a lot with different girls because like their approach to sex or to maybe hanging out with a dude in a day or two or maybe in a week, it's like nothing, it's like normal but maybe you can meet a girl in Ghana and she will say, like I can't go with you to your house or I can't go home with you today because I just met you, you Canadians, the girls don't give a damn, like sorry but if they wanna have fun, they are like down.

The difference expressed by the participants in this study between the behaviours of Ghanaian and Canadian females might be accounted for by the fact that in Ghanaian society too much interaction with males may lead to societal labelling, and therefore girls prefer to maintain their distance from boys to avoid this label. Open-mindedness was noted, however, by one participant (#7, male) as being a Canadian value he preferred, a value that was in striking contrast to the conservativeness of Ghanaian society. This participant expressed his perspective in this way:

P: oh well to my views now, because of how conservative my parents were and how Ghanaian society tends to be like, I hold that dear but at the same time, over here

everything is about acceptance and what not so now am a little more open minded to certain things, however that doesn't compromise who I am as a person but I mean I see am a little bit more acceptant, because of the environment I live in, being acceptant to certain things, that you know could be defined as sexually deviant or wrong in Ghanaian society, certain facets of that I can see and I am not as you know dismissive or you know negative about it as opposed to Ghanaian conservativeness and everything so.

One participant (#8, male) suggested that views about sexuality in Ghana include the perspective that youth should not engage in sexual relations, but in Canada sex among older youth is generally more accepted but the use of proper protection is encouraged. Some participants have gone then from a view point of considering it wrong to indulge in sexual activity, to it being alright to engage in sexual acts as long as contraceptives are used. A participant (#13, female) disclosed that interaction with other girls her age in high school in Canada changed her previous perceptions about sex, however, she also acknowledged being totally indifferent to the influence of Canadian sexual practices among youth, and she claimed that she maintained her more traditional Ghanaian views about sexuality. She stated that:

P: well I still hold my Ghanaian views coz I grew up there and like that's how I've been brought up so the Canadian one I just turn a blind eye towards it, I don't pay attention towards it, so yeah.

Other participants reported holding a new and different outlook on the issue of gay and lesbian sexual practices among youth. One participant (#10, female) believed that her views on this issue had been impacted significantly from her experiences living in Canada and had evolved from the views she held while living in Ghana. This perspective is reflected in the following quote:



P: I've been able to differentiate the gay and lesbian act differently than the way I did in Ghana. If I was in Ghana I'd hate the people that commit the act, but now I see, I view them individually as a person as against the act that they commit so I will be way comfortable with someone that is gay but then I will never accept the act that they commit.

Lastly, while one participant (#12, male) suggested that Canadian culture had created for him the impression that same-sex relations were "alright," he still thought otherwise. He highlighted his perspective in this way:

P: well it taught me that homosexuality is fine but really I know it's not fine.

Overall, it was apparent from interview findings that ideas regarding sexuality which participants previously shared had been demystified after contact with Canadian sexual culture and participants were forming new perspectives about sexuality while residing in Canada. It was also worthy to note that many of the participants also maintained their traditional values about sexuality.

**Knowledge of contraceptives.** The Ghanaian youth in this study shared different perspectives about contraception use among youth living in Ghana. In this study, some of the participants felt comfortable sharing their knowledge about this issue. One participant (#1, male) reported having some knowledge about male and female condoms, and about pills and injections that are available for women. When asked if the use of contraceptives should be encouraged, he said:

P: I think so, I think that one thing that I see different in Ghana compared to Canada is that when it comes to sexuality, when it comes to sex per say, Ghanaian's shun talking about it, Ghanaian's feel shy talking about sex, Canadians just talk about it like it's a

normal occurrence, and that is something that I find very interesting, but I know that Ghanaians do engage in it and there are lots of teenage pregnancies which I think can actually be avoided because like it or not, the youth do engage in sex so if you encourage the use of contraceptives, maybe some of these diseases that come around with unprotected sex and all those teenage pregnancies can be avoided so it's something that I think should actually be encouraged.

This participant further explained that he believed that Ghanaian youth living in Ghana were aware of the options available to them in terms of contraception but that social (i.e., parental and peer) influences in Ghanaian society does not allow them to make use of these available forms of contraception. He clearly highlighted this view in the following quote:

P: I think they are aware, I was aware as early as when I was in my early teens. I knew of condoms, though It's not that I was using them but I knew of condoms and all those things, but I think that people just don't seem to like using them, because even if you are a youth and you go into an pharmacy to go and buy condoms or even to a mall to go and buy condoms people are going to look at you in some weird way, if you meet an elderly person, you will be shocked that the elderly person might not even sell it to you.

This same view on the nature of the Ghanaian environment being discouraging to young people in terms of accessing available forms of contraception was echoed by another participant (#5, male) who compared it to an experience he had in Canada, as outlined in this quote:

A Ghanaian will go to the pharmacy shop to buy condoms and get there and there are people there minding their own business and you can't even tell the person you are buying the condom, why? Because they think you gonna have sex, when I came here the first month, I went to a convenience shop to buy something, and this guy just came in a

loud voice, I want the blue Trojan, In front of everybody, like he said it so loudly, I am buying a condom, you can never see anyone doing that in Ghana. that's one huge difference , the awareness is there but the perception of someone going to buy a condom, you are already condemned like you are a "whore", you are a "player" , you like sex, you are "spoilt".

Another interviewee (#2, male) admitted to not knowing much about contraceptives, and he also thought there was not enough awareness among Ghanaian youth about this issue. He stated this perspective in the following quote:

P: In Ghana I will say there is more room for improvement in terms of awareness, especially with regards to the youth, like the young ones they hardly understand what you mean by contraceptives, no one takes time to actually explain to them what it is and the advantages it gives them and the liberty it can give them if they incorporate it in their lives.

Yet another participant (#15, female) believed there was some knowledge about contraceptives among young people in Ghana but that this knowledge was more concentrated in the urban than the rural areas. Another participant (#14, male) shared the same view and explained that commercials on contraceptives were run by T.V stations in Ghana; therefore, there was indeed some shared cultural knowledge about this issue in Ghana. Another fact shared by a participant (#6, male) when asked if he thought there was enough awareness about contraceptives in Ghana was that despite the availability of different kinds of contraceptives, the public's awareness about contraceptives was focused almost exclusively on condoms, rather than on all forms of available contraceptives. This participant explained this problem in the following way:

P: no, it's not enough and because all they are giving them are condoms, where there are pills and stuff you can take right? so not every guy wants to wear a condom all the time, so it really doesn't make the whole sexual thing, that's why guys stop using it, so if they have pills, you are not gonna have that problem.

This participant's assertion was supported by another interviewee (#10, female) who spoke of the emphasis on condoms in the following way:

P: in Ghana no, in Ghana everyone just thinks of condom, condom use, condom use, it was not until I got here that I learnt really about contraception and the after morning pill that they do here, so I don't think that there is enough awareness

Similarly, when focusing on Canadian culture in relation to contraceptives one participant (#11, female) said that she had learned more about contraceptives since being in Canada than when she was in Ghana. A participant (#1, male) commented on a key difference between the two societies in their approach to making contraceptives available to young people, as reflected in the following quote:

P: I was shocked when I actually went to Brock University student clinic and I saw condoms there, students were just taking them normally. Back home in Ghana we will have sneakily taken them, even though it was there for us to take we will have done that.

Another participant (#9, male) had also noticed the easy access to contraceptives in Canada which supported the views of the previous participant, he explained this:

P: not so much awareness going on because in Ghana when you go to the hospital for example you don't see like condoms offered say after you've been treated, pick up a condom in the basket or something, I haven't seen so, I don't know about other people, but I don't think there is enough awareness going on.

In summary, all of the participants in this study reported having some good knowledge about contraceptives; however, they mostly agreed that there was not enough awareness about contraception in Ghana. Rather, the participants described Canada as providing greater access to information about, and actual access to, contraceptives. In this way, according to the participants in this study contraceptive use among young people was thought to be encouraged in Canada.

### **Second Research Question: What Role Does Religion Play in The Sexual Views and Attitudes of Ghanaian Youth?**

Five themes emerged from the interviews with the participants in this study and these include: 1) the impact of religion on sexual views, 2) views about the issue of sex before marriage 3) views about heterosexuality, 4) views about homosexuality, and 5) changing views about homosexuality.

**Impact of religion on sexual views.** In this study, most participants responded positively to being religious and all identified with the Christian religion. The only variations in religious faith came from a participant (#6, male) who disclosed that he was not religious and had disagreements with the Christian faith. Another participant (#9, male) also stated that he did not consider himself 100% religious. All participants however confirmed that they were from religious families; the participant who was not religious did state that his family was religious and the other participant who did not think he was fully religious revealed that his mum was religious but his father was not religious. Most participants believed religion did indeed have an impact on their sexual views, with the exception of two participants. One of these participants had previously stated that he was not religious and implied that religion had no influence on his sexual views. The other participant had reported that he was not 100% religious and he also

believed religion had no impact on his views. Another participant (#7, male) who now believed that he was getting closer to his spirituality had this to say on the issue:

P: am starting to become more of one from latter of last year so I started to find myself spiritually a bit more so, I am sorry to say am getting there, I will not classify myself as not religious or as devout as my parents.

One participant (#1, male) who was the son of a pastor and an active member of the church both in Ghana and in Canada said that he was very religious, and revealed his thoughts on the influence of religion in his life:

P: Of course there are many factors that have affected my views on sexuality but I think that the strongest of the influences so far has been my beliefs as a Christian so yes it plays a major role on my views on sexuality.

Another participant (#2, male) was of this opinion:

P: yeah religion has shaped my view on sexuality, being a Christian I was brought up to view sexuality in some sense and most had to do with like its reserved for married couples only so not really much is explored till you are married from our religious point of view.

A view from one participant (#13, female) was that everything was centered on religion and the way she was brought up was based on religion and so religion impacted her sexual views. A different perspective was shared by one participant (#5, male) who linked religion to his decision making in his dealings with the opposite sex, which he clarified in this way:

P: girls in Canada are not like girls back home, sometimes when they want something they make you know they want it, so like if you not in the position to know what you want, to behave yourself or just be a little disciplined, you can go wayward but because

of your religious background sometimes you're just a bit hesitant, so religion it helps the conscience you know, it helped me a lot because there are some things that I haven't done because I knew am a Christian and because of some conviction in me that don't do this, if not, I don't know maybe I could have done a lot.

Similarly, one participant (#10, female) revealed that religion had helped her remain chaste, she commented, "yeah it has I mean I've been able to keep my virginity for twenty years now."

A different perspective was also highlighted when a respondent (#12, male) said, "in terms of like the big part, same sex people and heterosexuals, I am still in the heterosexual game, I am not even looking at the homosexual part right now." A participant (#11, female) on this same issue revealed that "yes it has because if it wasn't for religion I think I will be very wayward and I won't care about certain things." Similarly, another participant (#13, female) had this to say "because of my religion or my faith it has made me, my morals and values, it has shaped my morals and values and so I stick to them, I live by them you know, so I strive to be more of it."

Finally, a participant (#14, male) revealed that "yes I think in a way religion has played a significant role, it has actually reinforced my values, the values I have about sexuality." Religion as evidenced by self-reports can be seen as having a great influence on the sexual views of participants in this study as interviews revealed that it played a dominant role in their daily lives on matters related to sexuality.

**Sex before marriage and changes in this idea.** Opinions on pre-marital sex shared by the participants in this study were diverse. Religion seemed to play a role in the ideas of those who believed it was not a good practice, others also believed it was not right but at the same time felt that it was difficult to abstain from sex. One participant (#6, male) however did not see the

purpose of waiting until marriage to have sex and thought that sex before marriage was good; he gave this account:

P: I think it's good because it kinda lets you know what you going for you know, you don't just hope for anything, you know some guys are stupid and they hope that the sex will be heaven. So am going to marry her and get the sex but you know that can't be what the reward is, the reward is the actual person that you going to be dealing with, so I don't think sex before or after marriage really makes any difference because I think the value of putting sex on the price is not a good idea, because you can't use that as the promise, not nowadays, maybe back in the day (laughs), but not now.

A participant (# 7, male) stated that his opinion on sex before marriage was influenced by his mother, he stated that:

P: it's odd, because I know my parents, my mum as devout a Christian as she is, I know she did not wait before having sex and so me personally I don't see it as being as taboo as most Ghanaians or Ghanaian culture will deem it so I think sex before marriage its, its good.

He also revealed why his thoughts on sex before marriage had changed:

P: yeah because I have been here for so long and everything, this society is more acceptant of sex before marriage than Ghanaian culture may be so I will say yes it would, it definitely plays a part in my decision or thought process.

Sex before marriage was also classified as good by a participant (#5, male) despite his belief that sex before marriage is not consistent with religious doctrine. He stated that "this thing to me personally I think it's cool, I think it's okay, it might not be very religious but I think its ok." He did not think his views on sex before marriage had changed in any way since being in Canada.



Another participant (#8, male) disclosed that abstinence from sex was extremely difficult and also thought that opportunities to have sex were made easier due to the distance from home in Ghana, as reflected in the following quote:

P: what do I think? Well I think it's extremely like difficult to do it, because when it comes to like, Canada or university? Like when you are far away from home, there is so many like opportunities to like get to know girls and like do it before marriage and people don't intend to get married till like they are done school or they are finishing their masters like it's going to be a long time so you might as well just like try for at least once or something.

