Construction of Masculinities, Femininities and Sexual Risk Negotiation: Exploratory Evidence from Urban Ghana

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Abstract

The present study explores the narrative constructions of masculinities and femininities, and how they influence the negotiation of sexual intercourse. Men defined themselves at least by one of three main features identified, i.e. physical characteristics, phallic competence (ability of the penis to erect) and responsibility. These factors do not conflict but rather reinforce each other in the construction of masculinity. Women distinguished between four characteristics, i.e. independence, physical characteristics, responsibility, and reproduction. For example, a characteristic that indicates independence included being smart, fulfilled, financial autonomy such as the ability to fend for oneself and one's children. Most women did not construct their femininity around the ability to bear a child. Refusal of sex attitude was gendered and derived from sexual myths (e.g. sex positions) and sexual health such as feelings of sexual displeasure, and fear of infecting a partner with a disease.

INTRODUCTION

The study explores the narrative constructions of masculinities and femininities in urban Ghana, and how they influence the negotiation of sexual intercourse.

The term masculinity has often been associated with sexual "potency", sexual dominance and the need to control women (Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2011; Adomako Ampofo et al., 2009; Caldwell et al., 1989; Ratele, 2011; Whitehead, 2002). Thus, men and boys are sexually active and lack sexual control, women and girls on the other hand are passive to sex, and lack sexual drive. But these are stereotypes and due to the misconception that for women, their reproduction is perceived as an important aspect of their femininity (Fortes, 1978; Foucault, 1978; McFadden, 2003; Inhorn, 2005). This is typical of how women's sexuality has been viewed in relation to men in Africa although recent studies (see Connell, 2005; Ratele, 2011; Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 2005; kimmel & Aronson, 2004) try to present a more nuanced view.

Some scholars (such as Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2011; Butler, 1990; Connell, 2005; Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 2005; Tamale, 2010) have contested the notion that reproduction is what defines a woman's sexuality in Africa. Pereira (2003), for example, notes that sexuality is congruent with new understandings beyond reproduction. She suggests that the inconsistencies that sexuality provokes in the African context are understated and that researchers have overlooked some complexities of women's sexual realities in Africa (Pereira, 2003:1). Thus, what is conceived as a biological suppression to female sexuality in itself is to a high degree very complex and nuanced. Indeed, as Tamale (2010) observes, what is understood as culture in Africa is largely a product of Western notion in collaboration with African male patriarchy. In many cultures in Africa, women have rights to sexual intercourse.

As in some other African societies, the notion of 'responsible man' or 'responsible woman' goes

to the very core of sexuality in Ghana. The concept of the responsible woman includes issues of good and personal hygiene practices, good housekeeping including good cooking and training of children (this is expected of the man as well), hard work, modesty, humility, "motherhood" and marital fidelity. It is for this reason that even though the Ghanaian society is largely patriarchal (excluding the Matrilineal Akan), women are often questioned with the phrase "have you seen what has become of your daughter?" This is because fathers are expected to set up their male children in life through training, and to help their sons in choosing potential female partners (Miescher, 2007; Sarpong, 1977). The male characteristics that are approved of or encouraged include leadership qualities (such as bravery, 'potency', power and the ability to bear pain), and the need to control women and support one's wife. A boy or a man whose lifestyle does not measure up to the prescribed expectations is branded as *banyan-basia* in Akan, meaning man-woman (Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2011) or regarded as "useless" (Nnuroh, 2006: 98). On the other hand, as suggested by Adomako Ampofo and Boateng (2011), a girl who veers from the prescribed feminine roles into the domain prescribed for boys is branded *bemaa-kokonin*, the Akan appellation for 'male-woman'.

Although the Ghanaian cultural values also stress the importance of childbearing[1] probably due to the part children play in economic activities of parents and their assistance in the home (see Miescher, 2007), children are expected to be cared for. Therefore, an "Opanyin" (i.e. Akan term for an elderly man) had wives and children but cared for them. Similarly, women are also expected [and strongly encouraged] to develop careers of their own in order to support themselves, husbands (if married) and their children' (Kumekpor, 1974). These complexities show the nuances surrounding both male and female sexuality in Ghana.

So, do women construct their gender identities differently from men? How do the constructions of gender identities influence female subordination within the context of sexual risk? The questions here are both empirical and feminist in nature.

