

**Social Media, Social Space, and African Newcomer Youth Sexual Subjectivity in Winnipeg,  
Canada**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

My research interrogates how African newcomer youth navigate the sexual terrain of Winnipeg and social media, to explore and express their sexual subjectivity. I examine the question: How does Winnipeg as an urban space shape African newcomer sexuality? Through ethnographic research, I gained considerable knowledge into how African newcomer youth navigate different cultural norms of sexuality in the emergent production of their sexuality in Winnipeg, as well as how youth use social networking technologies to form and maintain intimate connections with others. Following the anthropology of sexuality scholarship, I define sexuality, broadly, as the many ways in which one displays his or her sexual desires and sexual preferences, the feelings and performances of sexiness, and the enactments of and resistance to sexual norms. Rather than reducing sexuality to innate or solely physiological or biological impulses or even to sexual “orientations,” sexuality is continually under construction and emerges intersubjectively, through social relations and relationality. In this way, sexuality is spatially contingent as the different space in which one spends their time shapes their sexuality, as I show in my thesis. By exploring the emergence of African youths’ sexualities, as youth navigate between “Africanness” (what is deemed as acceptable and appropriate mostly by adults) and their developing identities as “Canadian,” social media technologies appear as vital technologies through which they come to understand and express their gendered and racialized erotic subjectivities. Through this thesis, I show how Winnipeg as a local and trans-local space shapes African newcomer youths sexuality.

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*“Do you know her? She works at the club. Maybe you have seen her there before. She is young, about 22 years old. My Ethiopian friend told me that she had sex with two Nigerian guys and apparently one of them took a picture of the incident. One of the [Nigerian] guys told his Ethiopian friend that he had sex with an Ethiopian girl but his friend refused to believe it and said no Ethiopian girl will have sex with him. He [the Nigerian man] showed him [the Ethiopian man] the picture he had taken of the girl during the incident. The Ethiopian guy begged his friend to send him the picture, and the Nigerian guy did. He posted the picture on Facebook and tagged the girl in it. He said it was a lesson for those who think they can disgrace the community.*

*Someone called the girl to tell her to go on Facebook because there is a picture of her there. My friend showed me the picture on Facebook. I felt so sad for the girl. My friend asked me why I feel sorry for her. She thinks she deserves it. I asked her if the reason she thinks the girl deserves it is because she had sex with two men or is it because the men she had sex with were Nigerian and not Habesha. She did not answer.”*

(Conversation with Sarafina September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015)<sup>1</sup>

## **Chapter 1. Why study Winnipeg as a Social Space?**

### **1.1 Introduction**

When I had decided to conduct research on African newcomer youth, social media, and sexuality I had certainly not expected to hear of the story in the opening vignette. I had, in my then – narrow scope, been concerned only with how newcomer youth were using social media for instance, Instagram and Facebook to depict themselves as sexual beings while living in Winnipeg, a city in Canada that was a new home to them. The above conversation took place in Winnipeg in 2015. It opens up a window into a whole wide arena where tensions within the African community present obstacles that the youth navigate on a daily basis. This story encapsulates the tension between various African groups in Winnipeg, such as Nigerian and Ethiopian, West Africa and East Africa, Black and Habesha,<sup>2</sup> and what it means to be “African.” This plays out alongside ideas placed on gender, sex and sexuality. What this short vignette does is provide that opening for me as an anthropologist to recount in my thesis a broader story about how African newcomer youth navigate and display their sexuality in Winnipeg with the aid of social media—that involves much more than simply posting and deciding on their own images.

### **1.2. Thesis question**

In this thesis, I pose the overarching question: How does Winnipeg as a space shape African newcomer youth sexuality? As will be demonstrated below, my research postulates that social media is an important aspect of this, even though it transcends a local space. Through the themes that emerged from my research that include youthhood and settlement, African-ness and social media, as well as religiosity, I gained considerable insight into this question during the time I spent with my participants. My thesis is part of a larger project that examines how youth coming from HIV-endemic countries are targeted by service providers for HIV/AIDS messages. By



characterising African newcomer youth as “at-risk,” these discourses are targeting African youth as risky subjects in need of sexual health messaging for the prevention of sexually transmitted disease, which creates an “us” versus “them” dichotomy in relation to disease (Vaughan, 1991).<sup>3</sup> Within that larger project, my research specifically explores how the social geography of Winnipeg as a space aids in the formation of African newcomer youths’ sexual subjectivities with the help of social media. This knowledge is an important antecedent to HIV prevention, which my thesis does not delve into, for subjectivity, social relations, intimacy, erotics, and sexual practice are interrelated. I focus on how the different locales, including the different spaces where youth spend their time, play an important role in shaping their sexuality.

### **1.3. Settling into Winnipeg**

I moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, with my mother and sister to join my stepfather when I was 16 years old. Settling in Winnipeg was relatively easy for me although it had its challenges. We had moved from Accra, Ghana. I had lived in the city my whole life and I had attended some of the best schools growing up. English is the national language of Ghana and my primary language. My dad spent the first couple of weeks taking us shopping and sightseeing when we first arrived in Winnipeg. He had bought a house in the North of Winnipeg, which was a short distance from the high school I was to attend. On my first day of high school, the Vice Principal looked at me and undoubtedly at my dark skin and “African” heritage and asked me a few questions including what my name was. Despite the fact that I grew up in an English speaking nation as an English speaker and learned in English at school, it was decided by the Vice Principal in a Canadian high school located in a diverse urban centre that I would need to go to ESL (English as a Second Language) and he told my mom that I would have to do that before my classes will be assigned.

On my first day in ESL, I wondered to myself what I was doing there, as the assignments seemed really easy and something I had done when I was in class 4 (relative to grade 4 in Canada). I went home and explained to my mom who told me to speak to the woman in charge of ESL who was from India. I mastered the courage and went up to her to ask her when I was getting my class schedule for regular classes. She told me she would look into it and let me know. But meanwhile, I remained in ESL where I helped other African students with their assignments. Some of them asked me how long I had been in Winnipeg and were surprised when I told them I had been in Winnipeg for a month. They complimented me on my English. I hung out with other Africans because the head of the ESL Program had assigned a Somali girl to be my friend and her friends were other girls from Rwanda and Ethiopia. These Somali, Rwandan, and Ethiopian girls were in middle school or grade nine, while I was supposed to be in grade 11. But my mom and sister had told me not to be surprised if I was placed in grade ten.

One day, during lunch break, I was talking to a girl from Ethiopia who asked me if I had a boyfriend. I responded no. It was unusual to have a boyfriend at age 16 in Ghana although some boys and girls date without the knowledge of their parents and only letting a few friends know about it. She then asked me how old I was, and I told her 16. She looked at me curiously and asked, "What is your 'real' age?" I responded 16. I did not understand why she had asked me what my real age was. I went home that afternoon and asked my older sister (who was waiting for admission into university) what she thought that meant. She explained that some people had to change their ages to be able to gain entrance into Canada. I went back to school the next day and finally got a schedule for grade 11. I was very excited as this meant I did not have to be a year behind. I started regular classes a week behind other students but managed to catch up. The downside to being in regular classes was that, as I realised very quickly, I apparently spoke with

a thick accent making it hard for other students to understand me, which meant that I could not make friends very easily. I did not speak up in classes, as I did not want the students making fun at me. I joined a group called Youth Opportunity Program in my second term that provided volunteer opportunities and a biweekly stipend and I started making friends through the program. Through this program, I ventured to the downtown core of Winnipeg as we were given passes to the YMCA. Later, for my master's thesis, I would revisit these familiar spaces as a researcher.