When asked if his beliefs about sex before marriage had changed at all since being in Canada, he stated that "well back home like I thought I was going to get married to someone and have my first sex with the person but when I came here I already had sex already so." The views of this participant were echoed by another participant (#12, male) who believed that sex before marriage was very hard to resist in spite of biblical teachings against it, he gave this description:

P: sex before marriage, I think , I know what the bible says about it but on the contrary it's a hard thing to resist so at first I wasn't for it but when it comes to it, temptations it's definitely hard to resist so right now, I think it should stay in the marriage no doubt but I think if you are strong enough you could probably keep it in the marriage but it's hard as hell to keep it in the marriage so yeah based on the bible I know it should stay in the marriage but it's hard

The influence of religion is brought up again by a participant (#9, male) who had stated that he was not 100% religious but when asked about his views on sex before marriage, he clearly stated his religious stance in this quote:

P: I will just put it this way, since am not really a religious person, I don't think I have a say like a positive say or a negative say in terms of sex before marriage because I believe if you are that like 100 percent religious? That's when your, that's when your views lies under sex before marriage but compared to me, and my generation right now I don't really see that as a problem.

One participant (#1, male) disclosed that his ideas on sex before marriage had not changed since being in Canada, "I know sex before marriage, religiously is wrong, religiously I know it's against the tenets of Christianity so as a Christian I believe that sex before marriage is wrong." With regards to not experiencing any major change in his thoughts about sex before marriage the same participant explained it this way:

P: no, no, no, no, no, I know that sex is not a rare commodity in Canada, if there's something like that. Canadians I have realised they don't really care about, they don't see sex as sacred, as a big deal as we see it, but I don't know maybe if I didn't have a girlfriend in Ghana and I was going out maybe, I am not saying that I have not done it but I am saying that it is wrong.

This respondent then implies that even though he admits that sex before marriage is wrong, he does not claim to have abstained from it. A similar opinion was shared by another participant (#2, male) who also spoke from a religious point of view and said that "Well sex before marriage, being a religious person, coming from a religious background, sex before marriage is not acceptable so I will have to take that viewpoint as well." This participant also reported that being in Canada had not changed his perspective about sex before marriage; he still believed it was "not right." One participant (#14, male) believed that people should be discouraged from

engaging in pre-marital sex because it was not the best thing, and he further explains this view in the following quote:

P: I think they should be discouraged in the sense that it's not the best way from my religious kind of view and my religious background tells me not to indulge in sexual activities before marriage because once you sleep with someone before marriage then you are spiritually bonded to the person and it makes the two of you one so my religious upbringing does not encourage it but then the society in which we live now tends to encourage it so people who cannot control themselves can indulge in it but they should do it in moderation.

One participant (#3, male) commented on what he perceived as the lack of seriousness attached to sex in general in Canada, and how this has been linked to changes in his own perspective about sexuality. He commented that:

P: I think before coming here, when I got here I realised that people can have sex and its normal, it's part of life, it's just one of the fun that people can have but where I come from it means a lot to have em, to engage in sex with a person so I mean, having gotten here a lot has been influenced.

All female participants shared similar views which highlighted the commitment and sacred element of sexuality. One of the participants (#11, female) stated that "hmm (laughs), sex before marriage to me, I don't think it's right but if people cannot wait then you just use the contraceptives, that's my view, yeah so me I don't think sex before marriage is right." Another participant (#4, female) mentioned the idea of commitment and she believed that sex was prepared by God for two people who have decided to be together forever, she explained "for me that's what I want personally I do want to give myself to that one man who has decided to wed

me, who has decided to be committed to me not someone who is just dating me.” Another participant (# 11, female) shared a similar view based on her religious background:

P: laughs, I don't think it's a good thing but am not one to judge other people that do that but I don't think it's a right thing at all. I guess it's because of my religious background, I know that we supposed to keep it (virginity) till we find the right person, get married and then let them have it because I wouldn't, when you listen to other people how they lost their virginity but they do regret it because they actually found the one that they would have loved to give it to? So I know you have to keep it till you find the right person.

It was obvious that the females in this study were all concerned about preserving their sexuality until they were married and so did not believe in sex before marriage. One of the participants (#13, female) regarded the issue of sex before marriage as being extremely controversial and gave reasons for this:

P: I think it's a very controversial thing and when I think about it am like ok, it's a good thing and a bad thing because, it's a bad thing because the bible tells us that we shouldn't have sex before marriage but I think of popes and am like maybe popes have also had sex so I guess am more, I am just going to save it for the right person that's what I think about it yeah. In Ghana it was like do not have sex before you get married but here it's like yeah you can have sex everyone does it, it doesn't matter so yeah.

A participant (#4, female) also highlighted the importance of preserving her sexuality before marriage and linked her view to her religious beliefs, as reflected in the following quote:

P: well personally I don't think people should indulge in sex before they get married because of the notion that women are supposed to preserve themselves before the day they are married and more importantly on the religious side that sex is actually an

exchange of spirits between two people so I don't think that people should indulge in sex before marriage.

With regards to changes in her beliefs about sex before marriage since living in Canada, this participant (#15, female) revealed that there had been a very slight change, and she describes this change in the following way:

P: well I think the Canadian society does not seem to make a big fuss about sex or do not think that the concept of sex or random sex is too important so in a way it mitigated the way I saw it as very very strong not to have sex before marriage.

Finally, one participant (#14, male) also stated that sex before marriage led to immorality in the society. Sex after marriage rather should be embraced but sex before marriage shouldn't be promoted because it tends to lead to promiscuity in society."

In summary, for those who strongly believed in abstinence from sex before marriage, the data seem to suggest that religion was the main reason for this line of thought. It appeared that the difficulty in abstaining from pre-marital sexual relations was highlighted most strongly by those participants who found it more difficult to follow religious rules governing premarital sex. Interestingly, those participants that reported changes in their views about sex before marriage since living in Canadian tended to attribute such changes to a lack of seriousness attached to sex in comparison to Ghanaian culture on sex.

**Heterosexuality.** All participants in this study identified as being heterosexual males and females. The process of achieving a heterosexual orientation was explained by most participants as being "innate." With the exception of two participants, most participants revealed that they had not gone through a phase of sexual exploration or thought about being anything but heterosexual; they just knew they were heterosexual from the start. A participant (#1, male)

stated, “I think it’s natural, I was born a heterosexual,” a second participant (#14, male) revealed, “I just adopted a heterosexual stance”; and another participant (#5, male) described it in this way “I just grew up to see girls and I was aroused, I loved it.” A participant (#11, female) implied that the environment she grew up in did not allow her to think about anything but heterosexuality, “I grew up in a society that everybody is heterosexual, if you are homosexual they will do it in their room and not outside.” Another participant (#15, female) explained that she was heterosexual and gave reasons why she had not explored other forms of sexual orientation, “I have not but because of my culture and my religion I think I am straight or yes am straight and I feel am straight.” Two participants did however disclose that they had thought about their sexual orientation and wondered if they could possibly have a different sexual orientation. One of these participants (#14, male) explained his thoughts on this latter issue in the following way:

P: I have actually thought about it especially when we had these issues of homosexuality coming into the scene but I don’t think I will like to be anything than what I am.

The second participant (#7, male) said:

P: yeah I have, I’ve thought about it and its, it’s odd because, I’ve had friends that I’ve always known were heterosexual males, and later on they became bisexual or gay or whatever so I started thinking well if that happened to them, is that possible that you know, that I could be the same way as well you know so yeah I’ve thought about it but however it has not gone past anything.

Another participant (#4, female) revealed that she had thought about same sex relations because of a previous same-sex attraction, and she shared her experience in this way:

P: I have thought about it because I have found myself being attracted to the same sex, to some one, am like wow she’s hot, yeah I have found myself attracted to the same sex, I

mean though I have had attraction I have never been really led to be physically intimate or stuff you know, I mean it's a crush and maybe when I was younger I will play around with the girls but it wasn't like anything serious I mean my girlfriend could kiss me on the lips right now like that but it wouldn't be anything it's just you know friendship, keeping it straight (laughs).

The importance of being heterosexual is obvious from this female participant's description, as despite having found herself attracted to the same sex, she ensured at the end of her statement to emphasise the fact that she is still attracted to the opposite sex and is in no way homosexual. Overall, the participants' responses reveal that they perceive heterosexuality to be more ideal than homosexuality and that their beliefs have been to some extent shaped by religious beliefs and societal expectations. It was interesting, however, to note that some participants had wondered about other types of sexual expression.

**Homosexuality.** Participants also shared their views about homosexuality, which they often discussed in the context of their religious values and ideas. One participant (#2, male) said, "my view on homosexuality is based on my religious background, my view is that it is wrong and it should be discouraged and people in it should be helped to come out of it." One participant (#10, female) stated, "because of my religious background, it's not approved, in the bible God said Adam be with Eve, Adam must be with Eve and not a man." Another participant (#11, female) echoed this same perspective saying that:

P: hmm same sex relations, well I think it's not right because in the bible God created Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve so I don't think it's a good thing but I just don't judge them because like at the end we will know what happens.

A participant (#1, male) who stated that his father was a pastor emphasised his belief that the society in which an individual grew up would impact significantly that individual's sexual orientation, he said that:

Personally I see it as very bad, I see it as they are in an environment that supports something like that. It supports them when they are kids, I've read articles, I've heard on the news of people who discovered that they were attracted to people of the same sex when they were like 5, 6, or 7. To me I see it as, and again that is because of where I come from, in Ghana if a 6 year old boy discovered that he has affections for guys and the parents get to know of it, they are going to see it as spiritual, the loving parents are going to take him to the pastor to pray over him. Those who are not as loving are going to beat the hell out of him for it to disappear so I see it as people who are gay are living in a society that encouraged it and their society had different forms of sexuality so you just had to discover the one that fit you, but in my society, am not saying that there are no gays in Ghana, but the dominant one, that people don't frown upon is being straight, I don't have anything against them but I wouldn't indulge it.

Some participants in this study also discussed same-sex relations based on ideas of procreation which underscored their opinions about same sex relations. Most responses given by these participants were of similar thoughts and it was mostly shared that same sex relations were not beneficial to society. It was also apparent that their thoughts on this issue were as a result of religious or Christian doctrine which procreation was considered a part of whilst same-sex relations was considered a violation of this doctrine. Several quotes below highlight these opinions, for example one participant (#3, male) stated:



P: my personal view about same sex relations is that it should be discouraged, it is not the best form of sexual relations and the main purpose of God creating man and woman was for the two to sexually procreate, sex was made for procreation, that was why it was initially designed by God so for this main reason I think we should use the right organs for the right kind of things, yeah so it should be discouraged.

Similar sentiments were echoed in this quote by another participant (#6, male) as he used the analogy of flowers and buds in illustrating his view, he stated:

P: I think they are unproductive, they really just a waste of time, because the guys or the girls who are doing this, yeah they want to live their lives, adopt a kid or whatever, they not really procreating naturally you know so if, in the tree of life every guy is a branch and this just keeps growing right? For those guys it's just a bud and it stops, there is no flowers it stops right there and the other guys just keep on branching, branching, branching and there is fruits.

A participant (#15, female,) reinforced the belief on the importance of procreation:

P: well I think it's a very unnatural process because procreation is inhibited so I think that we should not encourage same sex relationships because I don't think nothing good comes out of it, it's a very unnatural process, the natural is for a man and a woman to be together to procreate so I think it's a bit unnatural.

On this same idea of procreation another participant (#12, male) commented:

P: same sex I don't approve of it because I think it's a slap in the face to God because like it's supposed to be a man and a woman, like to make a baby, if you do it with the same sex, it's like what's the point, you know what I mean, it just doesn't make sense to me.

A participant (#14, male) considered same sex relations to be a deviation and based his ideas on the sexual orientation of the majority of the population, as he implied that people in same-sex relations were the minority in society, and therefore same-sex relations could not be considered a good form of sexual relations. This participant stated that:

P: I think when we take into consideration, let's say out of a population of 100, we have just about let's say 5 or 10 percent who are homosexuals, that attests to my earlier submission that it's a deviation, if out of a 100% we have about 80% being, being homosexual then you can say, that's the way things should be, but this is a case where they are in the minority so I think, it's a deviation.

Despite a majority of the participants sharing views which were not in favour of same-sex relations, one participant (#7, male) explained his indifference to it and considered it to be a private matter, and this view is reflected in the following quote:

P: homosexuality is a touchy topic but I think, am really indifferent to It all, especially the way I see it, it's someone else's personal error, what they do in the bedroom is up to them and that is how it should be so I, whatever I feel about it doesn't matter really, it's just another form of courtship, another relationship that you can get into with another person, so far as it being taboo, I don't see it as being, well because I've lived here so long and I've been groomed to be acceptant to certain things, I can't see it as being as bad as people say it is, however at the same time personally, it's a very touchy subject in general.

One participant (#4, female) also shared her belief that people have a right to love whomever they desire but then she said that same-sex relationships are not consistent with a belief in God and that she was very sure that God would frown upon same-sex relationships even

today. Additionally, some participants explained when they thought that it would be “ok” to hold a different view about same-sex relations. One participant (#4, female) stated, “if God said that yes I made this man to love this man, he was born to love this man, like that’s why God made him to be with another man then maybe I will be like ok God you know it all so you do your thing.” Another participant (#11, female) also stated, “Maybe when there’s a new world and God creates man and man then yeah but now no.” The rest of the participants revealed that nothing could change their ideas on same-sex relations. One participant (#3, male) stated, “I don’t think anything will ever make me have a different view on homosexuality.” Another participant (#14, male) said “I don’t think I will ever have any different view on homosexuality other than the view I have now and that view is that homosexuality is a deviation.” One participant (#6, male) said:

P: if men start having babies? Then fine, that’s the way to me it’s supposed to be, they deviate and me my problem is they not procreating, if a man and a woman can stay together, the only thing that comes out of it is a kid right? And that’s the translation of their relationship, that’s what they made so if you not making something like that? I see it as your blood line stops right there. So I don’t know, have babies and maybe you will change, you proliferating, you are making new people.