METHODS

The study was exploratory. The population of interest for this study were Ghanaians, raised in Ghana; 15 years and above (e.g. 15-24 years are dominant lowest age who report being sexually active; GDHS, 2008), who have ever had sex, were residents of Madina, and willing to participate in the study. Within this population, interviewees were selected based on sex (since masculinities are constructed relative to versions of femininities), ethnicity, socio-economic class, education, marital status, religion, and sexual activity. Interviewing these sub groups also brings heterogeneity to the sample and diversity of sexual beliefs and experiences.

The main method used for recruiting participants was by word-of-mouth. Access to participants was in their homes and work places (based on appointment). Overall, 19 females and 16 males participated in this study after a consent form had been explained to them and signed by the interviewer. The age distribution showed that more than half of participants were under age 40, reflecting the comparatively young age structure of the population in Madina. With the exception of a man, who had retired from active work, and two, who were pursing full-time education, the rest were working. Twenty one of the participants were Christian (mainly Catholics) while 10

[1] This emphasis on childbearing and motherhood remains strong even in Ghana today. The accepted pattern of Ghanaian life is to marry and have children although the trend has changed within the past few years (see Adomako Ampofo, 2002).

were mainly Sunni Muslims. Thirteen of the participants were married (see Annex 2).

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used as and when necessary. We often approached potential interviewees with the view of having a general discussion about youth sexual behaviour. This approach was useful because in Ghana, adult women and men are willing to share their views on adolescent sexuality, especially in relation to what they regard as "immoral" behaviour of the youth. Interviews were mainly conducted in a local language and English. All interviews were conducted by the first author (Daniel Yaw Fiaveh) and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The study conformed to the required ethical guidance (NMIMR-IRB CPN 048/11-12; see Annex 1).

Men and Narrative Expressions of Masculinities

Men defined themselves at least by one of three main features identified: physical characteristics (having a penis), phallic competence (ability of the penis to erect, sexually perform, and able to impregnate a woman) and responsibility (such as care for oneself, and family for those who were married). These components do not conflict but reinforce each other and do not suggest that possessing part meant incomplete or failed masculinity. However, some components were subtly superior to others such that the inability to meet the superior constituents could cause discontentment in identity.

Physically, having a male identity includes being 'created' as a man and having a penis. The penis as an important construction of masculinity was common among men who engaged in penis-in-vagina sex compared to those who had ever experienced penis-in-anal sex (with other men). Some also indicated that the penis does not necessarily identify them as men. Rather, fulfilling socially acceptable characteristics of what it takes to be a man (such as being cleanly shaven, and having respect for women) defines masculine identity for some men.

> *"Yea, I'm a man because I have a penis" (Fonyeh: man, 39 years, married, had vagina sex, Christian).*

To Dism:

> *The penis does not even define me as a man. I've already told you I have two personalities. I am a man and a woman. So if I define myself as a man, there are instances when I define myself as a man and there are instances when I define myself as a woman. You know they normally say that we take on the roles that are assigned to us by the society. So the society has decided I should be a man, and these are things that men do. One you don't I...I... don't shave off my beard so that I can feel manly. That is one of the things. Then what else? I try to dress as how men dress so that I can be a man. Even there are basic things that society has claims on (*Dism: man, 25 years, had anal sex, never married, Christian*).*

The two quotes show that the constructions of identities among men interact with other factors such as age, marital status, religion, and self-definition. Regarding marriage, *Fonyeh* constructs his manliness around his wife's identity. Men in heterosexual relationships are expected by their

female partners to have phallic competence i.e. possess a penis that can satisfy a woman sexually. For men who are married, the penis should also have the ability to bear a child, i.e. make a woman pregnant. These factors, in our view, explain why *Fonyeh* considers the penis as a very important construct of his identity as a man. The relevance of the penis to *Fonyeh* is more about phallic competence and not a mere possession of a physical organ.

On the other hand, *Dism* also presents multiple identities although this differs from those of *Fonyeh*. He has never married, a young man in a sexual relationship with a male partner (with no pressures from the partner), engages in multiple forms of sex (such as penis-in-mouth sex and penis-in-anal sex) and often he is the one being 'penetrated'. Therefore, he does not have any social obligation to have phallic competence. More importantly, he does not identify himself as a woman in order for us to suggest that he has an obligation of "feminine competence"[2]. To this end, *Dism* does not see the penis as a symbolic construct of his masculinity.