In grade 12 I started dating one of the boys I met in ESL who was from Rwanda. He was a couple of years older than me and had a car, which added to his appeal. By dating him, I could say I had "a boyfriend" as it seemed everyone in school "had a boyfriend." The relationship was heterosexual and physical; we kissed and held hands. I wouldn't consider it sexual or erotic, though. On one of our dates, we went to Portage Place, a shopping mall popular with immigrants located downtown, to watch a movie. When we were heading home in his car he used a route by Central Park where I saw a lot of black people. I was excited as you could barely see any black people in my neighborhood. I said to him I should come to this place more often. To my surprise, he told me not to ever come to this neighborhood by myself, as it was very dangerous. The comments uttered by my Rwandan boyfriend stuck with me as a Grade 12 student. Since that moment, until my university education challenged these notions, I continued to associate the West End and the area behind Portage Place including Central Park as a (black and aboriginal) space of violence. My own emerging awareness of African newcomer youths' differing experiences in settling in Canada- specifically the idea of teenagers dating and the practice of fluid ages (reduction of ages by some youth to be able to gain entrance into Canada) became central in understanding some of the intricacies of youth settlement experience when my research begun.

My settlement story in Winnipeg is very different from many other youth who come to Canada from African countries and call Winnipeg their new home. In high school one of my friends told me she and her family moved because another ethnic group were trying to kill her ethnic group because “they were pretty.” (I later found out from a close family friend of hers that she was older than she had told us at school.) In that moment I did not understand what she meant because I felt that could not be a valid reason for hostilities. I, however, listened and sympathised with her. This, I later learned, was the conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda. Like many other immigrant families my family and I faced challenges settling into Winnipeg and getting accustomed to the new society. However, our settlement was fairly easy, comparatively. Our biggest advantage was that my stepdad was already settled in Winnipeg and that we spoke the language (English). Some refugees and immigrants, on the other hand, face many more challenges and struggle with settling into the new country. For African newcomer youth such as the research participants in this study and me, Winnipeg our home, played an intricate role in shaping us.

#### **1.4. Defining African Newcomer Youth**

In cultural anthropology, the term “youth” is subjective (Bucholtz 2002). Although chronological age can be used to define the beginning of youthhood, not all communities and societies recognise this life stage. It is problematic to use age range as the criteria to define youthhood; young people from different socio-economic backgrounds and racial backgrounds have different experiences and, therefore, their life trajectories will differ based on these experiences (Bucholtz 2002). Youthhood will, therefore, differ for each cultural group. The state of a country, such as its economic and political stability, also influences whether this life stage might be prolonged or skipped; extreme conditions such as famine, epidemic and political unrests are examples of

circumstances that can disrupt relations of age, which can affect the conditions of youthhood (Waller 2006: 78). Historically and contemporarily, factors such as gender and race influence how “youth” is defined. According to Amit, the age range for the category of youth varies depending on the context of the research (2015: 808). The parameters, therefore, may vary depending on the research topic and question to be answered. In fact, the boundary for youthhood varies cross-culturally and is fluid in certain contexts. For my research, my interlocutors were between the ages of 18 and 30 at the time of my research. They had ranged from being in Canada for one year to ten years. The project as a whole uses the World Health Organization and United Nations definition of “youth,” recognizing the problems that go along with that. Also, by using “youth” as a category for the young adult newcomers, it flags that while they might be seen in Canada as youth, their experiences of childhood, youthhood, and adulthood do not map out neatly or universally.

### **1.5. Conceptualising Race and Identity**

My research is focused on youth who identify as Africans. However, I found during the course of my research that “not all Africans are black nor do all Black people consider themselves Africans” (Tettey and Puplampu 2005: 5). Regional differences and also endogamous identifications (identifying only with a particular group), I realised, played an important aspect in the youths’ identity. My own assumptions were challenged when I approached a young black female refugee who lived in a housing complex for new immigrants to be part of the research and she informed me she was not African but rather she identified as Saudi Arabian, which is geographically not Africa. I had assumed because she was black skinned that she was (black) African. After this experience was when I realised I had to ask the youth what they identified as during my initial meetings to ascertain if they were African, viewed themselves as African or

not. Identity seemed to be fluid as youth turned to identify from their country of origin and Canadian identity (Gauntlett 2008 and Tettey and Pupilampu 2005). Some youth identified more with their country of origin, others identified more strongly with a Canadian identity while others identified with an ethnic or religious identity, rather than a nationality. I use the term African newcomer to refer to those youth who have migrated from various African countries or identify themselves as African and have lived in Canada for less than ten years. This thesis does not seek to undermine the reality of black communities existing in Canada for hundreds of years and visible black Caribbean and African communities established in Winnipeg for decades (see Chambers, 1991). Literature on the Caribbean experience demonstrates the racism faced in the workplace as well as the tensions between Caribbean youth and African youth on ideas of belonging and “blackness” in Winnipeg and Toronto (Chambers, 1991; Kumsa, 2005). The term African newcomer for the purpose of this thesis includes immigrants with refugee status, immigrants with permanent residency status (PR), immigrants who have acquired citizenship status, and international students with study permits. My research is centered on nine participants with very different stories of immigration. These participants have all in some form left their country of birth to live in Canada as their new country of (temporary or permanent) residency either due to unstable political conditions in their African country of origin or for educational purposes. Conducting research among African newcomers requires an understanding of the different diasporic identities since each country has their specific cultures and experiences that shape their identities and behaviours.

According to Stuart Hall, there are two different ways of thinking about “cultural identity.” The first position that he critiqued defines cultural identity as one shared culture, a sort of collective “one true self,” hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially

imposed “selves,” which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (Hall 1990: 223). The second position of “cultural identity” recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference that constitute “what we really are” or rather since history has intervened “what we have become” (Hall 1990: 225). Cultural identity, in this second logic, is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” This implies that identity belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something already existing, transcending place, time, and history. Cultural identities come from somewhere and they have histories. Far from “being eternally fixed in some essentialised past,” they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power (Hall 1990: 225). Identity to Hall is an ongoing, rather than a finished product. Hall notes that it is from this second position that we can properly understand the traumatic character of the colonial experience. The ways in which black people and black experiences were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation. Black people were not only constructed as different within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes, they had the power to make them see and experience themselves as “Other” (Hall 1990: 225).

It is from this second position of postcolonial theory I wish to understand the African youth experience in Winnipeg. To Hall, the diaspora experience is defined by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity. Diaspora identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (Hall 1990: 235). This is important as African youth have different identities, which also become shaped by the various spaces they occupy in Winnipeg. I will explore this central idea in this thesis.