A participant (# 5, male) also highlighted that his perspective on this issue will not change as a function of living in Canada. He stated that:

P: I don’t think anything will change it, ok fine if anything will change it, to accept it I don’t think I can ever accept it but like to change it? Hmm they should stop it.

In summary, it can be inferred from the participant responses that previous views and attitudes towards same sex-relations still exist even after cultural contact with Canadian culture.

Most participants with the exception of a single participant (#7, male) held the view that same-sex relations were a deviation based on religious views and also the idea of procreation.

**Changes in views about homosexuality.** As previously noted, in this study all of participants identified as being heterosexual and most of the participants believed that same-sex relations were a deviation from the norms of heterosexuality. Nonetheless some of the participants intimated that their ideas about same-sex relations had undergone some important changes since being in Canada as a result of the liberal environment in Canada and also as a result of seeing more of such relations shared among young people living in Canada. A participant (#1, male) described the changes in his sexual views in the following way:

Its changed in some way, back home in Ghana I don't think I will have even spoken to a guy who was gay, I don't think that I will have even befriended one but that's because in Ghana if even people see you associating with a gay person they assume you are also gay and I wouldn't want to have that tag on me, but over here I like how people are ok and normal with it so I mean I don't care because they are all human beings.

The impact of societal labelling is evident here as this participant also shared his perspective about the labels that some members in society will attach to someone that associates with a gay or lesbian person. The perspective that all people should be considered equal regardless of their sexual orientation was raised by a participant (#13, female) in the following quote:

P: yeah it has, at first in Ghana it was more of, oh I hate it, I hate it, I hate it, Ghana is more of I hate it and I hate the people doing it as well, Canada is more of they are people, what they do is their own problem, I could care less but at the same time you got to see them as people as well, you can't just hate people based on what they do in the bedrooms, you got to know them before you judge them.

Another participant (#2, male) also felt that he had become more open to same-sex relations and that there was a possibility that he might become even more open to same-sex relations if he remained in Canada for a longer period of time. He stated that:

P: the only difference in the view I have being here is that I have become more conscious about it and therefore more tolerable in that sense so maybe my tolerance level will be higher in a few years if I remain here but that is as far as I expect it to go, I don't expect to have a different view on the matter.

A participant (#4, female) expressed how she had come to terms with same-sex relations and said "I guess now I don't blink twice, am ok I just move on, nothing new under the sun." Another participant (#5, male) could not come to terms with the notion of same-sex relations and stated that he viewed it as some form of fashion and also felt it was something that was socially and culturally based. He described his perspective in the following way:

P: I've just got to know some people are just more like crazy, and they are not shy to show it in public and some people like Anderson Cooper and others, they have everything but they just want to be gay to support gay people or that's really their orientation? I just don't get it like they just want to be different. I don't know what they want but it makes no sense so my views changed like I just got to see all those people and to me it's like a fashion or something like that, something societal.

"I've grown to accept it" was the simple statement made by another participant (#8, male). One participant (#10, female) stated that she had come to differentiate the individual from the act of engaging in same-sex relations. Another participant (#9, male) referred to the more lax laws in Canada in the following way:

P: as I said before the views has changed based on the laws over here, the way even in class, I have a couple of lectures and I see these guys just sitting beside each other and just doing whatever they please to do but nobody says anything.

A participant (#13, female) explained the change in her perspective on the issue of same-sex relations in the following way:

P: yeah in Ghana it was more about strictly heterosexuality but here I think I've grown to accept homosexual people as well so it has certainly changed because now I have a broad and open mind and am not close minded as I was in Ghana.

Another participant (#15, female) touched on the stigma attached to same-sex relations in Ghana:

Yes it has changed, in Ghana it is more of a taboo, the social stigma attached to same sex relations was stronger but coming here I realise that people might not be homosexuals but they are just trying to explore their sexual identity so there is room to allow people to explore their sexuality so comparing the two societies I think my views have changed a little bit coming to Canada.

In contrast to those whose views had undergone changes, some male participants asserted that they had not experienced any changes in their views since being in Canada. One participant (#14, male) stated this was because he still considered homosexuality to be a deviation from the norm, and he considered it unnatural and believed males were created to be with females and vice versa. The other participant (#3, male) detailed the reasons for the maintenance of his old views in the following way:

No it hasn't changed, my view on it hasn't changed, I still stand on the fact that it should be discouraged though several people seem to come up with the opinion that that's the way they want to live and they should allow them to do whatever they like but I think if

we should encourage a society where everybody does whatever he or she likes then we are virtually heading towards a lawless society so it should be discouraged to me yeah.

In summary, the majority of the participants in this study reported experiencing some kind of change in their views about sexuality and same-sex relations since living in Canada, and that these changes were a function of exposure to Canadian cultural norms and values. In spite of acknowledging and maintaining their more traditional and Ghanaian stance on the issue of sexuality, the participants in this study were able to reconcile their views with those adopted by the majority of young people living in Canada; many of them reported that they could differentiate the individual as a person from their sexual behaviours, recognising that individuals have the freewill to choose their sexual orientation. It was also evident that the majority of the participants in this study tended to subscribe to the social constructionist, versus essentialist, view of same-sex relations.

### **Third Research Question, What is the Self-Perceived Impact of Ghanaian and Canadian Societal, Cultural, and Family-Based Influences on the Sexual Views and Attitudes of Ghanaian Youth?**

The following three themes emerged from the interview process and these are examined in the next section: 1) the impact of the Ghanaian environment, 2) parental influence/communication on sexuality and its effects, and 3) the role of peers in sexual views.

**The impact of the Ghanaian environment.** Participants shared ways in which they believed Ghanaian society had impacted their views on sexuality. Overall, most of the participants in this study agreed that there had been some impact as a result of the environment they grew up in. A participant (#1, male) raised the issue of the societal definition of gender roles as he stated:

P: The Ghanaian society saw people who were like me as males and saw people who were like you, the interviewer right now as female so there is nothing that is going to interfere with that for me, personally growing up so I have always seen myself as male and I think that that is because of the environment that I was born in, the values and the cultures that they held unto and the ones that they taught me made me know that I am a man and it has always been like that for me.

Another participant (#15) reiterated a similar view on gender roles in her words:

P: obviously because in Ghana sexual identity or sexuality is based on gender and biological difference between a man and a woman, there is no form of mid- section where it is socially constructed, it is just based on the biological differences between girls and boys so I think it has shaped my views on sexuality.

The ways in which society defines codes of sexually accepted behaviour was highlighted by a participant (#1, male) who discussed these guidelines which exist in the Ghanaian environment:

P: the Ghanaian community actually helped shaped my view of sexuality by having certain guidelines that define the limit of sexuality especially in terms of how much you can explore the subject but over here you realise that there is no restriction on how much you want to explore sexuality on an individual basis, there is room for you to explore without being restricted in any form which is a total deviation from what being in a Ghanaian community had, like a different experience.

The secrecy surrounding issues of sex and sexuality in the Ghanaian environment was emphasised by a participant (#5, male) who said discussing such issues was considered inappropriate, he clarified it:



P: you know Ghanaians we are a little laid back to express our sexuality you know like if you like it, it's not appropriate to show too much sexuality and stuff, even though you want to talk about it, it's like you're "spoilt" or something but here It's not like that. In Ghana, the whole sexuality topic, they hold it in some secrecy but here it's kind of open so I think it helps to understand it, because in Ghana we can't express too much, even if you want it you can't talk too much about it, you have to respect sexuality, you can't talk about it anyhow.

Another respondent (#5, male) emphasised the same ideas in his response and stated the difficulty of having any interaction on sexuality, even in a local language (i.e., Twi), he expounded on this:

P: it's hard because growing up sex was always a very taboo topic you know amongst everyone growing up, like it wasn't till a certain age that I even started to learn certain things that were you know sexual, as far as in twi even, and I think it's always been so very conservative and very taboo such that it's not in the open where we speak about it so I would say yeah, it's really difficult to be honest.

In considering the social aspect of sexuality, a participant (#8, male) disclosed that despite talking to girls in Ghana he had not thought about taking them out but then after being in Canada he had learnt how to do that and so described the experience as different. A different view was shared by a participant (#12, male) who placed more emphasis on religion rather than the Ghanaian environment he said "come to think of it I don't think it did, I think it was more the religion." Despite living in Canada presently it was apparent that the control of sexuality in Ghana had a profound influence on a participant (#13, female) who was still careful in choosing her words when interacting with Ghanaians in Canada on sexual matters, she explained further:

P: sometimes even if am trying to be open to certain sexual comments, I'm really cautious about the people around me especially if they are Ghanaian am more cautious about what I say than if they were Canadian I will just feel free to say whatever I want to say than if they were Ghanaian because they will remind me of my background I will be more cautious.

Some participants also mentioned the idea of homosexuality being unacceptable in Ghana and identified that as the bases for their own views on same-sex relations. In summary, it is apparent that the environment these participants grew in moulded their views and attitudes towards sexuality, either consciously or unconsciously. The only variation coming from the participant who believed religion had a greater impact on his views than the society. Religion, however, can also be seen as being a part of the society in which case religion will be a part of the wider societal fabric.

**Parental influence/communication about sexuality.** What role did parental communication about sexuality play in shaping the sexual views of participants in this study? Most participants reported having very little to no communication with their parents on issues concerning sexuality. One participant (#1, male) explained the only time that he had come close to having such a conversation with his mum in the following way:

P: No, never, the only time that I had a conversation about sex was when my mum caught me kissing a lady, and at the age that I kissed a lady it would have been legal in Canada, it was just something that was normal but my mum took it as, like It was a serious case, something that if my dad had heard would have turned out to be something very bad, drastic for me, but I don't remember sitting down talking to my mum about sex, my dad about sex no.

The seriousness attached to the actions of this participant is distinct as he states that if his dad had gotten to know about the issue it could have escalated into a more serious problem. This participant also elaborated on the impact that this non-interaction with his parents had left on his mind and implied that parents and children lived with a silent agreement on sex in Ghana:

P: Of course, my mum saw me kissing a lady and all hell broke loose, the next time I was kissing her I was thinking about it, so the Ghanaian society is like this, parents and children live in an unspoken agreement that kids are not supposed to engage in any form of sexual activity with anybody, that is it. Technically you the kid you know that you are not supposed to do it even though your parents haven't told you that you are not supposed to do it, so if you do it and you are caught, you are going to be punished in a way that it's going to be like you actually broke a law of your parents. That is the Ghanaian society for you, even though our parents do not talk about sex with us, we do know that we not supposed to do it.

Another participant (#2, male) narrated that he never had any communication with his parents about sexuality but then as far as the impact that this lack of communication on his developing sexuality, he stated that:

P: well when we are watching a movie and maybe sexual scenes come up they make comments that sometimes will suggest their view on the issue but that is as far as it went so not very much impact from that side, because I am not really clear on their view on it that much to make judgements.

One participant (#11, female) believed that parents shared information about sexuality with their children mostly through indirect communication forms. She shared the following example of her experience communicating about sexuality with her parents:

P: it was more like you don't need to have a boyfriend because you might get pregnant, why do you want to get married now? Those kinds of stuff but it wasn't like oh don't have sex, they don't just go straight to that point, they will just say don't have a boyfriend, but I know what they mean but they don't say don't have, sex, they just say don't have a boyfriend that's all.

Another participant (# 4, female) shared her experience in this way:

P: no, my mum will always say in twi but let me translate it "you get a boyfriend when you get married", that's how she will say it, so basically my notion is that I get a husband then I get a boyfriend, it made no sense but she was saying it and she stuck to it, sex no I don't think me and my parents ever had that conversation.

One participant (#3, male) disclosed that where he came from, discussions surrounding sexuality are absent and children that are found to be engaged in such discussions are considered "bad."

He stated that:

P: the society that I come from we highly respect, and elders or parents don't easily discuss issues about sexuality with their kids and even when they hear you talk about it, you are mostly beaten or you are seen as a bad person so I didn't have the privilege of getting sex education and so we had to learn it in the hard way, in school, you are taught in class or even with your peers and that is how I got to know about it but my parents never openly discussed sex with me and that is how I grew up and I think it's still practised where I come from in Ghana

He also shared the negative and positive effects of this kind of environment on him:

P: yes and no, yes in the sense that sometimes because of that lack of sex education from childhood, me in particular I tend to sort of lack confidence when am for instance

hugging someone in public, you sort of see it to be a sin or kissing those kind of things because it was not openly tolerated in the society that I grew up so yes in that sense, and no because it actually in a way moulded me morally.

Another participant (#6, male) stated that he had no interaction on sexuality with his parents, and all the information he received were from friends and experimenting, but what he did hear from his parents was this “ don’t be gay, that one is general, don’t be gay.” Another participant (#7, male) also gained more information on sexuality from the internet and said the conservative nature of his family did not permit for sexual discussions:

P: no, not much at all, actually I think about it sometimes and it wasn’t as much as it probably should have been, I got more information from my friends and internet than I did from my parents because it’s always taboo and its always uneasy to speak about and coming from such a home where you know everyone is a devout Christian and it’s very very conservative, it was tough so we didn’t speak much about it.

One participant (#10, female) explained that she did not have any communication with her parents and the only thing that came close to interaction were intense romance novels handed down to her to read by her mother to read. Another participant (#15, female) revealed that she had no communication with her parents on sexuality and the effect this has had on her seems to center more on gender roles, “in a way because if your mum should tell you that you are a girl, go to the kitchen or your duty is to take care of a man it in a way shapes your sexuality but in terms of a direct communication I do not think so.” Some participants explained that they had some interaction with their parents on sexuality but was somewhat limited. Another participant (#13, female) said she had communication with her mum but not her dad and also stated that the views she had was dependent on her in the long run:

P: they influenced it to an extent, they will be like oh be careful blah blah blah but I guess at the end of the day it's my decision and since I come from a good moral background especially a good cultural background so am more cautious of what I do.