In addition to the difference observed in physically identifying men, the study also found that some men showed an earnest need to redefine themselves as men depending on the social context. Thus, in the context where an individual is a member of a religious group, the moral code of such group could inhibit how the individual expresses his manly characteristics. As is well known, an explicit aim of religion is to whip adherents into line in upholding moral sentiments. In this instance, religion becomes a coercive mechanism that influences the way individuals continuously manage and define their identities. For example, *Dogl* is a catholic and a health worker. He is 28 years old. Trained in a religious background, *Dogl* had to quit the seminary, which he thinks is his "calling" [what God has asked him to do], because he feels the belief defining the sacerdotal life interfered 'a little' with his identity (sexual preferences). He has sexual attraction towards men. He had this to say:

> *Aaah well, I consider myself a man at so many levels. Am a part of two personalities and they all ... ermm [phone rings]. They all interplay in a different way. How do I feel, when do I feel I'm a man? When do I feel I'm a woman? Hmmm for example, when I'm in a space where I cannot bring the other side of me [womanly identity] I play a man. You know I was a seminarian and had to quit. Seriously, you will never know sometimes that I could even do anything womanish. And when I'm in a space where people appreciate diversity, I wear shoes, I wear dresses ,I'm a woman. So I have two parts and they all come into play* (Dogl: man, 28 years, ever had anal sex).

When some men identified themselves as having phallic competence, the main focus was the ability to have sex, the capacity to perform during sex and satisfy their partner during sex regardless of the form of the intercourse (that is vagina or anal), and the ability to bear a child. These sexual abilities, according to the interviewees, informed their emotional male sexual identity of "feeling like a man". While some men were of the view that "a man has to sex like a man" to assert their emotional identity, others also said that sex was not essential and argued that "feeling like a man" was the mode through which they defined their emotional identity.

[2] Our own construction, meaning the possession of a vagina to satisfy a man partner sexually and ability to bear a child.

Another issue that influenced the construction of masculinity among men is having responsibility. The ability to provide for oneself and dependents was among the facets of being a "responsible" man. Responsibility as a manly identity from men's perspective includes engaging in an economic activity, protecting the family, providing for the family (financially), and being the family head. These characteristics did not vary regardless of age, sexual orientation, marital status, and religion. We call this *monolithic responsibility*. Consequently, *"I am a man in my house*", indicates the limits where a man's identity and power reach as captured by the following quotes:

> *I'm a man because I am able to fend for myself, I do not ask anybody for money, I do not beg for food, and if I am a man, I am a man in my house. I am not a man in someone else's house. And if you insult me that "are you a man?", I wouldn't mind because whether I am a man or not, I won't come to you to beg for food to eat and I won't come and ask you for a loan [money]. You see? (Uncle: man, 73 years, divorced, primary education).*

Married men and those in stable relationships have multiple masculinities. They have to fend for themselves, their female partners, and their offspring (those who have). Thus, the inability to provide for their families or themselves constitutes grounds for complete failure. Women also perceived men in the light of the ability to provide financial and emotional support for their families, especially the ability to provide for their offspring (if any) and not necessarily their female partners (e.g. wives).

> *Here in Zongo, anytime you find a man and his girlfriend or wife quarrelling, the woman often say that "you koraa are you a man [Are you a man at all]?" I think for me I will only ask that question if you are not playing your role as a father, not in bed [sexual intercourse]. For me bed [ability of a man to sexually satisfy me] is only 2 or 5 percent. Financial and emotional luxury, if you are doing that as a man, it does not matter what you do in sex. If you are very active in bed and you don't look after your children what makes you a man? And that's what our fore fathers were using because they had lots of children.... [pause] then eeei you are a man. You have ten children, you are a man meanwhile you cannot look after them* (Sitsofe*: woman, 31 years, married*).