### **1.5.1. Critical Race Theory**

Several scholars have theorised on race and its intersectional nature about the Canadian experience. Critical race theory is important as it posits that race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Some of these scholars' writing on the Canadian experience of race and sexuality are important because they write about queerness and blackness in Canada. They are important to the theme in the thesis with respect to my queer interlocutors. In Rinaldo Walcott's *Reconstructing Manhood; or The Drag of Black Masculinity*, he states how black masculinity has globally come under new kinds of policing (Walcott 2007, 76). He mentions how black masculinities are understood to be underperforming and therefore "in need of programs of efficiency and better management" especially in terms of fatherhood (Walcott 2007, 76). As Wesley Crichlow (2001) describes, in the article *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys: Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities*, there is clear illustration and documentation of the sexualisation of black masculinity. He also theorizes terminologies such as gay and queer in terms of its whiteness and erasure of colonialism, imperialism, and racism and therefore its contestation and resistance within black same-sex sexuality and relationships in Canada. Crichlow (2001) further discusses the erasure of same-sex sexuality within Black communities in Canada.

### **1.6. Literature Review**

To begin discussing the topic of African youth sexuality, one has to situate the issue and the topic to demonstrate its relevancy and how the research contributes to the existing literature and discussion of African youth sexuality. Historical inaccuracies defined what was apparently a distinct African sexuality and perpetuated wrong-minded ideas such as Africans having a homogeneous sexuality. This ideology, which has existed for decades, has seen several



anthropologists such as Spronk (2012) and Tamale (2011) debunk this notion in their work. I will first start by defining what I mean by sexuality. I will further describe what I mean by subjectivity and then continue with discussing notions of African sexuality. The aim of this section is to clarify my terminology and to situate my research on African newcomer youth sexual subjectivity in the broader debates in these bodies of literature.

### **1.6.1. Conceptualising Sex and Sexuality**

The study of sex and sexuality is complex as it is diverse and changes across time in terms of history and the life course. Sex and sexuality is a subject matter where perspective and understanding of the topic may vary with respect to age, gender, socio-economic status, religion, ethnic background, and other factors (Leonardo and Lancaster 1997). These continual changes add to the complexity of researching sex and sexuality. For example, participants' responses and perspectives during the time I conducted my research will change as they mature and over the course of their life course. Drawing on postmodernism and intersectionality (Allen 2012, Keaton 2006), I argue there is no absolute truth as many factors affect people's perspectives and ideologies. Therefore, the interplay between religion, class, economics, social strata, race and ethnicity, and gender is important as these factors inform one's opinion on sexuality as a body of knowledge and discourses and also how sexuality is produced, performed, and experienced.

Sex, as conceptualized by Donnan and Magowan (2010: 3), "defines a wide range of activities and principles." As Cameron and Kulick (2006) note, sex is not just an act but also something that is represented and reflected on. Therefore, by speaking about sex, we shape and form sex (2006: 1). The term "sex," according to Spronk (2014), can refer to acts that are "erotic practices and to categories such as female or male to a practice and to a gender" (2014: 4). This research is concerned with how African newcomer youth form and come to understand their

sexual subjectivity, that is, the perceptions a person has of herself or himself as a “sexual being, combined with a sense of agency and the ability to identify one’s own desires” and how they navigate the sexual terrain in Winnipeg (Kimmel 2007:47). By sexual terrain I mean the different locales and spaces where youth come into contact with, what they associate with or express as sexuality. These spaces could be anywhere. That is, church, school, home, coffee shops, social media, their neighbourhoods and the many spaces they spend their time. In these spaces, youth express and explore their sexual subjectivity.

Sexuality, as noted by Donnan and Magowan, encompasses understandings not only of our sexed bodies, that is, how people are gendered and also categorized as heterosexual, queer, or whatever, but also our “sexy bodies” and how we come to understand ourselves as erotic subjects (2010: 23). Spronk defines sexuality as the “personalised sexual feelings that distinguish one person from another, as in my sexuality” (2014: 4). This means that sexuality refers to the different ways people define or express their erotic desire. I conceptualise sexuality in this thesis as incorporating many diverse behaviours, bodily practices, and understandings that are interpreted on a cultural basis. It is not characterised by stasis, as in “fixed from birth,” and is not homogeneous. As cultures change, sexuality is also prone to certain changes and, therefore, migration plays an important role to these changes. As I show through my thesis, although all my participants were from the continent of Africa, their diverse cultural backgrounds as well as their varying experiences shaped their sexual subjectivities; therefore this thesis contributes ethnographic accounts of *how* sexuality is heterogeneous. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault asks us to contemplate “not only why sexuality became such a focus of concern in the past hundred years, but also how sexuality concentrated extremely potent transfers of power that have exerted considerable influence on the regulation of the social order” (Bristow 2011:152). Bristow

(2011) draws on Foucault to emphasise the central role that power has in the regulation and control of bodies. This is important in emphasising the central role those in power had in regulating bodies and how the regulation of these bodies are directly linked to power and control. Spronk's analysis on sexuality asserts that sexuality is the "social arena where power relations, symbolic meanings of gender, and hence moral discourses in relation to sexual behaviour, are played out" (Spronk 2014: 4). Foucault employs the term discourse, discursive formation and discursive regime to allude to the historically variable ways of speaking, talking and writing that function systematically to articulate what is desirable and undesirable, legitimate and illegitimate within a culture (Bristow 2011: 153). I agree with viewing sexuality as multiply constituted by gender, race, and social strata and, also, as dynamic (Allen 2011; Tamale 2011; Donnan and Magowan 2010; Lancaster and Leonardo 1997). Therefore, I take the view that for each individual, different life experiences influence the performance and constitution of sexuality, meaning that their sexual subjectivity and their erotic desires, as well as knowledges about and views on sexuality, can and do change, in particular with migration, as my research will show.

### **1.6.2. Historical Construction of African Sexuality**

This thesis makes the argument that migration shapes sexuality—and it does so in particular socio-spatial and virtual ways. Therefore, it is important to situate these changing sexualities in cultural context. This thesis grapples ethnographically with the broader question of how sexuality is reproduced in different contexts and in different settings. Before I launch into the ethnographic accounts, I briefly examine African sexuality in its historical constructions and how different influences have led to this current juncture in time.

Black sexuality in general, and African sexuality in particular, has been at the centre of a number of debates where stereotypes have emerged about African sexuality being innate. This is

problematic especially as it is not only a sweeping generalisation that homogenises a whole continent as driven by instinctual desires but also because black sexuality, across the globe, has been racialized. As examined by Pincheon in the study of African sexuality, cultural studies and theories are abound with examples of “limited, unilinear approaches which tend to reinforce basic assumptions about the nature of social categories, often in a self-perpetuating dynamic that undergirds the social and material bases of their construction and hence solidifies their alterity” (2000: 39). Even the most well-intentioned scholars writing historically on Africans and homosexuality (or blacks and homosexuality) tend to perpetuate these assumptions without questioning how such conclusions are arrived at and used. In this section, I examine a number of articles that tackle the various issues of African sexuality and I argue that there is not a distinctive or an “innate” African sexuality. I debunk the myths of African sexuality that pertain to homosexuality as a Western import and heterogeneity as the sole African sexual identity.