A participant (#9, male) stated that he was always told to use condoms which were the only form of communication he received from his parents. One participant (#14, male) who had some form of interaction on sexuality with his parents however felt it was an uneasy subject for discussion and stated in this quote:

P: yes there was but I will say it was kind of limited, once in a while they do talk about issues relating to sexuality especially my parents trying to advise me to abstain from pre-marital sex and all that but one thing I realised was that my parents themselves were kind of shy you know discussing such issues with me.

He also explained why this kind of communication from his parents had an impact on his life, as reflected in the following quote:

P: yes I will definitely think about them when, when trying to engage in such because I've it's like they have socialised me throughout my developmental stages and I think they've had kind of big influence on my life.

Overall, it is clear that there was a significant lack of information on sexuality available to participants by their parents with the exception of a few participants. Participants also acknowledged the uneasy feelings associated with these types of interactions when they did occur.

**The role of peers.** Participants previously disclosed that some of the information they received about sexuality was from their friends. Participants now revealed if they had any communication with their friends about sex and whether they found these interactions

comfortable and again if they felt in anyway influenced by what their friends told them. One participant (#1, male) explained that he sometimes got uncomfortable discussing sex but then also gave reasons for this discomfort, as outlined in the following quote:

P: I like to talk about it, not because I feel comfortable talking about it, but because I like making funny comments about sex and I've realised that even myself at times I feel uncomfortable talking about it especially if I see that the conversation is very intense, I feel uncomfortable, I grew up in an environment back home in Ghana where sex wasn't something that people talked about even in schools, I never had any talk on sex with my parents or with my siblings. I started talking about it when I got to school and even that time it was just people bragging about their conquests and not necessarily educating ourselves. I must say that I am better than the average Ghanaian when it comes to talking about sex but at times it gets uncomfortable for me.

He further explained why he thought there was discomfort attached to discussions about sex:

P: Yeah, that is just how we are trained. I don't think there's any Ghanaian who is so comfortable talking about sex , I don't think there is any Ghanaian youth, unless the person was actually born in Ghana, maybe brought out of the country somewhere else, maybe Canada, US or UK and the person came back to Ghana. Those people are very expressive when it comes to sex but even with that society sees them as "spoilt kids."

Almost all the participants in this study had little difficult discussing sexuality with their peers.

For example, one participant (#4, female) stated, "we do discuss, I will be the first to ask my friend so "how was it" you know yeah we do talk about it openly and it's no it's not uncomfortable, we've passed that stage." Another participant (#12, male) said, "Yeah, at times I discuss it a lot with my friends and I feel very comfortable, there's nothing to hide." A different

outlook was brought up by a participant (#5, male) who felt people should talk about sex even if they are religious because it is a part of life, he stated:

P: yeah, so comfortable like, its good, I have a lot of experiences like guys who try to be too churchy around, don't get me wrong am, am religious, I love Jesus trust me, he's the best but like there are realities on the ground, you have to deal with realities, it's not religious stuff, the perception about like condoms and sex and the way people see it, I think they should be more like open about that like the reality is there.

One participant (#14, male), however, revealed that he did not like discussing issues of sexuality with his peers, "I rarely discuss such issues with my friends, once In a while I do but I really don't like to discuss issues regarding my sexuality. Another participant (#7, male) stated that he was initially uncomfortable with such discussions, "me personally I do speak about it with my peers, at first I wasn't as comfortable but now I've grow to become more comfortable about it." Most participants also believed that these discussions with their peers had no impact on them, as outlined by one participant (#14, male) in the following quote:

P: I don't think my discussion with my peers will change my attitude, will change my sexual attitudes or sexual orientation in anyway but I think it rather informs what I already know so it's not likely to influence me in anyway because I have, I have friends who smoke I have friends who drink, I discuss such issues with them but I do not personally engage in such activities.

Some participants however thought discussions with their peers had an impact on them, a participant (#13, male) said:

P: with my friends it's just like we talk about what we do and the stuff we like to do and your friend will tell you like what to do and what not to do and it changes like how you



think and how to make things better and how to fix how you behave in your sexual encounter.

Another participant (#5, male) explained why the views of friends could have an impact on him, he stated, “yeah you have different views so like if someone says something differently and it makes sense yeah definitely, yeah it’s going to influence me.”

Taken together, it was clear that participants did have interactions with their peers on sexuality which most of them found comfortable, it was also apparent that they learned from ideas of their peers but the extent to which it impacted their own personal views varied for each individual participant.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

Themes that emerged from the interview data have been outlined as a means of answering the three main research questions which guided this study. Overall, these themes have been connected to the overarching research topic which is “to which extent has cultural contact with Canadian culture influenced the changing perceptions of sexuality of Ghanaian youth in Canada?” The main themes revealed in this study include the perceived differences in sexual culture reported by the participants. Notably, Canada was described as a free country wherein most people can express themselves freely with regards to sexuality. On the other hand, the participants in this study perceived Ghana to be a restrictive society wherein sexuality can only be discussed or expressed covertly. The participants in this study reported that religion was a major factor in shaping their views about sexuality. In relation to the issue of sex before marriage, some of the participants in this study stated that sex is ideal for married couples only, whereas others had no qualms with sex before marriage. The theme of contraception revealed the lack of knowledge of diverse methods of contraception in Ghana with more emphasis on condom

use in Ghana. Canada was said to provide more information, diverse forms of contraception, and greater accessibility to contraception for youth. Another key finding related to contraception that was found in this study was that youth reported being deterred from using contraception because of the perceived judgemental reaction of other Ghanaians, especially the elderly; they did not wish to attract undesirable labels such as “bad girl” or “bad boy.” Most of the participants in this study considered heterosexuality to be the ideal form of sexual orientation, and most of them had not considered other forms of sexual expression. Homosexuality on the other hand was considered by most participants as being socially unacceptable. Exposure, however, to other forms of sexual expression while living in Canada had raised participants’ awareness of different sexual orientation possibilities. Participants identified religion as being a major factor for why they were against same-sex relations and they pointed to the fact that God was not in favour of same-sex relations because it *interfered* with natural procreation. Parent-child communication about sexuality was noted by the participants in this study as being essentially non-existent. Participants also disclosed that sexuality was discussed with peers and this helped them to gain different perspectives about sexuality. Overall, this study’s findings suggest that cultural contact with Canada and traditionally Canadian values about sexuality exerted some impact on the sexual perspectives of Ghanaian youth living in Canada. Nevertheless, it was apparent that traditional notions about some aspects of sexuality (i.e., same-sex relations) remained unchanged for many of the participants in this study.

### **Gender Differences in Participants’ Views about Sexuality**

In this study, some unexpected and important gender differences were noted in participants’ responses during the interview process. First, none of the females in this study responded positively to dating Canadian men or having close interaction with them. In contrast,

some male participants revealed that they had either dated or had close interaction with Canadian females. Because of their personal experiences, the male participants in this study had more to say on the topic of comparing Ghanaian and Canadian sexual practices. The female participants in this study could not provide such information because none of them had dated or had a close relationship with a Canadian male. This could speak to opinions given by females in this study which centered on the fact that too much interaction with the opposite sex could attract “name calling” among Ghanaians and since most of their interaction in Canada is among Ghanaians, this may have led them to stay away from Canadian men.

Second, despite most participants stating that sex before marriage was not in line with religious doctrines, it was evident that the female participants in this study were more concerned about chastity before marriage and of preserving their sexual experiences until after marriage, as compared with the male participants. Despite the fact that some male participants mentioned that sex should be kept within the marital relationship, quite a number of them also stated that they found nothing wrong with sex before marriage and thought people should use contraceptives if they could not abstain from engaging in sexual relations. The female participants in this study, on the other hand, mostly shared the view that sex before marriage was wrong and should not be encouraged.

Third, with regard to the issue of parental communication about sexuality, most of the participants in this study reported that they did not receive any communication about sexuality from their parents. However, the responses from the female participants implied that even when there was little to no communication, their parents had provided some indirect hints such as “you get a husband then you get a boyfriend,” and “don’t have a boyfriend.” Also, some of the female participants reported that their parents handed them romance novels in preparation for what to

expect in future sexual relationships. These participant responses speak to how much importance Ghanaian society places on females being chaste, and the indirect references that parents often made to their children, as reported by the participants, might represent a way of cautioning their children not to bring any kind of shame in the form of pregnancy at an early age to the family.

Lastly, regarding the issue of same-sex relations, the female participants in this study spoke more about not judging the individuals in same-sex relations irrespective of the fact that they did not endorse such relations. Also, the female participants often spoke about separating the individual from the act they commit and the human rights of individuals in same-sex relations. In contrast, the male participants in this study discussed the human rights of homosexuals but the idea of not judging people was not mentioned, and neither was the thought of differentiating the individual from his/her sexual orientation. In summary, the male and female participants in this study held some very different views about sexuality, and these differences might be based on different societal expectations for boys and girls.

### **Discussion**

This qualitative study involved in-depth interviews with 15 Ghanaian youth living in Canada with the aim of explaining the impact of cultural contact on their perspectives about sexuality. The findings from this study reveal that cultural contact had some impact on the perspectives held by Ghanaian youth living in Canada. Most of the participants in this study reported some noticeable changes in their ideas and perspectives about sexuality. Overall all participants reported that they believed Canada was a more liberal environment in which to understand and explore sexuality, as compared with Ghana.

Previous research on sexuality in Ghana and in other parts of Africa has demonstrated that sexuality is generally regarded as a taboo and sensitive topic. For example, Izugbara (2004) asserted that in a lot of Nigerian cultures words connected to sexuality and sexual needs such as menstruation and masturbation are vague and tacit which portrays the secrecy surrounding sexuality. Respondents in this study confirmed these notions and it was apparent that the very nature of Ghanaian socialisation does not encourage open discussions about sexuality. This can also be traced from the root source, the primary agents of socialisation which includes the parents and peer groups which exist within the wider society. The values of the society and environment in which participants live are most likely imbibed by the people who live in that society, for which reason the cultural values and ideas of the Ghanaian environment are a part of the life of the young Ghanaians consciously or unconsciously. For example, in this study the participants reported that religion was a very important aspect of their lives, and religion is considered a very significant part of Ghanaian society. Ghanaian society is highly religious and religion has played its part in exerting almost some form of religious control on its adherents based on beliefs in the bible for Christians and the Koran for Muslims; note that all of the

participants in this study identified as Christians. Most of the views and perceptions about sexuality in this study were framed within a Christian religious context.

In looking at the findings relevant to the research questions in this study, recall the proposed developmental niche framework and the ecocultural and acculturation frameworks (see Figure 1) that were presented in relation to understanding the perspectives of young people about sexuality in a Ghanaian context. These two frameworks outlined the agents and factors that helped to explain the importance of cultural contact on views and perspectives with particular emphasis accorded to understanding stability and change in views about sexuality. The findings related to the research questions examined in this study will be discussed with reference to these frameworks.

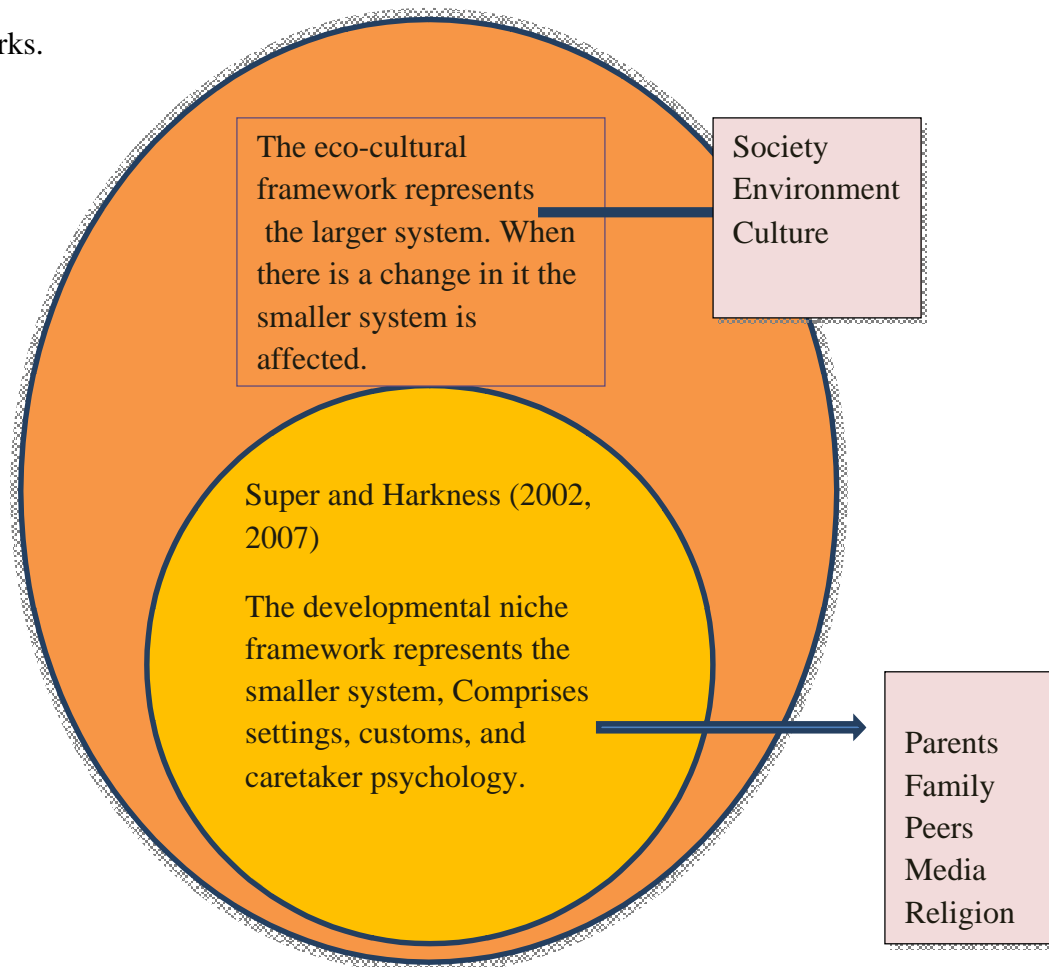


Figure 1: Theoretical Frameworks Diagram

### **How Do Ghanaian Youth Living in Canada Understand the Influence of Canadian Sexual Practices on their Developing Sexual Views and Behaviours?**

An important finding in this study involved participants' perceptions of key differences in the sexual culture defining both Ghana and Canada. In this study, it was important to first establish if there was any difference in the sexual cultures defining Ghanaian and Canadian cultures, and then to determine whether these differences had an impact on the sexual views of the young Ghanaian participants in this study. While some previous research has examined within group patterns of sexual behaviours and views about sexuality among youth within a particular country or cultural group (Loke & Yuen, 2006; Råssjö & Kiwanuka, 2010; Zheng, Lippa & Zheng, 2011), relatively less research has specifically examined differences between countries and cultural groups with regards to sexual culture. Berry (2005) alluded to the fact that contact with a foreign culture impacts the cultural perspectives and values of immigrants. In this study, the participants shared their understanding of the vast differences in the sexual practices and norms often defining Canadian and Ghanaian cultures. One of the main themes that emerged was the idea of sexual freedom and liberation that is often so openly expressed by Canadians, as compared to the more secretive expressions of sexuality by Ghanaians.