However, both women and men indicated that even men who were unable to provide for their family still earned some acknowledgement for their social position. In this regard, responsibility transcends the financial to include caring, giving emotional and psychological support (nonmaterial), such as being "a nice man" as expressed in a man's "choice of words" towards a female partner. For example, the manner in which a man approaches a woman, including how he express his sexual overtures even in a marital relationship, is an important construct of some women's *proper masculinity* . Women also mentioned appearance (in terms of dressing), being cleanly shaven, and "*smelling good*". For these women, the body odor gives a good account of how 'responsible' a man is or is likely to be. They stated that the 'appearance' (in terms of dressing) of a man is indicative of how a man organizes himself and his household in general. Hence, younger women in particular would not date men who exhibit the characteristic that they

identified as 'irresponsibility'.

Women and Narrative Expressions of Femininities

Women distinguished between what they referred to as a "contemporary" (Twi, ene maa" or "mmabawaa aba" meaning today's' women) and a "traditional" woman (Twi, "yen a bre so" meaning during our time). A contemporary woman is perceived to have complex identities. These identities transcend cultural values (e.g. the need to bear a child) with which women are identified. The identities of women were categorized in four major themes based on the findings[3], i.e. independence, physical characteristics, responsibility, and reproduction. The identity of women as expressed in the narratives is an indication of a social transformation process influenced by individual agency and other forces such as individual knowledge (self-definition) and experiences.

Physical features were very important to all women. The main physical features mentioned include face, hair, and breast. A woman, for example, identified herself as "me gyinaso" [Twi, I have good physical attractiveness]. Six women indicated the vagina as an important construct of their femininity. The vagina is often referred to indirectly such as "akosua kuma", "cocoa" (Twi), and "Buemi" (Ga). However, it is known as "etwe" (Twi), "toto" (Ga), "edo" (Ewe) and "duri" (Hausa). To all the women interviewed, being a woman means "you are created as one [by God]" and not necessarily being able to bear a child.

Characteristics that indicate independence included being smart (brainy), fulfilled, and possessing financial autonomy (such as the ability to fend for oneself and children and other family relations, i.e. biological parents). The ideas about being brainy and smart were assigned to women who had formal education although culturally these attributes were perceived as male attributes.

> *It's a lot of things [pause]. Okay so physiologically you have been born or created a woman that is one. You don't necessarily need to have a man in your life to feel fulfilled as a woman. It's a combination of beauty and brains. And when I talk of brains, am not talking about just academic brains, because there are some women who are not good in school but whatever business you are doing, you should be smart. If it a business , if it's being a mother, whatever role you are playing, you should be smart in that area not just academic prowess, so its beauty with brains. You should be able to please a partner if you have one, you should be able to take care of your children and your home and that's one of the key things. It's everything. Trying to make yourself beautiful and all that (*Sitsofe*: woman, 31 years, married).*

Women who identified themselves as responsible drew on some stereotypical social values. A responsible woman was perceived as someone who was associated with keeping personal hygiene, engaging in household duties (such as cooking, and keeping her surroundings clean) and caring for children. Others also perceived a responsible woman as someone who "can handle a man" and has a 'good' character.

[3]Women were given the freedom to express these identities.

Women's narratives of responsibility did not vary by age, marital status, religion or education. Among all the women interviewed, responsibility was constructed around the ability to provide for one's self (such as afford clothing and cosmetics), ability to provide for children, and one's biological parents. These attributes did not differ from the way women also perceived men (see the earlier discussion on "irresponsible" men) although women had extended versions of responsibility compared to men. Thus, for women, responsibility transcends one's nuclear family to include extended family relations. In addition, responsibility overlapped with the notion of independence, which emanated from the ability to engage in a job that would earn an income, whether formal or informal, in order to meet their material needs whether married or not married. The following spells out some women's views:

> *What show I'm a woman? I can provide for myself, I do provide for my parents, am working and at periods when my father and mother don't have I help my younger siblings. I personally feel ok, what I want is what I do, is not like I wait for someone to provide for me before I eat. I feel am ok and a woman (Sumaya*: *unmarried woman, 36 years, primary education).*

On reproduction and construction of femininity, this link was not expressed differently from those of men. Women were of the view that "if you don't bear a child", "if you are not married", and "if you are not even in a relationship", *a woman is still a woman*. The only stereotypical characteristic women adopted from the 'traditional' construction was the concept of "motherliness" (i.e. showing concern for those in need, especially children), something they considered as given. However, reproduction such as their own ability to bear children was not a strong concept women used to identify themselves just as men did not.