The framing of “Africa” as a single entity, the construction of promiscuous “African man” and the creation of the category of the destitute “African woman” are three types of stereotypes that have led to the impediment of research on sexuality in Africa, states anthropologist Rachel Spronk (2012: 23). The construction of “Africa” as a single cultural entity (viewing Africa as homogeneous) leaves no space to the vast ethnic and racial diversities that exist on the continent leaving some works as overgeneralised accounts that do not represent Africa (Spronk 2012: 23). The characterization of promiscuous “African men” who have vast sexual networks and enact irresponsible sexual behaviours is reminiscent of the postcolonial construction of blacks or African-descended Cubans who are seen as sexually prolific, deviant, and criminal, with unruly gender practices (Spronk 2012: 23; Allen 2011: 106). The third problematic stereotype that has impeded research in Africa is that of the “African woman” that

depicts “African women as disempowered to the point that they often have sex for material gain” (Spronk 2012: 23). According to Spronk, while literature on sex in Western society cites a multitude of reasons why people engage in sexual relations and practices, literature on sex in Africa is still in its embryonic stage (2012: 28). The reasons cited for sex in Western society include one’s “pursuit of pleasure, a desire for intimacy, an expression of love and /affection, erotic expression, definition of a gendered sense of self, procreation, domination, money, or any combination of these reasons” (Spronk 2012: 28). Literature on sexuality in Africa, however, describes only the last four as reasons why Africans engaged in sex due to the fact that for Africa, “sexuality has long been understood in terms which do not allow for personal and erotic specification” (Spronk 2012: 28). Sexual pleasure and desire, as Arnfred (2005) points out, were rarely the basis for research on African sexuality and that female sexual desire received even far less attention (2005: 20) This then draws emphasis on what colonisers constructed as a heterosexual African sexuality, which some Africans have come to putatively embody as their true historical sexuality (Epprecht 2005; Murray and Roscoe 1998).

Historical conceptualisations classify African sexuality as simplistic and driven by natural instinct to procreate (Murray and Roscoe 1998 refs). However, research shows that African sexuality is complicated, with diverse sexualities. To add to its complexities, literature shows colonisers had a role to play in the widespread idea that homosexuality is a western concept. Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe in their edited volume on African homosexualities note that the oldest and enduring myths about Africa created by Europeans is the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies (Murray and Roscoe 1998: xi). The basis of the colonisers’ ideologies was embedded in how the black African subject was characterised as primitive and ruled by instinct (Murray and Roscoe 1998: xi). The colonisers’

assumptions that the black African was culturally unsophisticated and driven by instinctual desires meant the black African was heterosexual with his [sic] sexual energies driven only for reproduction purposes (Murray and Roscoe 1998: xi).

Murray and Roscoe trace the assumption of Africa being homogeneous back to Edward Gibbon's comments in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, where he notes that "I believe, and hope, that the negroes, in their own country, were exempt from this moral pestilence [that is] homosexual vice" (Murray and Roscoe 1998: xii). Murray and Roscoe note how "belief and hope" "have become confounded in reports of African homosexuality ever since" (Murray and Roscoe 1998: xii). By believing and hoping same sex sexualities did not exist, when it was witnessed Murray and Roscoe note that these observations were dismissed or ignored. Other researchers such as Sir Richard Burton gave credence to Gibbon's observations, noting that "the negro race is mostly untainted by sodomy" (Murray and Roscoe 1998: xii). This added to the continued idealization that same-sex sexualities did not exist on the continent which decades later African leaders such as Mugabe the president of Zimbabwe for example draws on to situate homosexuality as a western import. This is because in the accounts of African sexuality reported by European scholars where homosexuality was observed, it was believed to have been introduced by non-Africans or Arab-slave traders, Europeans or other African groups (Murray and Roscoe 1998: xii).

Myths about African culture, the strength of religion, and black masculinity are among the reasons why homosexuality is such a taboo in Africa as a whole (Leak 2005, Murray and Roscoe 1998, Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1992). Africans opposed to gay rights claim that homosexuality is alien to their culture (Murray and Roscoe 1998: xvi). Drawing on accounts from different researchers' observations of the African continent, Murray and Roscoe show that

same sex relationships had always been present on the African continent and traditions. Same sex relations were neither alien to the continent nor were they brought by colonisers. A number of historical accounts based on late 19th-century records on Africa and African oral history show that homosexual practices existed in pre-colonial Africa. One case in point are the Azande people in the north-east of modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where it was acceptable for kings, princes and soldiers to take young male lovers (Tendi, 2010). Further evidence for the existence of homosexuality is that pre-colonial African ethnic groups ascribed tribal classifications to gay people (Tendi, 2010). While some of these categorisations had negative associations, many had neutral connotations. A number of tribal groups in Cameroon and Gabon believed homosexuality had a medicinal effect. In pre-colonial Benin, Tendi notes that homosexuality was viewed as a boyhood phase that males passed through and eventually grew out of (Tendi, 2010). Certain tribes in pre-colonial Burkina Faso and South Africa regarded lesbians as astrologers and traditional healers based on their capability to bridge gender roles (Murray and Roscoe, 1998: xii-xv). Clearly, same-sex sexuality did exist prior to European contact.<sup>4</sup> But the problem lies in the fact that “the” “African” body was only relegated to the category of heterosexuality, obscuring the diverse sexual practices that existed.

In their work on the Caribbean and Cuba, respectively, Jacqui Alexander (1991) and Jafari Allen (2011) have shown that people who identify with non-normative sexualities have fewer rights compared to those who conform to heteronormativity. Heteronormativity equals more citizenship and more rights being awarded. Citing several African countries that include Namibia, Kenya, Zambia, Kenya, and Uganda whose heads of states have made homophobic rhetoric, Vasu (2001) explains that same-sex sexuality used to be treated as a private matter in the past; however, in recent years, self-identification of gays and lesbians has

been met with hatred and criminalisation (Vasu 2001: 84). The bodies of people who participate (or suspected of participating) in same-sex relationships have been marked by the law as deviant and therefore not viewed as having rights to full citizenship because of their sexual practice. Dicklitch, Yost and Dougan (2012) explain that few countries in the world actually accept homosexuals as valuable members of their society and even fewer grant full human rights on their homosexual citizens. One's proximity to same-sex sexuality in many different countries in Africa is extremely dangerous as it is a crime punishable by the courts or by citizens who take the law into their hands without repercussions from the state. This does not include South Africa, the only country on the African continent where same-sex marriage is legal but its actual practice is a different discussion.