In discussing their understanding of what is meant by sexual freedom, the participants in this study shared a number of ideas. First, they disclosed that Canadian culture allowed open discussion of issues related to sexuality, something that is often absent in Ghanaian culture. They also perceived that there was a lack of restriction on sexual activities in a Canadian context. The same sexual activities that would earn people labels such as "bad" and "deviant" in Ghana did not attract such labels in Canada. It was also mentioned that sex was not considered as sacred in Canada, as compared to Ghana wherein faithfulness to one partner was emphasised. The last

issue that was mentioned by this study's participants was the existence of other types of sexual orientation such as same-sex relations, and it was thought that same-sex relations were more prevalent in Canada than in Ghana because people had the freewill to choose which ever orientation they deemed fit for themselves. These findings are consistent with those found in another study focusing on how Iranian immigrants living in Canada viewed the prevailing Canadian sexual culture (Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2007). In this study, Iranians perceived Canadians to speak easily on matters of sexuality and as having a lack of commitment to a partner. In this case, Iranian immigrants were asked to compare the Canadian sexual culture in relation to their own Iranian sexual culture, as was the case with the Ghanaian youth participants in this study.

The key question then becomes what is the impact of these perceived culture differences about sexuality among Ghanaian youth in this study and among other such youth living in Canada. In this study, discussions with participants depicted an effort on their part to reconcile the culture they knew with the new environment in which they found themselves and what this new environment had to offer. For example, some participants made reference to the fact that the changes they were now experiencing were a reality check which made them realise they were actually in a new country and they had to get used to some major cultural differences. As outlined in Figure 1, the ecocultural framework consists of the society, environment, and culture, all of which can affect each individual member living in a given social and cultural environment.

Zhou (2012) stated that some research conducted on international migrants revealed that changes in behaviour occurred as a result of living in a new environment. Another noteworthy finding of this study was the ways in which contact with Canadian sexual culture had given new ideas, or given a new exposure to the Ghanaian youth with regards to their own ideas about



sexuality. In this study, the participants' responses revealed that previous ideas about sexuality which were associated with negative connotations had been replaced with newer ideas as a result of how easily Canadians expressed themselves sexually, which participants now considered to be a positive aspect of the Canadian sexual culture. Similarly, in another study (Shirpak et al., 2007) Iranians reported that they positively viewed Canadians' overall lack of difficulty with discussing sexuality and their knowledge about sexual issues. In the present study, several of the young Ghanaian participants reported positive perspectives about the freedom that Canadians had to explore their sexuality and sexual orientation. With the absence of societal stigma attached to certain actions, Ghanaian youth in this study believed Canada was a country of freedom where sexuality can be explored and which they believed was the way it should be. Consistent with this latter finding, Mclelland and Tolman (2011) stated that sexuality should be considered a normative part of life, implying it should not be shied away from but regarded as an ordinary part of our existence. The participants in this study reported that they felt this was evident in the Canadian sexual culture, and some believed that this is the way it should also be in the Ghanaian culture.

A third major finding of this study was related to the ideas of contraception and how much knowledge Ghanaian youth living in Canada and Ghana had about contraception Hagan (2012) stated that despite educational programs about sexual reproduction in schools and media education about contraceptives for a period spanning over two decades in Ghana, there is still insufficient knowledge of contraception among youth in Ghana. Knowledge about contraception is however important to minimise issues of teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and AIDS. Knowledge of contraception is also important because youth still engage in sexual activity regardless of contraceptive knowledge. In another study (Tawiah, 1997) interviews

revealed that participants believed there was a significant lack of contraceptive knowledge in Ghana, however these same participants reported believing that the situation was better in urban areas, as compared with more rural areas. Tawiah (1997) similarly found that women living in urban areas of Ghana were more likely to have access to contraceptives and to use them, as compared with women living in rural areas. In this study, it was evident that youth participants, while living in Ghana and Canada, had the most knowledge about condoms as a form of contraception. The participants in this study shared their belief that the lack of contraceptive options, outside of condoms, likely discouraged some youth in Ghana from using effective means of contraception, especially if they did not particularly like condoms.

In reflecting on how their knowledge of contraception has changed since living in Canada, most of the participants reported that Canada had provided crucial information about contraception, and that now they knew about other options such as the morning after pill which they had no knowledge about before coming to Canada. Several of the participants in this study also discussed how television commercials about various means of contraception added to their knowledge base. Some of them also revealed that courses they had taken in schools (e.g., Public Health courses) also added to their knowledge about contraceptives. Interestingly, many participants in this study shared their surprise about the fact that contraceptives were openly displayed and given away in public, a sight which was not common in Ghana due to the secrecy that often accompanied anything sexually related. For example, the availability of condoms in the hospital and clinics for students was considered to be a very new experience for most of the participants in this study, and it was suggested that even if such services were made available in Ghana young people would still go about obtaining contraceptives in a way that would avoid detection.

Another important issue that was raised by the participants in this study was that even when people did know about contraceptives in Ghana, societal control did not encourage people to actively use them. Some participants stated that it was not a lack of knowledge about contraceptives that was the problem but rather the attitude toward people using or even simply buying contraceptives. Whereas in Canada most people buy contraceptives without any sense of guilt or shame, in Ghana people buy contraceptives cautiously, both old and young and in most cases they try not to be seen buying them. The societal attitude therefore discourages young people from using and buying contraceptives so as to avoid labels like “spoilt” and “player.” Some of the participants in this study also pointed out that, in Ghana, even when people actually go in to pharmacies and other places to buy contraceptives, they may end up not buying them because they realise there are people there who may see what they are doing. In some cases, elderly people may refuse to sell contraceptives to youth because they believe that this will contribute to wayward behaviour. Consistent to these findings, Bosmans, Cikuru, Claeys, and Temmerman (2006) discovered in their study of contraceptive use in Congo that instead of contraceptive use being linked to responsible sexual behaviour among youth, contraceptive use was rather connected to promiscuity on the part of youth in Congo. In addition, societal barriers to discussing sexuality also contributed to the lack of promotion of contraceptives. Another study in four African countries namely Ghana, Burkina Faso, Malawi and Congo revealed that adolescents felt embarrassed and in some cases afraid to access contraceptives as a result of negative societal attitudes about sexuality (Biddlecom, Munthali, Sing, & Woog, 2007).

These latter findings add to the existing literature that explores overall knowledge about and use of contraceptives among youth in Ghana, as well as some of the barriers associated with accessing contraceptives. Specifically, this study’s research findings help to explain the

perspectives of Ghanaian youth living in Canada about sexuality and contraception. For the most part, the participants in this study believed that contraceptive education should be encouraged in Ghana and more awareness should be created as it is a very important topic to discuss toward the goal of ensuring safe sexual practices.

**Implications.** This study's findings underscore the influence of the prevailing Canadian sexual culture on the views and perceptions of young Ghanaians living in Canada. Overall, the new experiences to which the participants in this study were exposed contributed to the development of a new outlook on sexually related issues such as contraception. However, this study's findings also reveal that there are many challenges that face immigrants who choose to live in Canada and are suddenly saddled with a new cultural environment to which they have to adapt, especially when they have no previous experience with this cultural climate. It speaks to the fact that it is necessary for new immigrants or "travelling students" to have a very good idea of what they may be exposed to in Canada in order to reduce the shock they may experience when they suddenly find themselves in this new environment. For example, Canadian brochures could highlight key aspects about Canadian culture more broadly, rather than focus solely on the nature of Canadian weather and food.

This would provide some key background information about the people who actually live in Canada and some important information about typical Canadian cultural practices. This information would also be relevant and beneficial to new immigrant youth from other ethnic groups, and not solely to Ghanaian youth. Despite experiencing some initial cultural shock when arriving in Canada, if youth have had an opportunity to read in advance about some of these typical Canadian cultural practices they might be in a better position to adapt to some of the challenges they might face in terms of interpersonal and sexual relations while living in Canada.

Khawaja & Mason (2008) document that there is significant stress associated with immigration which can make the whole process a traumatic experience. Therefore, the suggestion of creating a Canadian brochure is also relevant because despite information on Canada being readily available on the internet, a brochure would be more accessible if it is delivered at Canadian embassies at the time of visa application; this type of brochure would be vital for individuals living in countries in which internet resources are limited. This brochure could outline the fact that Canada is a highly multicultural society, and caters to the needs of its people and accepts people of diverse sexual orientation. The brochure will serve as a document that individuals can easily draw on before they access other sources of information.

Another key finding highlighted by the participants in this study is that in Canada sexuality is expressed much more liberally. One of the implications of this finding is that Ghanaian society has a strong hold on the actions of its inhabitants with regards to sexuality, while Canadian culture embraces sexuality and in this regard people can often speak freely about it. It might be argued that a benefit of the prevailing Ghanaian perspective toward sexual issues might be that by discouraging – *and controlling* – early expressions of sexuality among youth there are fewer instances of interrupted education and unwanted pregnancy. On the other hand, a challenge to this way of thinking is that youth are prevented from actually finding out the information they need from the right sources. With everything shrouded in secrecy instead of this kind of control working as a benefit it may rather have the opposite effect, as information received from the wrong sources which may not be verified may affect choices made by youth. In this study, some of the participants suggested that Ghanaian people might need to take a cue from the sexual practices of Canadian people. This is in no way implying that the prevailing Canadian approach to sexuality should be adopted, but rather in some cases where benefits are

seen such as the free expression of sexuality, it may be helpful to the Ghanaian society as a whole. Participants in this study positively affirmed the benefits of this kind of more liberal sexual expression.

In addition, this study's findings imply that a lot of work has to be done on raising awareness about contraception in Ghana. As evidenced by self-reports, most of the participants in this study alluded to the fact that they had gained more knowledge about contraception while living in Canada, as compared to what they knew while living in Ghana. Again, condoms were stated as being the most commonly known form of contraception, as it is the most commonly advertised form of contraceptive in Ghana. This implies that the Ghanaian youth in this study are privileged to have access to information about contraception as a result of being in Canada but then the youth in Ghana may still have limited contraceptive knowledge and access. Educational institutions have a role to play in promoting awareness about contraception. If reproductive health is fully integrated into curriculums and students are taught the most basic information about contraception, it may go a long way toward preventing some unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

More broadly, the media also has a role to play in promoting awareness about contraception and the different available options. Currently, despite some knowledge about modern forms of contraception in Ghana, its use does not seem to be as high. Evidence on this was gathered in a study by Adanu, Seffah, Anarfi, Lince, and Blanchard (2012) about modern contraceptive use among women in Accra, the capital of Ghana. Their results showed that although the participants in this study had knowledge of modern contraceptives, there was still a significant lack of knowledge on how these contraceptives worked. Intensive education therefore needs to be carried out, education should also be carried out in different local languages in

Ghana as English may not be understood by everyone and translating the information to common local languages will be beneficial to persons who may lack essential literacy skills. .

Finally, the results of this research showed that cultural context and notions of contraception did not change dramatically even in cases where contraceptives could be accessed. Therefore, on a societal level, it will be necessary to look more carefully at the health implications of not using contraceptives as opposed to linking contraceptives with promiscuity and labelling youth as “bad.” People should begin to realise that the use of contraceptives can help to discourage youth from engaging in careless sexual practices in contrast to engaging in reckless sexual acts as a result of negative perceptions attached to being seen purchasing contraceptives and negative labelling. As evidenced in the study by Hagan (2012) youth still engage in sexual activities regardless of contraceptive knowledge; therefore, it is necessary to help protect these youth from avoidable complications (e.g., unwanted pregnancies). In addition, free access to contraceptives in locations such as hospitals and clinics can provide some people an easier opportunity to access contraceptives, especially when they do not have the means or desire to purchase them. Future research in this area could explore the perceptions that adults in Ghana have about adolescent contraceptive use, with the goal of aiding in solving the issues surrounding contraceptive use among youth.