> *What defines me as a woman maybe because I'm a mother, is my role as a mother. Even before I had my child, I was "mothering" [caring for] my siblings. I think I have some special gifting in mothering people and taking care of myself, my home and playing that role. Even though I say that defines you doesn't me that if you don't have a child you can't be a woman. You can mother other people and be such a blessing. Nieces and nephews are like, there are things they will come and tell me or ask me that they won't ask their parents. So it that nurturing ability or something (*Naa: woman, 37 years, *remarried).*

Although some women said that they were happy to be able to bear a child, there was no narrative where a woman indicated that her inability to bear a child would mean an incomplete femininity. In fact, for some of these women, sex is the least thing on their mind and this perception was common even among women who were married. For elderly women, these perceptions were even stronger perhaps due to "*sexual fatigue"* (familiarity with a sexual partner) and or self-fulfillment, as expressed by the following:

> *Sex is the least of my worries. I have four kids, two boys and two girls, and I'm happy. My first boy is 18 and the last is a girl. She is 2 years. I love my kids (Absu: woman, 42 years, married, and a mother of four).*

Absu's claim that sex is the least of her worries should not be assumed to mean that she perceives sex as mainly a reproductive function. This is because further questioning revealed that she has sex whenever she has the interest, *"ohh, I do [have sex] when the feeling comes"*. Low sexual desire is influenced by several factors including sexual beliefs, sexual experience, economic engagement, and individual factors such as one's own persona.

The expressions that "sex is the least of my worries" and "I love my kids" are common narratives among married women in Ghana, claims we wish to interrogate. Several factors may explain these narratives. The first possible explanation is that there is the availability of a sexual partner and a married woman does not have to struggle to seek for her sexual gratification, even if not matched in practice. *Absu* is married. Last, due to some women's own personality, they have low sexual desires, i.e. they are undersexed. This is also the case for some men who indicated that they do not "think of sex often" based on their own persona (influenced by upbringing), religious upbringing and sometimes the demand of their economic engagement. Other factors that may influence low sexual desires include the experience of forced sex (even if *Absu* did not indicate such experience).

Masculinities, Femininities and Sexual Risk Negotiation

Sexual risk includes the fear of experiencing sexual displeasure, fear of disease infection (due to STI/HIV, fear of suffering long penile erection, and fear of experiencing pain during sex (e.g. due to lack of lubricants or secretion of vagina fluid, sex position, and fear of being forced to have sex). It also includes the fear of getting pregnant for engaging in sex, and risk of "bloody" sex. Risk assessment is influenced by sexual knowledge (e.g. health consciousness), beliefs (e.g. religious upbringing, myths and misconceptions), and sexual experiences.

The findings show that sexual risk is an important factor for sexual negotiation, and gender differences were notable. Women's risk consciousness unlike men indicated consistency across the span of a relationship (even in marital context), although fear of unplanned pregnancy was partly responsible. Dzidzor, a 38-year-old woman living with HIV had this to say:

> *If I had not negotiated condom use with this guy, that would have been a big problem. It would have been a big problem, I would have had unwanted baby. So it's good for you to negotiate sex and when and how you have to have sex and where, it's very important. I only asked him one question, i.e. are you ready [to be a father]? And he is always fumbling. That tells me straight away that this guy is not ready so we need to play it safe (*Dzidzor*: woman, 38 years, PLHIV, vocational education, has one child).*

Some may suggest that Dzidzor's partner (the alleged man referred to in the quote above) has less sexual health awareness. We argue to the contrary. According to Dzidzor, her partner, who is a graduate, is aware of her [Dzidzor] HIV serostatus. What the quote reveals is that although people may have sexual awareness, knowledge does not necessarily translate into action due to the desire [sometimes selfish] to seek sexual gratification regardless of the consequences. For some men, the concern for health is most salient in beginning new sexual relationships and especially for engaging in sex for the first time with a new partner than in more established

sexual unions. The findings show that a man's sexual health is dependent upon a woman's safe or unsafe sex decision making. The less likely a woman negotiates for safer sex, the more likely a man's chances of being at risk of disease infection. The perception of Koku about safe sex behaviour also lends support to this assertion:

> *Charlie, not really oo. "Rubber [chuckles], charlie, e dey worry but how we go do am? [PG English, condoms are barriers but I have no choice]. But most of the time, my serious girl dier, we no they use am [I don't use condom with my regular partner] (Korku: man, 33 years, higher education).*

For some women (especially for younger women and those who were never married) risk assessment was pursued for prevention of unwanted pregnancies. Love, trust, and faithfulness in partner, and the quest to improve these qualities in the relationship were the reasons for such actions. The use of agentic skills such as "are you ready to marry me", "are you ready to be a father", "please use it [condom] since we are not ready", just to mention a few, were some of the dominant narratives used in negotiating safe sex behaviour.

Women mentioned that the desire for sex is linked to their menstrual cycle, as some indicated that they have less sexual desire when in their menstrual period.

> *Mm you know for him one thing is that sometimes he reads my month [menstrual cycle], so he made me to show him the time my period is like because of the way am not living with him sometimes he ask me when I had my period which day or time was it. I am very careful in having sex if I'm not safe or I have my visitor [menstruation]. It is not healthy for one to have sex during' menses' (*Sitsofe*: 31 years, married, Christian).*

The reasons for the low sexual desire and sexual resistance in menstrual moments had symbolic descriptions and meanings attached. The descriptions associated with their menstrual period include '*fishy days*', 'visitor', 'period', and 'red'. In Twi, for example, the menstrual period has several descriptions such as "wa bu ne nsa" (she has broken her arm), "anti rose" (aunty Rose), and so on. These descriptions have symbolic meanings as they often determine women's sexual response. For example,

> *Oh when am in my 'Fishy' days, off course I don't feel for sex (Oye-Mansa: woman, 22 years, married).*

> *For me it's when I have my 'visitor' (Gyamfua: woman, 25 years).*

However, some women have sex in their menstrual period. In such situations, women constructed alternative sexual narratives based on agentic strategies such as, "*me huhru hor*" [I wash the vagina], "*ye sesa position no*" [we change the sex position], and "*yen ye no wo mpa no so"* [we don't do it on the bed]. To some of these women, having sex in their menstrual period was because they had the desire to do so and that they enjoy sex even during their menstrual period. A woman had this to say:

> *I feel for sex when am in my menses [menstrual period] and ovulating. We are often careful especially when am ovulating because I don't want to get pregnant. But in my menses, I wash down and it's ok [no smell and can have sex in menstrual period](* Zu: woman, 26 years, never married*).*

In situations where a woman has sex in her menstrual period she has the choice to do so. This indicates the complexities surrounding a woman's sexuality. Even when some women see sex as a duty they have to perform, there is no evidence that such women do not derive pleasure in having sex in their menstrual period.

Another issue that borders on sexual risk negotiation is anal sex. With the exception of four interviewees (a woman and three men), the rest reacted negatively to anal sex. The perception towards anal sex was based on moral codes, health reasons, the thinking that it is painful, and hearsay. A woman had these to say:

> *It's not good. So you don't you know this? [Questions the interviewer] Why are you asking me such a stupid question? Ah! I don't understand. You said you are a doctor [a PhD student] but am surprised you don't know this. Look, a friend of mine who had ever tried that kind of thing [anal sex] told me how painful it was. How can you allow someone to insert that thing [penis] at your back [anus]? Me if you [partner] try that thing with me, I will run away and leave you and you will never see me again. I was told that it can cause the place [anus] to weaken and when you go to toilet, the thing [faecal matter] just drops "toom" like that [an expression intended to mean an easy drop of faecal matter from the anus] (Akofa: woman, 30, primary education).*

One of the agentic strategies some women employed to resist anal sex was to '*scream'*. In this context screaming has different symbolic meanings compared to other contexts where a woman's scream was indicative of her sexual pleasure. Given that most people do not want a third person to know that sex is taking place (i.e. fear of being found out), *screaming* is a useful agentic strategy to deter a partner from engaging in an unwanted sexual act. No matter the circumstances, even in forced sex, some women resort to *screaming* as agentic strategy to gain audience except on grounds of threat of harm. In fact, it is even possible that even in times of threat, some women still scream (often mildly) to indicate their sexual discontent. A woman shared her experiences as follows:

> *The first time I tried that "thing" [penis-in-anal sex], "heh", it was very very painful. When we were doing the "doggy", he entered ['penetrated'] wrongly and it was very painful. So I swore never to try that thing again. He has been forcing me, let's try this lets try that. It was only that day that…I don't even know what happened that I tried that stupid thing. It was so painful that I had to scream for him [partner] to stop. Sometimes the position can cause that. So me, I am very careful in those positions. I screamed and he stopped since he didn't want the people around [neighbours] to know what was going on. As for my husband, he will stop no matter what. I love him for that. Some men are*

very stubborn but mine [husband] is not like that (Akosua: woman, 32 years, never married, higher education).

A man's decision to discontinue an unwanted sexual act was also influenced by the protection of reputation. In most cultures in Ghana, men who coerce women into sex lose their respect. Such men become focus of ridicule, such as hooting at them, *"huuuhuuu"*. In other instances, the narratives depicting the disapproval are *"berma enye saa"* [a man should not behave that way], *"yen 'forso' obaa oo, obaa pe woa na ope wo"* [you don't force a woman, if a woman loves you then she does]. These narratives by themselves 'strip' such men off their masculinities or as Cornwall and Lindisfarne (2005) put it, masculinity is "dislocated".

Can a man also engage in this agency, i.e. can a man scream to deter a female partner from unwanted sexual overtures? Can he say to a female partner, "I will scream if you don't stop what you are doing"? We do not think so. A man who refuses a woman's sexual overtures is often regarded as a "weak" man and described in local parlance as *"otoolege" or "kotobonku"*, *banyan-basia or bemaa-kokonin*, meaning "man-woman" or as Nnuroh (2006: 98) bluntly puts it, a "*useless*" man. These descriptions have symbolic meanings and are coercive in constructions of masculinities. Women have sexual power and the decision not to use their sexual agency is not synonymous to their lack of power.

Conclusion

Among males, a subtle hierarchy of the constituents of masculine identity was expressed. Whereas some men selected penis over reproduction and responsibility at home mainly because women could also adopt these roles, other men considered the ability to provide for their families as the most crucial constituent of their masculinity. The difference between these sets of men is intergenerational (based on age and educational differences) than intercultural (cultural upbringing). The men that ranked the penis as the most important male identity were less than 45 years and most had formal education whereas those that ranked responsibility as most important were above 45 years and with low or no formal education.

Conclusively, construction of masculinity is not always about power to control women rather power to control one's own perceived 'imaginary' territory and does not differ from women's femininities. Aspects of femininity crisscrossed with men's masculinity including responsibility (e.g. providing financial support for the family). Although reproduction matters for some women, it does not form the core of women's femininities. Hence, the view that reproduction is the most important aspect of a woman's femininity (see Fortes, 1978; Foucault, 1978; McFadden, 2003; Inhorn, 2005) is a misconception and stereotypical. The dominant narrative encountered during fieldwork was a deviation from the Western-centric assumptions about African sexuality which tend to focus on reproduction. Male sexuality had diverse meanings from the stereotypical heterosexual or reproductive norms. Women and men were of the view that masculinity and femininity is not necessarily about biological capabilities of men such as the possessing of a penis or the ability of the penis to bear children (Ratele, 2011). Even those men who considered the penis as an important construct of their masculinity also acknowledged responsibility, for example, as an invaluable construct of masculinity.

For men in particular, the reluctance of safe sex behaviour has to do with the quest to maximize sexual gains such as sexual pleasure. Moreover, for younger women, the decision to engage in

safe sex has to do with the fear of getting pregnant. This supports the view of Herbert Mead that the ability to think does not only reside in the individual's mind but that the mind hails from the socialization of consciousness (Mead, 1982).

The findings also show that differences in meanings of gender identities for women and men can be explained by the degree to which the meanings of a particular act were understood or were determined by individual sexual experience in a particular relationship and context. For example, a woman who perceives her menstrual period as something unpleasant or distasteful also describes her menstrual cycle as "fishy days", meaning having sex during her menstrual period would be unpleasant for her. The different descriptions associated with the menstrual period in itself presents a complex understanding of women's own view about their sexuality, making women engage in self-reflecting sexual choices.