### **1.6.3. Constructing African women sexuality**

As I mentioned above, there has been a gross generalisation of sex and sexuality when it comes to the study of sexuality in Africa (Spronk 2012). Spronk notes in her research among youth in Kenya how, as a response to the AIDS epidemic, sexuality was discussed passionately in the media and, as a result, older males in the society set rules for sexuality. These rules became accepted as the norm and have become entrenched in the society (Spronk 2014: 11). According to Lewis (2005), the understanding of women's sexuality is biased and based on patriarchy viewed through male-centred nationalism and through racist and colonialist views of African women's "agency" (Lewis 2005: 22). Even though there is no set definition for African or Kenyan sexual culture, female African sexuality has been connected to reproduction. Being a married female has become a symbol of reputability (Sponk 2014). The idea of female sexual pleasure is basically nonexistent and there is no acknowledgement in society of such needs (Sponk 2014; Arnfred 2005). This perception explains the overwhelming emphasis in research



that deals with African women's sexuality as based on reproductive rights and HIV/AIDs, rather than on subjects like pleasure, agency and autonomy (Lewis 2005: 22). In linking this to Spronk's research, the young professionals she interviewed aspired to what they viewed as a different kind of relationship with sexual pleasure and companionships, in which sexual pleasure represented a successful relationship (Spronk 2014: 15). Spronk shows that women's agency has become a focal point of research and that sexual pleasure is an important aspect of couples' sexual relationship. Using Spronk's point about changes in Kenya as an example is crucial to my thesis as I show the different ways that immigrant youth in Winnipeg talked about sexual agency and sexual pleasure.

#### **1.6.4. Immigration and Sexuality**

Immigration scholar, Vukov, notes that in Canada there are two prominent sets of public discourses that describe the nation and its boundaries (2003: 340). These articulations stem around "immigration and population in news media culture and the governmentality of immigration policy" (Vukov 2003: 340). In the first instance, a sexualized reproductive vision of immigration is envisioned as key to the life of the population and population growth (Vukov 2003: 340). On the other hand, immigration has been positioned as a threat to the population, which is then controlled through the continuous regulation of bodies for "security, health, sexuality and race and ethnicity" (Vukov 2003: 340). Immigrants are viewed as key to population growth as any future offspring they have will become Canadian citizens. These two points of view, according to Vukov, "play a decisive role in the organization and regulation of the broad discursive categories of Canadian immigration policy and immigrant selection, particularly in the ways that they are racialized and sexualized" (2003: 340). Broadly speaking, and this is not limited to Canada, certain bodies are not as desirable as compared to other immigrant

populations (Alexander 1994; Allen 2011; Keaton 2006). Relating this to Canada, Vukov notes “xenophilic and xenophobic articulations are mutually informing facets of a common policy discourse that seeks to select, regulate and produce the population for the good of the nation” (Vukov 2003: 340).

Although not all bodies are desired, the selected immigrants are regulated in order to produce desired citizens through enculturation and “education.” Health Canada’s articulation of healthy sexuality for immigrants is a good example of this form of governmentality. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, “healthy sexuality involves much more than avoiding negative outcomes, such as sexually transmitted infections (STI) (also known as sexually transmitted diseases) and unintended pregnancies. It involves acquiring the skills, knowledge and behaviours to maintain good sexual and reproductive health throughout life” and operates under the assumption that the immigrants never had this “education” (Health Canada 2016). Sexuality and immigration are intricately linked as the country relies on the incoming immigrants to settle, reproduce and populate the country. To do this, the immigrants who are not necessarily desirable are made suitable through the education specifically aimed at them in order to help the country realise its vision for desired citizens.

Through this discussion, I have drawn attention to the critiques of the notion of a distinct and homogeneous African sexuality and to the historical assertions of same-sex sexuality as an importation of western culture and therefore as un-African. This body of literature is the cornerstone of my thesis. As shown in the above discussion, the notion of a homogeneous African sexuality is highly problematic and its fallacy will be demonstrated through the various stories my participants discussed with me. Through my various interactions with my interlocutors, I am able to contribute to the literature that shows the various ways in which

African newcomer youth are situated and “integrating” into a new society. My research shows the various specific ways in which youth view and express their sexuality; as well, my research adds to the literature debunking the historical assertions of African sexuality as homogeneous.

## **Chapter 2. Winnipeg as a Cityscape/space for African Immigrant Youth**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Winnipeg is a Prairie city and the capital of Manitoba with a population of 718,400 as of July 2015 (Population of Winnipeg, 2016). In 2014, Canada welcomed 260,351 new immigrants of which 16,222 settled in Manitoba (Manitoba Immigration Facts, 2015). Out of those coming to Manitoba, 13,850 or approximately 85% settled in Winnipeg. Important to this thesis is the reality that twenty percent of the new immigrants in Winnipeg came from Africa and the Middle East (Manitoba Immigration Facts, 2015). Astoundingly, 9.2% or 1,495 of those immigrants made up the refugee population in Manitoba. In addition to refugees and immigrants, university students contribute to the African newcomer youth population in Winnipeg. According to the Manitoba Immigration Facts statistical report, 13% of the study permits granted were for Nigerian students. Following China (at 24%), Nigeria makes up the second highest source country for international students in Winnipeg.

I will now shift to discuss the cityscape of Winnipeg and the spaces in which youth spend their time. Administratively, Winnipeg is divided into 12 neighbourhoods, which does not neatly map onto the numerous emic place-names for the neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> Newcomer youth spend their time in these neighbourhoods where they live, work and entertain themselves in the various locales. With regards to the diverse downtown neighbourhood, for some it is the core of the city while for others is an uninhabitable area, safe only during the day (Carter and Osborne 2009). I use space to refer to not only the physical locales the youth spend their time but to the virtual landscape of Winnipeg such as the various social media apps the youth engage with. What I emphasise here is that spaces as produced through social relations and made meaningful through the various interactions we have in the spaces and the meanings placed on those interactions in

those spaces (Farrugia and Wood 2017: 210). In this regard, we cannot disregard the power relations that play out in spaces. As theorised by Young et al place, or in this thesis space is a “critical aspect of inequality, and young people are positioned within landscapes of poverty and privilege” (Farrugia and Wood 2017; 213). As I further show status of entry into Winnipeg place African newcomer youth at different privileged positions and this affects where their experiences in relation to the spaces they spend their time and its effects in their settlement in Winnipeg.

The status of entry into Canada affects the specific neighbourhoods where newcomer youth find themselves living, with their families or on their own. Refugees are more likely to be housed in the downtown core of Winnipeg, which Carter and Osborne (2009) describe as characterized by unemployment, poverty, crime, and safety issues but appealing because of affordable housing and proximity of service agencies. Other immigrants such as international students either take university housing or they find off campus housing via other African contacts already in Winnipeg.<sup>6</sup>

Winnipeg’s downtown has various agencies specifically aimed at providing a range of services for newcomers. These agencies include resource centres offering school programming for youth. Refugee and immigrant centers are also located downtown and aimed specifically to help with settlement and housing for families. A number of homes and apartments are within walking distances to banks, cafés, grocery stores, a mall, a park, and other ethnic shops that newcomers utilise for spices and other foods to prepare delicacies from their home country. I can relate to this since my family and I also use those same shops often to buy hair products and “ethnic” food products for cooking. Although it has a complex history and is a multi-vocal place in that its varying groups of residents tell different stories about it as a place to live, for the participants in this study the downtown of Winnipeg was seen as an active hub of activities with diverse

restaurants catering to African residents. I conducted a number of my interviews in restaurants and cafés downtown since participants either suggested it or were familiar with the location or wanted to be close to their homes.