### **What Role Does Religion Play in the Sexual Views and Attitudes of Ghanaian Youth?**

Consistent with previous research on the relationship between religion and sexuality, this study’s findings also showed that religion had a significant impact on the sexual perspectives of young Ghanaians living in Canada (Khoi, Whelan, & Cohen, 2008, Davidson, Anderson & Norton, 1995)). Most of the participants in this study identified as being very religious and affiliated themselves with the Christian faith. Interviews revealed that most of the youth believed

their attitudes towards sexuality were based of their religious values and religious upbringing. These participants reported that their sexual values helped them develop a conscience which aided them in making moral decisions. A major finding of this study had to do with views about sex before marriage. As a result of Christian teaching on pre-marital sex, some participants considered sex before marriage to be wrong and felt it went against the tenets of the bible. In support of this perspective Ojo (2010) posits that a lot of seriousness is attached to sex by Africans and therefore sex is traditionally reserved for married couples and unmarried people are not supposed to engage in sexual activities.

Most of the female participants in this study were concerned about preserving their virginity and their sexual experiences for the right man and so believed pre-marital sex was not right. However, some of this study's participants believed there was nothing wrong with sex before marriage and they felt there should not be a lot of fuss attached to it. Another idea put forth by some of the participants in this study was that engaging in premarital sex might create the impression that people only got married for the purpose of sex, which would defeat the purpose of marriage since at the end of the day partners might not be compatible with each other and this might lead to divorce. Other participants also shared their view that sex before marriage would pose a significant challenge to individual's Christian beliefs.

Another key finding of this study's data involved changes in participants' views about sex before marriage since living in Canada. Specifically, some participants felt that their views about premarital sex had changed since being in Canada. A new environment which offers liberty and possibilities of sexual exploration was at the core of these changes. It was discussed that sex was not considered something sacred in Canada as it was viewed in Ghana, and therefore people often engaged in sex more casually in Canada. This latter perspective tempered



some participants' view that it was extremely important to abstain from premarital sex. Interestingly, Addai (2000) notes that the religious rules which previously governed sexual behaviour in Ghana have lessened and as a result of social change, sexual initiation is no longer linked to marriage. In this study some participants believed that sex before marriage should not be encouraged as it led to moral decadence in society.

Another key finding of this study involved Ghanaian participants' views about sexual orientation. One noteworthy thought was the fact that most participants had not previously thought about their sexual orientation or wondered if it was possible to be anything other than heterosexual, while all participants identified as being heterosexual. Nonetheless, some participants alluded to the fact that they had considered their sexual orientation and wondered if it was possible that it could change as a result of witnessing same-sex relations in a Canadian context. An interesting and unexpected finding was the fluid nature of sexuality in the Canadian context, as put forward in this study. Participants now believed that it was possible for individuals to switch sexual orientation, something which previously they had not thought about or believed possible. Overall, most of the participants in this study reported that they had simply accepted being heterosexual and believed their upbringing and societal values did not encourage them to step outside the margins of heterosexuality. Important to note also is that some participants placed a lot of value on being heterosexual and believed that they were born heterosexual and therefore there was no room for deviation.

Another key finding in this study involved the perceptions held by Ghanaian youth about same-sex relations. Most of the ideas on this issue were heavily influenced by religion. Most of the participants believed that same-sex relations were sinful and should not be encouraged in society. Many participants also shared the view that society influenced perceptions about

sexuality and that it is society's values that contributed to their views about same-sex relations. Izugbara (2004) posits that Christian socialisation conditions its adherents to revile homosexuals and in this regard gives them the idea that involvement with homosexuals is likely to jeopardize their relationship with God and in this way the heterosexual order is maintained and Christians are unwilling to accept changes. Morrison, Ryan, Fox, McDermott, and Morrison (2008) support this latter point by stating that Christian principles have been perceived as having negative views about sexuality with some Christian sections condemning sexual activities which are not heterosexual or which do not lead to procreation. In this study, a main argument also put forth on the basis of religious beliefs was that in the bible God created Adam and Eve and not two men or two women. Participants believed then that it was already crystal clear that the bible did not endorse same-sex relations and being Christians they went along with this notion. Another idea reinforced throughout the interviews was procreation.

The Ghanaian youth believed that heterosexuality was the best form of sexual orientation because it yielded fruits, in other words heterosexual relations led to procreation which helped sustain the human race. Same-sex relations were however considered unfruitful because individuals in same-sex relations could not reproduce and in their opinion this defied the codes of being in any sexual union. In referring to sexuality in Nigeria, Izugbara (2004) notes that children are one of the reasons for encouraging heterosexual relationships because children can be reproduced within such a relationship and same-sex relations are considered fruitless and aberrant due to their inability to lead to procreation which is considered a risk to the human race. In spite of a lot of the participants in this study sharing some of the same views about same-sex relations, a challenge to this way of thinking was posed by one participant who believed that same-sex relations were alright and that individuals had the right to choose their sexual partners.

This was an unexpected finding since this individual also identified as being religious. In this case, the impact of societal socialisation as outlined in Figure 1 might be said to exert some influence since this participant noted that staying in Canada for an extended period had given him the idea that same-sex relations were alright.

Interestingly, most of the participants in this study reported believing that their views about same-sex relations would not change, and in fact many of them believed that their views would not change unless there was a new world order wherein it was explicitly stated that same-sex relations were alright. Izugbara (2004) notes that heterosexuality surpasses just being a sexual orientation, but is more or less a way to culturally ensure that individuals remain within the accepted sexual code of the majority in society. This then could also be another reason other than religious beliefs why participants consider same-sex relations a deviation because the majority of people in the Ghanaian society are heterosexuals.

In addition to views about same-sex relations, another important finding in this study involved changes in views about same-sex relations that some of the participants in this study reported since living in Canada. It was evident that contact with Canadian culture had forced some participants to actively think about same-sex relations, despite not being in favour of same-sex relations. For example, transitioning from an environment where such relations are abhorred to a new environment where same-sex relations are generally accepted, some participants felt that they had little choice but to accept the idea that individuals in these relations should be treated equally as human beings. Most importantly, some participants reported that they viewed the whole act of homosexuality as being disassociated from the individuals who committed the act. These latter participants reported that they were now more conscious of their actions towards homosexuals and despite not being supportive of such acts; they were more exposed to it and

were trying to reconcile their previous ideas to their new environment. The liberal sexual environment in Canada had allowed them to be open to new ideas without judging the people involved. In this study, some participants held the view that there were no changes in their thoughts about same-sex relations since living in Canada; these participants still believed that same-sex relations were wrong and would lead to moral decadence within society.

This study's research findings suggest that the majority of the participants implicitly believed that sexual orientation is socially constructed; for instance, they reported believing that in Canadian society people are granted the opportunity for people to engage in same-sex relations, if they so desire. This latter perspective is consistent with research and literature highlighting the constructionist view to understanding sexual orientation (Haslam & Levy, 2006, Jannini, Blanchard, Camperio-Ciani & Bancroft, 2010). However, research also supports the role of biology in shaping sexual orientation, and scholars point out that a more essentialist position on sexual orientation allows for a more liberal attitude towards same-sex activities (Tygart 2000, Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst, 2002, Landen & Innala, 2002, Hewitt & Moore, 2003). In this study, the views held by the Ghanaian participants in this study were highly entrenched in religion and reflected a more conservative attitude towards same-sex activities. For example, several of the participants noted that same-sex relations in Canada occurred more frequently than they did in Ghana because the Canadian cultural context is "permissive" about sexual orientation. Jayaratne, Ybarra, Sheldon, Brown, Feldbaum, Pfeffer and Petty (2006) demonstrate that unwillingness to accept sexual orientation is often as a result of religious codes, a finding that is supported in this research study.

It was evident from participant responses that Canada seemed to them a more liberal and supportive environment of same-sex relations, as compared with Ghana where sexuality is

viewed as being regulated within socially acceptable margins. However, the idea of sexual liberalism in Canada should not imply or give the assumption that all Canadians or the whole of Canada is in support of same-sex relations, as individuals can hold different views about sexuality. Saewyc, Skay, Pettingell, Reis, Bearinger, Resnick, Murphy and Combs (2006) put forth that undesirable messages aimed at sexual minority groups are wide-spread throughout North American society. Taylor and Peter (2011) also document in a survey carried out in 20 Canadian school districts with participants from all regions of Canada except Quebec that homosexual students did not enjoy a comfortable school environment as their heterosexual colleagues did. Chinell (2011) found in research in a Canadian University that homophobia was still prevalent in social work education. Homophobia and transphobia is documented as still being rife on college and University Campuses in Ontario despite efforts to protect the legal rites of queer and Tran's students (Canada Newswire, 2013). The main factor to consider is that the Canadian law clearly prevents discrimination against individuals based on their sexuality (Constitution Act, 1982). This law allows different forms of sexualities to exist and creates an environment where people are not judged on the basis of their sexuality. In light of this, if people, for example gay and lesbian individuals are seen in the Canadian society, the general perception by newcomers in Canadian society which in this study are Ghanaians will be that Canadians have no issues with such sexual relations or are not homophobic but then it must be recognised that individual views on this matter may vary, so then the sexual culture of Canada cannot be seen as being homogenous across the country; however, it may be more permissive than the sexual culture in Ghana. As supported by Nierobisz, Searl and Theroux (2008), the twentieth century has seen a tremendous change in the way homosexuals in Canada are dealt with or treated, and this change they speak about is positive.

**Implications.** In considering the impact of religion on the views and perceptions of participants in this study, it is necessary to first understand that religion still plays a vital role in regulating the behaviour of society. More importantly, religious socialisation from a young age impacts individuals long after they leave the religious environment. The influence imparted by religious organisations and groups is key because its supporters hold these religious organisations and groups in very high esteem. For example, the idea that sex before marriage is sinful might be argued by some people as restricting the lives of the youth and preventing them from exploring their youth, even enjoying their sexuality. Others may also raise the issue of compatibility between potential spouses which could be realised if initiation before sex is allowed. On the other hand, a challenge to these latter arguments and a potential benefit of abstinence from sex before marriage is the possibility that young persons might avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually contracted diseases. However, it is highly likely that young people out of curiosity will still explore their sexuality and engage in sexual acts away from the public eye. Therefore, a medium ground must be found on the issue of sex before marriage, one that explores carefully both the benefits and disadvantages. If young people understand the possible negative consequences of premarital sexual relations it will be easier for them to maintain some level of caution in their sexual activities.

Another important finding in this study involved participants' views about heterosexuality. Here again, as a function of societal relations, most of the participants in this study reported simply accepting what they grew up to become in terms of their sexual orientation preference which was heterosexual and they simply lived within their societal values and expectations. In this way, these participants might experience difficulty in coming to terms with other forms of sexual expression to which they are not used. For example, they might adopt more

negative and discriminatory attitudes toward other forms of sexual orientation such as same-sex relations. This raises the question about the problematic issues that might be evidenced when new immigrant and/or travelling youth hold such “context and culturally specific” views and attitudes about same-sex relations. It is possible that immigration to a new environment leads to new and conflicting views about sexuality. How individuals navigate these different views about sexuality will likely be mostly based on their personal upbringing and the society in which they grew up. People must therefore be open-minded before they move into a new environment. As participants in this study alluded to, despite not being in favour of same-sex relations they were now more accepting of same-sex relations than before their arrival in Canada. However, the participants in this study reported that their new views about same-sex relations did not change their fundamental view about same-sex relations, but rather their views on this issue were moulded to fit the more general Canadian value system in this regard. This also poses a significant challenge especially to people who desire to return home after school such as “travelling students”. For example, it will likely be difficult for some students to reintegrate into their more traditional cultural way of thinking about sexuality after being away for a period of time and being exposed to new ways of thinking about sexuality. The interviews in this study revealed that some participants were ready to let go of their new ways of thinking once they returned to Ghana, based on the perceived fear and stress associated with being viewed as adapting to the more liberal sexual views of a foreign culture. Toshiaki (1997) posits that when students who have travelled to other countries for the purpose of study return to their home countries they can experience difficulty in readjusting to the practices of their own countries; in this case, the readjustment process can be a difficult one

Clearly, the data in this study point to one important benefit of exposure to the values of a new culture, namely a degree of understanding about and respect for individual rights to practice different forms of sexual expression. There must also be some education to help people understand the role of biology in shaping sexual orientation, which will help people to be more open minded to same-sex relations. Future research is needed that explores how people reconcile their different environments after travelling to new countries, with a special focus on African students travelling to Canada and other countries. This is important due to the significant lack of research in this area despite its importance to the well-being and adjustment of foreign students. Necessary steps therefore need to be taken in order to help travelling students, immigrants and other travellers function and settle well in their new environments while adjusting to a new culture. Baffoe (2010) states that when considering immigrant groups in Canada, the least amount of research has been carried out with African immigrants and it is therefore necessary that more research is done with this group of people.

Educational institutions in Canada need to know and understand the background of these students in order to know why they may have certain views or perceptions. There should be an effort to embrace and encourage them, and also to have some patience in dealing with them as certain ideas may seem out of place in an environment where it is more lenient. The transition from one society to another is not easy and therefore as opportunity presents itself such students must be helped. Educators must first be firmly educated in diversity because that is the only way they can begin to understand students from different backgrounds. Foreign students should be taken into account when planning educational programmes and services in schools so that their needs may also be met. Workshops can be held that enlighten students and help them in their transitional process. Educational institutions should also make sure not to homogenize the



educational environment as this can in away help overlook multicultural differences among their students. Again counselling services exist on campus and there could be some tailored to meet the needs of international students facing a difficult times on campuses. Also if there is more research into experiences of Africans in Canada, not just Ghanaians in Canada, it will go a long way to provide insight into what Educators can do with the information from the research to meet the educational needs of these students.