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Annex 2 Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

Res #	Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Duration of Relationship/Divorce	Education	Religion	Occupation
R1	Sumaya	F	36	Basaare	Never Married	1 year	Primary	Muslim	Seamstress
R2	Fonyeh	M	39	Ewe	Married	10 Years	Tertiary: Postgrad	Christian	Lecturer
R3	Asantewaa	F	43	Asante	Married	8 Years	Middle School	Christian	Trader
R4	Memuna	F	35	Mossi	Remarried	2 years	SSS/SHS	Muslim	Trader
R5	Naa	F	37	Krobo	Divorced but Remarried	3 months	Tertiary: Postgrad	Christian	Lecturer
R6	Sitsofe	F	31	Ewe	Married	2 years	Tertiary: Postgrad	Christian	Teacher
R7	Dism	M	25	Ewe	Divorced	2 years	Tertiary: Undergrad	Christian	Social Worker
R8	Dogl	M	28	Asante	Never Married	Not in relationship	Tertiary: Undergrad	Christian	Medical Doctor
R9	Dzidzor	F	38	Ewe	Never Married	2 years	Vocational	Christian	Social Worker
R10	Natuama	M	31	Dagomba	Never married	7 years	Tertiary: Undergrad	Muslim	Consultant
R11	Babaana	M	28	Dagomba	Never Married	4 years	Tertiary: Postgrad	Muslim	Civil Servant
R12	Kun	M	28	Krobo	Never Married	Not in relationship	Tertiary: Undergrad	Christian	Medical Doctor
R13	Aida	F	37	Fante	Married	11 Years	Tertiary: Postgrad	Christian	Lecturer
R14	Hajia	F	53	Sisala	Married	26 years	Never attended any	Muslim	Trader
R15	Zu	F	26	Dagomba	Never Married	6 Months	Tertiary: Undergrad	Muslim	Student
R16	Azetiska	M	33	Sandema	Never Married	Not in relationship	Tertiary: Postgrad	Christian	Teacher
R17	Akosua	F	32	Asante	Never Married	Not in relationship	Tertiary: Postgrad	Christian	Business Woman

R18	Rev	M	67	Asante	Divorced	20 Years	SSS/JHS	Christian	Pub. Servant/Pastor
R19	Uncle	M	73	Asante	Divorced	8 years	Primary (Three)	Not religious	Retiree
R20	Nuru	M	40+	Ewe	Married	5 Years	Tertiary: Postgrad	Muslim	Health Admin
R21	Anti Nurse	F	56	Ewe	Divorced	10 years of Divorce	Post Secondary	Christian	Nurse
R22	Oko	M	33	Ga	Never married	1 year	Tertiary: Undergrad	Christian	Student
R23	Koshie	F	36	Krobo	Married	1 Year	Post Secondary	Christian	Admin Assistant
R24	Gyamfua	F	25	Kwawu	Never married	6 years	Tertiary: Postgrad	Christian	Student
R25	Akofa	F	30	Ewe	Never married	2 years	Primary	Christian	Health assistant
R26	Korku	M	33	Ewe	Married	6 years	Tertiary: Postgrad	Not religious	Teacher
R27	Gustaf	M	42	Gonja	Married	5 Years	SSS	Muslim	Businessman
R28	Baba	M	53	Sisala	Married	10 years	Technical	Muslim	Contractor
R29	Maimagani	M	46	Fulani	Married	12 years	Never attended any	Muslim	Sells medicine
R30	Aduro wora	F	79	Akwapim	Widow	25 years	Never attended any	Not religious	Sells medicine
R 31	Oye-Mansa	F	22	Akyem	Married	4 months	Tertiary: undergrad	Christian	Student
R 32	Maame	F	30	Asante	Never married	5 months	Tertiary: Postgrad	Christian	Teaching Assistant
R 33	Adwoa	F	33	Akwapim	Married	10 years	Undergrad	Christian	Teacher
R 34	Jun	F	31	Ewe	Never married		Postgrad	Christian	Nurse
R 35	Wiafe	M	38	Asante	Never married		Postgrad	Christian	Businessman
R 36	Absu	F	42	Fante	Married	8 years	Postgrad	Christian	Administrator