A number of clubs located in the downtown of Winnipeg attract various and different crowds. Winnipeg's two gay clubs are both situated downtown and within walking distance from each other. Two participants spoke about occasionally going to these clubs. Nathan Kanu, a gay African university student, spoke of his preference for one club over the other due to the music as well as the diverse crowd it attracts.<sup>7</sup> Two other clubs are mostly frequented by Africans, Blacks, and people from the Caribbean communities as their music selection is mostly African, hip hop and reggae music. These clubs, The Cube and African Bar, are known locally for their black clientele. They are both situated downtown on Portage Avenue but are quite a distance from each other. Also located downtown is a shisha lounge named River Way; it serves as an after-hours space for youth of different ethnic backgrounds to hang out after a night of dancing at the club.<sup>8</sup> There are also a number of clubs whose crowds are predominantly white but among the minorities are also Africans. Music preference as well as sexual preference plays a significant role in the clubs and spaces African youth choose to attend. Youth who are interested in meeting and hooking up with white Euro-Canadian men and women chose to attend clubs predominantly frequented by white men and women, as explained by Simone Adebayo who prefers white men and has never been to either of the clubs with predominantly black clientele, that is, The Cube or African Bar. These various places of leisure provide the space and sociality for African newcomer youth to meet potential partners as well as express their sexuality freely.

Immigrants and refugees settle in various parts of Winnipeg and, as anthropologists and geographers have shown, space plays an important role in how the youth experience sexuality

(Frye et al 2013, Colomina and Bloomer 1992; Johnston 2015). Drawing on these theoretical approaches (Allen 2011, Keaton 2006; Johnston 2015), I will demonstrate in my thesis that the different locales where youth spend their time plays a central role in how they come to express their sexual subjectivity (also see Frohlick, Migliardi, and Mohamed forthcoming). Based on my research findings, my thesis question will be answered in three intricate parts. I initially set out to conduct my research on how African newcomer youth were using social media technologies to navigate their sexual subjectivities in Winnipeg. Although social media did play an important aspect of their sexual subjectivities and how they displayed it online, I found that there were other factors that were important to the youth I interviewed. Following an ethnographic methodology, where knowledge is contingent and emerges through the research process, I had to change the focus of my thesis to highlight the realities of the youth I interviewed.

## **2.2. Discussing African newcomer Youth**

Previous work on African newcomer youth in Canada has looked at the impact of the Canadian educational system in knowledge production and positionality among African newcomer youth. As shown by Codjoe (1997), many African newcomer youth voiced their distaste for what was taught in the curriculum and how it was not a representation of Black history or the lack of representation of black achievement and scholars in the curriculum (Codjoe 1997; also see George S. Dei 1998). Allison Odger's (2015) research looked at how newcomer African young women's experiences and perceptions of sex and sexuality have been shaped by the sexual health discourses in Winnipeg. Her research critiqued the narrow ways of thinking about sexual health (also see Dutfield-Wilms 2011). I add to these bodies of literature on African youth experiences by looking at how youth are negotiating their sexual subjectivities in Canada in general but more specifically in Winnipeg as a social space. It is important to realise that as African youth are

becoming a visible part of the Canadian landscape, it is essential to understand the social constructions that have shaped their history and the many features that characterises the emerging African Canadian community (Tettey and Puplampu 2005: 12).

The first chapter, *Youthhood and Settlement*, focuses on Winnipeg as the centralised locale for my research. In this chapter I explain the different spaces where different youth from different African countries and with different sexual identities and orientations spend their time and meet people. I will then discuss the settlement realities for the youth I interviewed. This is important because Winnipeg is divided into neighborhoods and youth are exposed to different realities in their respective neighborhoods with the downtown core being considered as the space with “deviancy.” Most importantly, this chapter explores the different spaces the youth live in and interact with and, as I show in my analysis, its importance in shaping sexual subjectivity.

I introduce Danny Zamba who moved to Winnipeg in 2005 with his siblings and parents. They lived in a house in the downtown core. In plain sight through his bedroom window, as Danny explained to me, a drug dealer used to peddle his drugs. Sex workers used to stand by the bench, just at the corner of his house waiting to get customers. He eventually struck a friendship with this drug dealer and he soon started selling drugs himself. Female patrons who could not afford to pay for his product gave sexual favors to his friends. Danny showed us the back lane where customers used to wait for him to sell to them, which was only two houses down from his family’s house. For Danny, the downtown became a space where he was exposed to disenfranchised populations and the violence associated with his line of work, as well as with deep long-lasting friendships and social ties. His settlement story differs from other youths who come to Winnipeg as university students. I will introduce a second participant named Aomine Diaki who lived in the East of downtown and came to Winnipeg as an international student and



identifies as gay. To Aomine, Winnipeg is a space where he can live his life relatively freely and hang out safely with friends who are gay without being worried. The way he lives in Winnipeg is drastically different from when he lived in Zimbabwe where it is illegal to be gay and one has to be discreet by being careful with whom they hang out with because of the fear associated with being gay. When I spoke about this to Aomine summer 2015, he said, “I want to live my life... I care less of what people think because you do not affect my life in any way, and you do not pay my rent so there is no need for me to be worried...right?” To Aomine, Winnipeg plays an essential role in how he embodies his sexual subjectivity. He feels free of the fear associated with being gay that he experienced in Zimbabwe. In this chapter I will show how participants’ settlement stories and their relationships to the spaces they interact with impact their sexual subjectivity.

The chapter *African-ness and Social Media* discusses how African youth navigate sexuality in Winnipeg along with social media. I show that despite the assimilationist messaging they might receive from Canadian institutions such as high schools, universities, and immigration policies, the youth I spoke with and spent time with felt it was important to retain a sense of African-ness. Being in western environments did not negate the cultural discourses and norms they grew up with in their home countries or those enacted in their households in Canada. In this chapter then, I show the complexities of sexuality as displayed by my participants. By so doing, I will show how social media helped youth play an agentive role in departing from those ideas they deem as traditional and also at the same time using social media to participate in some types of traditional ways of being intimate that are in line with “tradition.” This chapter seeks to look at how youths’ “African-ness” is both maintained and departed from in this new environment. I introduce Nathan Kanu, a Nigerian international student who identifies as gay.

Nathan moved to Winnipeg when he was 18 years old and struggling with his sexuality. Social media played an intricate part in Nathan's life and others who used social media as an avenue to meet sexual and romantic partners and to make social connections not possible otherwise. Therefore, social media is an important bridge between online and offline socialisation and it is one of the main evidence gathering tools I use to get at youth intimate and erotic relations in Winnipeg.