### **What is the Self-Perceived Impact of Ghanaian and Canadian Societal, Cultural, and Family-Based Influences on the Sexual Views and Attitudes of Ghanaian Youth?**

A key finding from this study involved a more intricate understanding of the many ways in which Ghanaian society can shaped the sexual views of young Ghanaian participants. One theme that emerged was the societal construction of gender roles in Ghanaian society, which some of the participants perceived as creating a situation whereby they could not defy these roles. Males are expected to act in typical male fashion while females are also supposed to act in a feminine fashion. In this regard, an underlying issue that was alluded to by the participants in this study was that gender is based on biology and not societal construction, and therefore if you are born a boy then you are expected to act as such. The overall restriction to open societal discussion about sexuality was another factor that was raised by some of the participants in this study. Specially, they reported that Ghanaian society had rigid guidelines concerning sexuality and people had to remain within these margins because anything outside of it was considered inappropriate and led to societal stigma which most people tended to avoid. The more secretive nature of sexual issues within Ghana was emphasised several times by the youth in this study, and discussions about sexuality were also considered to be restricted. Similar to Ghanaian culture, Izugbara (2004) notes that in a lot of Nigerian cultures words connected to sexuality and

sexual needs, menstruation, and masturbation are vague and tacit which portrays the secrecy surrounding sexuality.

Brofenbrenner (1977) referred to the microsystem as the association between the maturing individual and his immediate environment which can include the home or school. Worthington, Savoy, Dillion, and Vernaglia (2002) refer to microsocial impacts on the development of sexual identity, which they state results from the individual's involvements with family and friends. In this way, values and beliefs embraced by members of the individual's microsystem can exert a profound influence on sexual identity development, and it is thought that sexual behaviours and sexual attitudes and values are acquired from this microsocial environment (Worthington et al., 2002). Consistent with this theoretical perspective, in this study the participants reported that their parents spoke secretively and indirectly to them about sexuality, and this finding has been documented in other sub-saharan African countries (e.g., Bastien, Kajula, & Muhwezi, 2011). Despite the implied nature of parental discussions about sexuality, children understand that they are not supposed to engage in sexual activities. The participants in this study indicated that the minimal communication they received from their parents about sexuality was uncomfortable and awkward. The effects of limited communication about sexuality on the participants in this study included feelings of discomfort with opposite sex relations and expressions of affection (e.g., hugging); participants did not want to be labelled as "bad" if they engaged in such activities at a young age. Majied (2013) states that parents play a pivotal role in impacting how their children view and experience sexuality (e.g., encouraging feelings of confidence or humiliation). Consistent with these findings, other research has documented the lack of parental communication about sexuality. For example, Epstein and Ward (2008) in their study in an American University with a sample of students from different races

found a lack of parent-child communication about sexuality. Similarly, Bastien, Kajula and Muhwezi (2011) found minimal parent-child communication about sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa. In another study, discussions about sexuality were also said to be fraught with discomfort by a significant number of parents (Yahyaoui, Methni, Gaultier, & Lakhdar-Yahyaoui, 2013).

Finally, this study's findings indicated that peers also had a part to play in shaping ideas about sexuality. In the absence of parental communication about sexuality, most people relied on friends to obtain information about sexuality. This study however revealed that most participants felt very comfortable when discussing sexuality with their friends and so gained valuable sexual knowledge from their friends, a finding which has been well documented (Ali & Dwyer, 2011). However, some of the participants revealed that they became uncomfortable discussing sexuality with their peers, which might be as a result of not having previous communications about sexuality. With regard to the influence of peer communication about sexuality, some people believed that their views were influenced by their peers, while others believed that the views of their peers should not be taken too seriously. In summary, this study's findings supported the argument that peers played some role in shaping the sexual views of young Ghanaian travelling students, but that compliance with the views offered by peers depended on each individual's personal values and upbringing.

**Implications.** Society can be seen as having a great impact on individuals to an extent such that even when they are out of that environment they still abide by certain rules which they have grown to know and appreciate. Once more societal contexts differ and so something that may be considered normal and acceptable in one society may differ in another society. In this way, sexual views and attitudes can be said to be socially and culturally constructed. This study's findings support the view that gender in Ghanaian society tends to be viewed in biological terms,

while in Canadian culture gender is constructed as being more malleable, as people may defy their biological gender, as evidenced by transvestites and transgendered individuals. In Ghanaian society the biological ascription of gender may serve as a means of control and order, as individuals may belong to either a masculine or feminine group. On the other hand, individuals who feel they do not fit these two categories may end up being silenced and may have to live their lives not being who they truly feel they should be which could lead to some negative social and mental health outcomes. To mitigate some of these negative outcomes, there needs to be greater awareness about sexuality among young Ghanaians, both in Ghana and travelling to and living in other countries such as Canada.

It will be highly difficult to convert a society which is set in its ways to a new mode of thinking, especially in light of the influence of religion but at the same time if religious groups as mentioned previously and schools or the mass media decided to create some awareness, it may go a long way to help widen up people's views about sexuality to accept different possibilities. Additionally, the idea of recognising that people have sexual rights will be the first step in this endeavour. Izugbara and Undie (2011) allude to the fact that the concept of "human rights" is very controversial in the African context, and that raising awareness about sexuality in Ghana will be a significant challenge. Finally, parents as agents of sexual communication to their children is another area that requires further attention, It will be important that parents learn ways to openly share information about sexuality with their children and to do so before their children begin to engage in sexual exploration. Majied (2013) posits that discussions about sexual risks can have some influence on reducing sexually risky behaviour. In Ghana, parental silence on the issue of sexuality is likely a result of generations of silence about sexuality, and breaking this intergenerational silence will be a significant challenge. Additionally, since communication with

peers can provide important insight about sexuality to young people, parents must also join the list of important information providers to ensure that their children receive accurate information about sexuality. This study's findings point to the importance of raising awareness in Ghanaian society about sexuality, both within the family and more formal educational context.

### **Theoretical Implications of Study Findings**

Recall that the main tenet of the eco-cultural and acculturation framework is that all societies share some common fundamental and psychological features (see Figure 1). These two frameworks are essential in studying human experiences and diversity. As outlined in Figure 1, changes in the larger system affect changes in the smaller system. In this study, the participants reported experienced some key changes in their sexual knowledge and views when travelling to Canada. To begin, the universalist idea is that psychological processes are believed to be shared among human beings but culture serves as the point of divergence in these experiences. This study's findings can be understood in relation to the eco-cultural and acculturation frameworks. Take as a starting point the universal assumption that sexuality exists in all persons living in all societies. In this study, the participants perceived key differences in views about sexuality as a function of Ghanaian versus Canadian culture. In this way, sexual views and attitudes and expressions of sexuality were thought by the participants in this study to be based on cultural context.

Additionally, the specific cultural experiences that an individual has may inform his/her sexual attitudes and behaviours. For example, a child in Ghana may be chastised for asking questions about sexuality, whereas a child in Canada might be given the information he/she has requested. Second, the above theoretical frameworks highlight the commonalities that societies share in terms of values and suggest that there are group and individual differences in the

expression of these common features. In this study, a variety of responses was received on the issue of sex before marriage despite the majority of the participants sharing the same religious faith. Also, while some of the participants in this study agreed that they had experienced changes in their views about same-sex relations since living in Canada, still others alluded to the fact that nothing had changed and they still held the same views about sexuality.

Finally, as Berry (2010) states to understand the impact of acculturation on new immigrants it is important to consider that a compromise must be reached, and in this case travelling Ghanaian students will have to adapt their views in order to successfully live in Canadian culture. In this study, the young Ghanaians students reported experiencing some key changes in their sexual views, particularly on issues related to sex before marriage and same-sex relations. Travelling individuals and/or immigrants may have to vary their views in order to successfully adapt to a new society (Berry, 2010). For example, it will be difficult for Ghanaian youth to continue being homophobic when they keep seeing people involved in same-sex relations daily in their new environment. As indicated in this study, even though some fundamental personal values on the issues of same-sex relations may not change, daily attitudes toward it may change in order to successfully integrate into the new society. Vancouver and Gullekson (2010) support this by stating that sojourners in a new country must know and understand the norms and accepted behaviours of the host country in order to know what kind of emotions are considered appropriate, especially in instances when the sojourner's culture and the culture of the host country are disparate.

The results of this study showed that most of the participants in this study had adopted the integration strategy put forth by Sam and Berry (2010). This could be deduced by the fact that even though they interacted and communicated with people in the wider Canadian society,

they still maintained some of their original views and values based on Ghanaian society for example, ideas about sex before marriage and same sex relations. The integration strategy could also be said to have been adopted as some of the Ghanaian youth had relaxed their stance on some issues related to sexuality as a result of being in Canada. For example some participants revealed that they had come to accept the individuals who engaged in same-sex relations but then could not accept the act the individuals committed. This latter finding might imply that Ghanaian youth accepted that individuals could engage in same-sex relations because they perceived themselves as having little option to do otherwise, if they have to live in Canada and Canadian society is accepting of same-sex relations. Having been exposed to a different sexual culture might have encouraged the Ghanaian youth in this study to try to fit into their new society. A study by Souiden and Ladhari (2011) on acculturation strategies of West African immigrants in Canada in relation to immigrant consumer's complaining behaviour revealed that West African immigrants are more likely to fall in either the integration or separation strategies of acculturation. A study by Makarova and Herzog (2011) on the integration of immigrant youth into the school context also showed that the integration strategy was most preferred by the immigrant youth before the separation strategy.

However, in the study, the maintenance of some of their original views about sexuality might be a function of the participant's relatively short stay in Canada. Most of the participants in this study indicated that they were in Canada for the purpose of obtaining an education and that they desired to go back to Ghana after their studies. In light of this it is possible that they were maintaining their original views because they will have to reintegrate into their original societies and this may prove difficult if they lose the values of their home country. In support of

this one participant mentioned that she will switch back to her Ghanaian mode of thinking upon return to Ghana.

The developmental niche framework advanced by Super and Harkness (2002) also informs the findings of this research in a number of ways (see Figure 1). This framework outlines three subsystems, namely the physical and social settings, the historically constituted customs and practices of child care, and the psychology of the caretakers. In addition, three organizational aspects of this niche are outlined, with the first being contemporary redundancy. Recall that contemporary redundancy refers to the repetition of particular activities during the developmental period. This study's research findings showed that ideas on what is morally acceptable had been repeated several times by both societies, parents, even peers to the point where they had become internalized. For example, an unexpected finding to which participants spoke involved traditional gender roles. Traditional Ghanaian views about how males and females should behave had been repeated several times to the point where these views had become internalized. Also note that the developmental period is very important as skills needed for survival are learned during this time, such as key gender roles that are needed to thrive within a cultural milieu.

A second organizational aspect of the developmental niche is communication and it is through social communication that children are able to give meaning to particular systems. This study's findings revealed that participants' views about sex before marriage and same-sex relations were largely shaped by communication from religious organisations. Communication played a key role in shaping sexual views and in this study some of the participants reported being wary of their speech when around fellow Ghanaians so as not to say anything that would be perceived socially as wrong.



The third organizational aspect of the developmental niche is referred to as chaining, which is explained as the interaction of various elements to create a single occurrence. This study's findings revealed that participants' views about sexuality were shaped by several key elements including religion, family, and peers. Indeed, even when interview questions focused only on the impact of religion, the participants in this study had difficulty refraining from sharing examples of how other factors were also key in shaping their sexual views; in this way, many factors were intricately linked in shaping the participants' views about sexuality.

In considering the three sub-systems of the developmental niche, in this study the physical and social settings refer to both the Ghanaian and Canadian cultural environment. The historically constituted customs and practices refers to the values that have been handed down across generations, and in this study the participants reported that the secrecy surrounding sexuality in Ghana was passed down intergenerationally. In terms of the psychology of the caretakers, the participants in this study reported that their parents provided very little communication about sexuality, which is likely a result of having themselves learned very little about the topic from their own parents. An intriguing line of research would be to explore whether the new views that some Ghanaian youth might hold about sexuality might have a negative or positive influence on their parents' sexual views when these youth return to Ghana.

### **Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This research fills in some of the gaps in previous research which examines views and perceptions about sexuality both in Ghana and among "travelling Ghanaian students" living in Canada. However, some limitations to this study should be taken into consideration. To begin, this study's research findings create the room for exploring the nature of Canadian sexual culture as perceived by Ghanaian youth living in Canada but these findings cannot be attributed to a

larger group of immigrants living in Canada or to a larger population of Ghanaians “travelling students” living in Canada. Nevertheless, these findings provide a preliminary reference point when attempting to understand and compare the perceptions of other international immigrants living in Canada. Future research can examine other international immigrants living in Canada. For example, if research is conducted with South-Africans living in Canada on the same issue, findings may greatly vary as the sexual culture in South-Africa can be said to differ significantly from that in Ghana. However, if the same study is conducted with Nigerians living in Canada it is possible to uncover some similar views since the sexual culture of Nigeria may be quite similar to that of Ghana (Izugbara, 2004).

Another limitation of this study was that the sample was recruited from a group of Ghanaian students attending post-secondary education at Brock University in St Catharine’s, Ontario, Canada. This sample may however not be representative of all Ghanaian youth living in St. Catharine’s or in other, larger and more urban Canadian cities. Future research should explore the sexual perspectives of young Ghanaians living in more diverse regions such as Toronto. According to Statistics Canada, as of 2001 41% of the African ethnic community in Canada resided in Toronto. It is possible that when people of the same ethnic or cultural background live together they may be more likely to hold onto more traditional values and resist cultural change in their sexual views.

Another limitation of this study is that the majority of the participants identified as religious and most of them identified as being Christian. In this way, their sexual views were mainly based on Christian values. Future research should also include participants of other religious faiths such as Muslims, as they may hold very different sexual views. Finally, in this study, the range of time that participants had lived in Canada ranged from 1 to 10 years. This

might help to explain why some of the participants reported having experienced more profound changes in their sexual views. For example, some of the participants reported that because they had been living in Canada for a long time their sexual views had been moulded toward the more liberal views defining Canadian culture. Research is needed that tracks changes in the sexual views of “travelling students across several years.