In the chapter *Religiosity, Racial Boundaries, and Sexual Regulation*, I show the moral complexities that youth encountered in the process of formulating a sex life and persona. I discuss the moral underpinnings of talking about sexuality and how it plays out in the African communities in Winnipeg. I will elaborate on the opening vignette by explaining what it means to maintain a boundary around the communities so as not to shame the community and also the importance placed on dating "the right person" so as not to bring shame on oneself and/or one's family. To put this in perspective, I use myself as an example. I have dated people from different African countries but never one from Ghana. My mother once told me to be careful when I told her I had a Ghanaian male friend. Although he was actually just a friend, she warned me that there were not many Ghanaians in Winnipeg and people will talk should they find out we dated and broke up. Although she was tolerant of me dating men from different African communities, she was resistant to me dating someone from the Ghanaian community in Winnipeg. From my mother's perspective, she was protecting me from the backlash that can occur from dating within the Ghanaian community. Similar concerns surround the youth in my research in terms of who they can date based on the African communities they belong to. Among the Eritreans and the Ethiopians, for example, strong emphasis is placed on being Habesha. Habesha communities view Africans who do not come from Habesha communities as "black."<sup>9</sup> As Segen, an Eritrea

woman, explained to me in February 2015, by dating a Nigerian male, a Habesha female will be shunned and talked about and referred to as only liking “black” men. This chapter, therefore, delves into an important aspect of the African newcomer youths sexual subjectivity and the complexities associated with navigating through it in Winnipeg, considering the various pressures and expectations from family, community members, and the Canadian society as a whole to create morally fitting citizens of African descent.

### **2.3. Methodology**

I used ethnographic methodology as the main research tool, with participant observation alongside multiple semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. Initially, I had aimed for participants between the ages of 16 to 25 who have been in Canada for five years or less and reside in the inner city of Winnipeg. However, the youth who were between the ages of 16 to 18 who I approached to participate in the research refused to participate or did not respond to my follow up requests to set up meetings for interviews. Therefore, the participants in my research were between 20 to 30 years old and had been in Canada for eight years or less. None of the participants resided in the downtown core during the time of my interviews with them but they had either previously lived downtown or had frequented downtown. Two of my participants lived relatively close to Winnipeg’s downtown, while three of them had first lived in the downtown core when they had first immigrated to Canada. The rest of the participants lived in the South of Winnipeg. Although participants did not live downtown, they all interacted with the downtown one way or another during their time in Winnipeg. I interviewed six young men and three young women for this research. I had tried to get more women to participate in the research as they had showed interest when I had explained what my research was about. However, during subsequent follow ups to set up coffee meetings to interview them they had changed their minds

about participating or had not returned texts messages or phoned back. I, however, gained considerable insight from the young women who participated in the research.

At the start of the research, I had wanted to be an active participant in the social worlds of the participants. I had wanted to engage in almost everything that the youth did, as per a conventional practice of participant observation as defined by DeWalt and Dewalt (2011: 23). However, this did not happen due to time constraints and also as participants were only willing to meet up in places they felt comfortable instead of inviting me to participate in their regular daily routines. I had to change my methods. This was ethically sound as anthropologists are not supposed to impose on their participants' private lives unless invited to do so (Groes-Green 2012). My positionality as a 26-year-old African woman from Ghana, who had been residing in Canada for ten years, and from a middle class family facilitated a certain degree of insider-ness but also some outsider-ness. Although I have lived in Canada for a decade, I still consider myself first and foremost African, an identity that most of my participants shared with me. I share the immigrant experience of having left my home country to live in Canada and some of the challenges that entails. However, I was still aware of the fact that I was somewhat an outsider. I am situated as an outsider because I am a graduate student and the participants did not yet have that level of education. The difference in education created a power dynamic that I addressed by ensuring that participants knew they could ask me questions at any time when the need arose; this was to ensure a level of trust was created between participants and myself. As a heterosexual woman, a gendered power dynamic was created between me and the young men participants (Madden 2010). I addressed this imbalance by building rapport with them (Madden 2010). This means I approached my interlocutors in a friendly manner by informing them that they can ask me whatever questions they felt like asking, creating an open dialogue, because it would not be

fair to ask them such intimate details about their life without willing to share something about my life as well. I was uniquely positioned to conduct this research because of my African origin as I could relate to some of the youth's experiences from when they were back in their country of origin as well as some of their experiences in Canada. I could understand some of the cultural terms and slangs they used without needing clarification. Also, being within the age range of the youth I interviewed as well as being a student – regardless of the fact that I am a graduate student, the participants could easily relate to my immigrant experience and relate their stories to me. Through our conversations I gained a sense of their ideologies and beliefs. I created a level of trust between participants and myself through my approach.

By being open and honest with them about my life, they seemed to become comfortable enough to share their life experiences with me. However, I had not expected the different immigration experiences to distance me from the participants quite so much as it did. This outside-ness was more emphasized with participants who had refugee experiences and had lived in multiple countries – prior to coming to Canada - because of unstable conditions in their home countries. I was made more aware of this difference by some acquaintances who told me of their immigration stories. I was informed of how they had to go to Kampala, Uganda to process their immigration papers and one had to change her name in order to acquire papers. Their stories shared similarities. They had to wait years to have their papers processed and they had to bear the secrets of hiding their identities and their immigration plans from family members and neighbors because of fear of their documents being stolen and forged for new travel documents for the culprits. They had also been afraid of being murdered (they mentioned this in relation to jealous family members). This is a life process I never experienced as my family did not come as

refugees. Also, my family members were always aware of our immigration plans throughout the process.

Participant observation was appropriate for this research as it is a method used to understand what is happening now (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 125). By spending time with the youth—even though I did not spend as much time with them in their private social worlds as I had initially aimed for—I gained an intimate understanding of their daily lived realities in Winnipeg along with the social media technologies used by youth, for what ends, and how they mediated their sexualities bound up with gender, race, and nation through these technologies and practices.

### **2.3.1. Methods**

Because my research is embedded within a larger research project, my methods derive from the larger methodology and research theme, which was community-based and ethnographic. The first phase of rapport building, which was essential to ethnographic research, consisted of working with peer researchers and volunteering. Peer researchers, who work with academic researchers and are paid for that work, play a central role as cultural intermediaries for academic researchers wishing to take cues from them in cultural-age-and gender appropriate ways of interacting with youth study participants (Frohlick 2013). The peer researchers are youth from the community, young adult men and women, who are peers in relation to other youth. They joined me to form a researcher-peer researcher pair. During the course of my research, I worked with four peer researchers whose insights and feedbacks were invaluable to my thesis project: Oiza Atta, Godfrey Fubara-Manuel, Yoko Fwamba and Winta Gheybrohannes.<sup>10</sup> I spent time with the peer researchers who gave me guidance on how to properly word my questions and how to solicit participants for my research. I kept in touch with them during the research process. This

way, in reference to Frohlick, the youth become active participants in the research process and retain some control in various aspects. As a result of their advantageous positionality, they act as a gateway into the community through their own social networks. They acted as a gateway by introducing me to other youth in the community who they thought would be interested in the research. It was through the peer researchers' social networks that my research cohort was derived. As the peer researchers were between the ages of 21 to 27 years old, they shaped the research cohort as they introduced me to young men and women in their social networks of similar age range. Also, their socio economic backgrounds played a central role in the participants who they introduced me to because they share similar socio economic and educational back grounds to my peer researchers. Peer researchers back grounds also influenced factors such as the nationality of the interlocutors as well as in some cases sexuality of the interlocutors I was introduced to. They also acted as gatekeepers, as they might have kept some youth from participating for various reasons including that they did not want some of their friends to know about their involvement on the project. Through the peer researchers, I was able to make contact with most of my interlocutors who participated in my research. The peer researchers helped me in data collection, as they were invaluable with the information they provided and also with connecting me to other youth in the community who were interested in participating in the research.