### **Conclusion**

An exploration of the views and perceptions of Ghanaian students about sexuality after cultural contact with Canadian culture has highlighted some important findings. This study’s findings underscore the fact that secrecy surrounding sexuality in African countries and specifically Ghana still exists today. The importance of society and cultural context is also highlighted, as the cultural context in which participants found themselves was shown to shape their views about sexuality. Moreover, the participants’ sexual views were shaped by both the Ghanaian and Canadian cultural context, thus fusing elements of traditional cultural sexual values into a new understanding of sexuality. However, the majority of the participants in this study maintained their traditional Ghanaian sexual views, despite relaxing their stance toward the issue of same-sex relations while living in Canada. For example, while the participants in this study acknowledged that individuals have sexual rights in many cases they did not report experiencing any changes in their views about same-sex relations since living in Canada. Additionally, this study’s findings underscore early childhood as an important stage in communicating knowledge about sexuality (e.g., the participants emphasised the importance of early religious experiences in shaping later views about sexuality). This study’s findings suggest that cultural contact with Canadian people and culture served to increase Ghanaian participants’

knowledge about sexuality and to widen their perspective on several sexually related issues such as sex before marriage, same-sex relations, and contraception.

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## APPENDIX B

***ARE YOU A GHANAIAN STUDYING IN CANADA?***

I am looking for volunteers to participate in a study which explores the impact of Contact with Canadian culture on perspectives on sexuality of Ghanaian youth living in Canada.

**Participation will include:**

An interview – Approximately 30-60 minutes

**Interviews will take place in a quiet and private room on the Brock University Campus or within participants' homes**

**Requirements**

Ghanaian students studying at Brock University between the ages of 18-27 who have been in Canada for a period from 1-3 years or more.

All participants will receive a gift card redeemable at Wal-Mart valued at \$10 in appreciation for their time.

If you would like to receive further information about this research study, please contact:

**Efua Boafo-Arthur**  
**Brock University, Graduate Student**  
**[eb10bn@brocku.ca](mailto:eb10bn@brocku.ca)**  
**Child and Youth Studies Department**

**Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams, Brock University**  
**905-688-5550 ext. 4557 [ctardifwilliams@brocku.ca](mailto:ctardifwilliams@brocku.ca)**

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file #12-098)



## Appendix C

**Letter of Invitation**

4<sup>th</sup> January, 2013

Title of Study: Exploring Perspectives about Sexuality among Ghanaian Youth Living in Canada: Understanding the Impact of Cultural Contact

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams, Professor and Faculty Supervisor,

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Student Principal Investigator: Efua Boafo-Arthur, Graduate, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University, [eb10bn@brocku.ca](mailto:eb10bn@brocku.ca)

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Exploring Perspectives about Sexuality among Ghanaian Youth Living in Canada: Understanding the Impact of Cultural Contact

The purpose of this research project is to examine the impact of cultural change on the sexual perspectives of young Ghanaians living in Canada. You are invited to participate in an interview to talk about and give self-reports on changes that have occurred in terms of your view points on sexuality since being in Canada. We are very interested in hearing about changes that may or may not have occurred in your life and how that will influence further studies in this area. Participation in this study is voluntary and at any point the decision to participate or not participate will be kept confidential. This study is being conducted in fulfillment of a Master's thesis.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer particular questions dealing with your thoughts about sexuality and how coming to Canada has impacted your views about sexuality. Questions will center on themes of "communication with peers and parents about sexuality, sex before marriage, contraception, homosexuality, heterosexuality, religion" etc. The session will be held either in a quiet and private room on the Brock University campus or in your home, depending on where you feel most comfortable. The session will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis.

The expected duration of the interview session is between 30 to 60 minutes and you may take a break at any time during the interview.

This research should benefit the scientific community as they will be given a chance to know the impact of cultural contact in the lives of young Ghanaians in relation to their sexuality, an area which has not been well explored. This research will also add to the paucity of literature on

sexuality in Ghana. Participants will be given a chance to examine changes in their own lives as a result of cultural contact that they may have previously not thought. It will also afford them the chance to have their voices heard as part of the process and this may be beneficial when addressing issues relating to sexuality among young Ghanaians. You will receive a 10 dollar gift card redeemable at Wal-Mart as a token of our appreciation for your time and participation in this study.

The potential risks involved in participation in this study include feeling some minimal psychological and/or emotional discomfort in discussing personal views about sexuality and sexual experiences. Please note that participants do not have to share specific details and are encouraged to reveal and share only the details that they feel comfortable sharing. Please note that all interview responses will be kept strictly confidential and participants have the right to withdraw their participation from this study at any time and without penalty. Participants will also be asked at intervals if they desire to continue with the interview or not to ensure participants are at ease and comfortable. Participants will be given an opportunity to review their interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of their responses and to add or clarify any points that they wish. Participants will also be asked to indicate if they wish to receive a summary of this study's final results (which will be available in April 2013).

The information that participants share will be kept confidential. Participants' names will not be included or associated with any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, participants will be asked for their permission to make use of their anonymous quotations. Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca))

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams

Efua Boafo-Arthur

Professor and Faculty supervisor

Graduate Student

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This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file # 12-098)

## Appendix D

**Consent Form-Participants**

Exploring Perspectives about Sexuality among Ghanaian Youth Living in Canada:

Understanding the Impact of Cultural Contact

Research Team: Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams & Efua Boafo-Arthur, MA Candidate

Brock University

**INVITATION**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The goal of this study is to examine the impact of cultural change on the sexual perspectives of young Ghanaians living in Canada. You are invited to participate in an interview to talk about and give self-reports on changes that have occurred in terms of your view points on sexuality since being in Canada. We are very interested in hearing about changes that may or may not have occurred in your life and how that will influence further studies in this area. **Participation in this study is voluntary and at any point the decision to participate or not participate will be kept confidential. Decisions to withdraw from this research can also be made at any point during the interview and without penalty.** This study is being conducted in fulfillment of a Master's thesis.

**WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be partaking in an interview which will involve answering particular questions dealing with your thoughts about sexuality and how coming to Canada has impacted your views about sexuality (e.g., "Was there any communication between yourself and your parents with regards to sexuality when growing up?"). Halfway through the interview you may take a break if so desired; participation will take approximately between 30 to 60 minutes of your time. You have the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any point in time and without penalty. The interview session will be held either in a quiet and private room on the Brock University campus or in your home, depending on where you feel most comfortable. The interview session will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis. You will be asked at intervals during the interview if you still desire to continue to ensure your ongoing comfort with the interview process.

You will also be given a chance to review the transcription after it is completed to ensure that your thoughts have been correctly captured; you will have up to 2 weeks to do this. Please note that if we do not hear from you within 2 weeks via email then we will assume that you are in agreement with the way your responses have been captured and we will include your responses in the larger data analysis.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

The scientific community will be given a chance to know the impact of cultural contact in the lives of young Ghanaians in relation to their sexuality, an area which has not been well explored. This research will also add to the paucity of literature on sexuality in Ghana. Participants will be given a chance to examine changes in their own lives as a result of cultural contact that they may have previously not thought of. It will also afford them the chance to have their voices heard as part of the process and this may be beneficial when addressing issues relating to sexuality among young Ghanaians. You will receive a 10 dollar gift card as a token of our appreciation for your time and participation in this study.

The potential risks involved in your participation in this study include feeling some minimal psychological and/or emotional discomfort in discussing your personal views about sexuality and sexual experiences. Please note that you do not have to share specific details and you are encouraged to reveal and share only the details that you feel comfortable sharing. Please note that all of your interview responses will be kept strictly confidential and you have the right to withdraw your participation from this study at any time and without penalty. Please indicate below if you wish to receive a summary copy of this study's results in April 2013.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information you will share will be kept confidential. Your name will not be included or associated with any thesis or report resulting from this study; however with your permission anonymous quotations will be used. Shortly after the interview has been concluded, I will send you a transcript to give you the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. You are however asked to share only information you are comfortable with divulging. The audio recordings will be used for the purpose of recording and then transcription. The data collected will be kept in locked filing cabinets with access only to researchers who have already signed confidentiality agreements.

Data collected during this study will be stored for five years in locked filing cabinets. After the 5 year period, data will be confidentially destroyed.

Access to this data will be restricted to the principal student investigator, Efua Boafo-Arthur, and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Christine Tardif-Williams.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty and you will still receive the \$10 gift card as a token of our appreciation for your time and participation in this study. If you choose to withdraw from this research your interview responses will be confidentially and immediately destroyed.

**PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available to you once your email address is provided. The results will be available in April 2013.

**CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the principal student investigator, Efua Boafo-Arthur, using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (File # 12-098). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca).

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

**CONSENT FORM**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the invitation letter and consent form. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

YES  NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES  NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis, publication, or presentation that comes of this research.

YES  NO

I would like to receive emailed thank you and feedback letter outlining a summary of the results of this study.

YES email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

## Appendix E

## Interview Protocol

Thank you again for participating in this research. Before we begin I would like to remind you that you can refuse to answer any question(s) that you feel uncomfortable answering and that you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point in time and without penalty whatsoever.

1. How are you doing today?
2. How long have you been in Canada?
3. Do you have any idea of when you intend to return to Ghana?
4. What course are you studying currently and how do you find it?
5. Have you noticed any differences or similarities between the two countries?
6. Did you at any point in time experience a cultural shock?
7. Have you dated a Canadian since being here?
8. How old are you?

Religion

1. Do you come from a religious family?
2. Are you a religious person?
3. If yes, do you think religion has helped shape your attitude towards sexuality?
4. Do you think your thoughts on sexuality will be any different if you were not a religious person?
5. Do you think religion has helped to shape/determine your sexual development in any kind of way?

Society

1. Do you think your immediate environment (Ghanaian society) played a major role in the views you hold about sexuality?
2. In what ways do you think Canadian society has interacted differently with your views about sexuality? Thinking back to the views you held before coming to Canada and the views you hold now.
3. Have you noticed any differences or similarities between these two societies with regards to sexuality?

Contraceptives

1. How much do you know about contraceptives?
2. What are your viewpoints on contraceptives?
3. Do you think their use should be encouraged?
4. Do you think there is enough awareness of contraception in Ghana especially among the youth?

Self-Image and peer Interaction

1. Do you think that your sexual behaviour is influenced in anyway by how members of society view you?
2. “Do you openly discuss sexuality with your peers, and if so, do you find these discussions comfortable?”
3. Do you think that your discussions with your peers about sexuality affect your views and attitudes towards sexuality?”
4. Do you think without the ideas and views of peers you will have different thoughts about sexuality?

5. Do you think that you would indulge in a particular sexual activity if it was approved by your peers and society?

#### Other Influences on sexual perspectives

1. Was there any communication between yourself and your parents with regards to sexuality whilst growing up?
2. Do you think your parents influenced your ideas or perceptions about sexuality?
3. Has your interaction or non-interaction with your parents about sexuality left a lasting impact on you? Do you think of their reaction when engaging in certain sexual activities or behaviours?
4. Were you influenced in any way by anything to behave in a particular way or to adopt particular views about sexuality (e.g., homophobia)?

#### Sex before marriage

1. What do you think about engaging in sexual activities before marriage?
2. Are there any particular reasons you can think of why you think of it this way?
3. Have there been any changes in your thoughts about the issue of engaging in sexual activities before marriage since being in Canada as compared to your views before coming here?
4. If yes what factors do you think have influenced the change?

Please note that the following question(s) ask you to share some personal information about your sexual identity and that you can choose to skip the following question(s) and move onto the next part of the interview session.”

#### Heterosexuality

1. What is your sexual orientation?



2. Have you ever thought of your sexuality and wondered if you could be anything other than what you presently are?
3. Did you have a stage of sexual exploration before achieving your sexual orientation status?
4. Is your sexual decision making affected by the dominance of heterosexuality in the Ghanaian society?
5. Do you think your views on heterosexuality have undergone any changes since being in Canada as compared to when you were in Ghana?
6. If yes what do you think may have caused these changes? And if not what may have maintained your original views?

Homosexuality (same-sex relations)

1. What do you think about homosexuality? (same-sex relations)
2. Why do you think of it in this way?
3. What will make you have a different view on homosexuality?
4. How do your thoughts on homosexuality affect your sexual orientation?
5. Have your views on homosexuality (same-sex relations) changed since being in Canada in comparison to when you were in Ghana?
6. If yes can you think of any reasons accounting for this change? Or any reasons why there has been no change in thoughts and ideas on this?
7. Do these reasons accounting for change make you think any different about Ghanaian society in relation to this topic?
8. In which ways do you think these changes in views will affect you when you return home?

9. Are there any ideas or thoughts on what should be done differently in Ghana with regards to homosexuality?
10. Do you think homosexuality should be legalised in Ghana?
11. Do you think you would ever come out if you were homosexual in Canada as opposed to if you were in Ghana?

## Appendix F

## Detailed Participant Characteristics

Gender	Age	Length of time in Canada
P1 Male	26	1 year (Graduate student)
P2 Male	25	1 year (Graduate student)
P3 Male	24	1 year (Graduate Student )
P4 Female	25	5 years (Under graduate student)
P5 Male	26	5 years (Undergraduate Student)
P6 Male	21	7 years (Undergraduate Student)
P7 Male	21	13 years (Undergraduate Student)
P8 Male	21	3 years (Undergraduate Student) Business
P9 Male	23	5 years (Undergraduate Student) Geography and Business
P 10 Female	21	3 years (Undergraduate Student) Political Science

P11 Female	21	4 years (Undergraduate student) Business
P12 Male	22	12 years (Undergraduate Student) Bio-medical science
P13 Female	18	5 years (Undergraduate student) Health Science
P14 Male	24	A year (Graduate Student) Political Science
P15 Female	26	1 year (Graduate Student) Social Justice