I established rapport with peer researchers and participants through constant communication, either through meeting up for coffee or having lunch together. During these meetings we talked about various topics, which were not necessarily based on social media and sexuality. The aim was to allow the youth to feel comfortable with talking to me before discussing sexuality, which I understood might be intimate and private matters for the

participants and peer researchers alike. I found that youth were comfortable discussing issues related to politics, family and life in Winnipeg that differed from life in Africa. I, therefore, engaged them in such topics during rapport building before talking about topics related to their social media activity and sexuality.

### **2.3.2. Conducting research**

As previously stated, since I was conducting ethnographic research, it required that I actively go into the field and spend time with the participants to get a snapshot of their life. I actively conducted the research and collected data for about five months in the field from March 2015 to July 2015. As mentioned above, my participants were all aged 18 years and above. Therefore, I had no difficulties collecting informed consent directly from them (as opposed to minors for whom I would need parental or guardian consent). Participants were each given an informed consent form, which they read and signed.<sup>11</sup> Data collection took place after the rapport-building phase from March to May was completed and lasted approximately three months, June to August 2015. I interviewed nine participants; three women and six men. My participants were from Nigeria, Eritrea, Congo, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Togo. My first step with each participant was to build rapport. I did this by texting them and asking each one out for coffee. I found that texting was the best way to interact with my participants with one participant actually asking me to use a specific app called WhatsApp to contact him instead of regular text messaging (mostly because he had an iPhone and I did not. Therefore when I messaged him it showed up in green and he liked his messages to be in blue). I found this to be a sign of how comfortable he was with me to inform me about his quirks. During my first meetings I explained to potential participants the intent of the research and the activities they will be participating in. I also informed them of the honorarium of \$25 for each meeting we will have. During my first meeting with each



participant, I found that it was not as difficult to build rapport with each of them as I had first assumed. This might have been due to the fact that I made sure I texted them in a friendly and yet professional manner to ask them to meet up and also because of our close age range making rapport building easier as we had a number of things we could relate to. We always met up in a public setting meant to feel safe and comfortable for the both of us. Our meetings were always informal where I asked them about school, work and life in general. My participants and I found common ground and related to each other quickly and most of them were willing to participate in the research. I had anticipated having to text and ask participants to set up interview dates but was pleasantly surprised by their enthusiasm as the participants texted me to ask when we could meet up for meetings or generally asked about my day or week.

I had spent a few months prior to conducting my interviews volunteering in various organisations to get a background understanding to where newcomer youth spend their time and what activities they enjoyed participating in. This was important because Winnipeg's downtown was essential to my research and a thorough understanding of where African newcomer youth spent their time after school in downtown provided an understanding and an insight that I would not have gotten had I not spent time in these spaces. I volunteered at two newcomer organisations for immigrants and refugees that provide youth centred programs. I volunteered for their homework and after school drop-in programs as this provided an avenue to interact with the youth on a one-to-one basis. As this was part of a larger program, the team members and I had previously met with the organisation's Executive Director and other members in charge of the youth programs to inform them of our research and our interest in volunteering with the organisation. This was to make them aware of our presence in their premises and of our intentions. This was also part of the ethics protocol. As we were not performing covert research

analysis, we had to make our presence known and also to acquire permission. With the help of a team member, my colleague and I were given the opportunity to head a girls group that was aimed for newcomer youth in a Winnipeg high school.<sup>12</sup> The girl's group was held on a bi-weekly basis with topics ranging from self-care, health care to discussions of social media usage.

My colleague and I led the meetings for a term. We, however, limited our discussions to conversations about social media and to topics the youth were interested in. The students were informed about the project and they were invited to participate if they were interested in sharing their stories and ideas. I found out that the most popular social media programs they use are Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. I signed up for these sites and familiarized myself with them before formulating my questions about social media. None of my participants were from the organisations I volunteered with. I was introduced to peer researchers, as I explain above, who introduced me to the youth who became research participants. I made it a point to explain to both peer researchers and subsequent participants that nothing they shared with me will be relayed to their friends who referred them to participate in the research.

After the rapport-building meetings in coffee shops and restaurants, I started conducting my interviews. In those semi-structured interviews, I asked participants to explain to me how they use the social media sites and the role it plays in their sexual subjectivity in Winnipeg. I found that some participants knew what I meant by sexual subjectivity and readily answered my questions. I also explained the meaning of sexual subjectivity to my interlocutors by asking them how they express their sexual identity and through what means. This I found was an explanation they understood and responded with stories about their sexual escapades. During the initial interview, I asked participants a set of open-ended questions aimed at gaining information regarding social media and sexuality. I asked youth questions about their life in their country of

origin and about their life in Canada, and whatever the duration of their settlement has been and the role of social media in negotiating sex and sexuality. This meeting assisted in contextualizing, that is, gaining a better understanding of each youth and their experiences, and also learning if they use any type of social media technologies.

After the initial interview, I asked them to meet with me again for a second interview. To prepare for that second interview meeting, I asked the youth to select a couple of pictures from social media that was representative of sex and sexuality that they would like to discuss. I also brought along a couple of pictures along to elicit a discussion from the youth. This meeting was conducted in various locations the youth picked out. Two participants elected to meet on the university campus while the rest of the participants chose locations somewhere downtown. I was surprised that my concern with location to maintain their privacy was not much of a concern for the youth. They spoke openly about sexuality in cafés and in public spaces. The intent of the activity was for the participants to bring their own pictures that they had already posted online. But I found that what happened instead was that the majority of the participants brought pictures of other people popular on social media whom they found attractive or represented their sexuality.

I audio recorded both interviews with their permission and I took field notes as well. While I had felt that a third meeting with participants would help me gain access into their social worlds, in practice this was difficult to see through. Participants were not always available. I nevertheless asked participants to inform me when they were available so we could meet up for coffee as a way to wrap up my research and exit the field with as little disruption as possible to their busy summer schedules.

I became aware of the inequalities (that crosscut educational and social dimensions) between my participants and I while conducting research in the downtown core. However, being an African woman, I fit into the environment quite easily as there were no physical markers to place me as not belonging. This means that as a black person the surroundings of the poorer sections of the city, such as the low-income housing, and pay loan and money sending businesses, did not mark me as out of place. Research shows that dominant groups can move from respectable spaces, such as suburbs and universities, to spaces that are classified as degenerate and back again, viewing it as an “adventure” that confirms that they remain in control (Razack 1995: 127). This suggests how white and other dominant groups can experience the racial Other but yet do not have to live with the daily implications of surviving challenging physical and social environments. This is similar to what I experienced while conducting my research. Although I am a racial minority, my privilege as a university student and an immigrant from a middle-class family enabled me to transverse both spaces. I went into the downtown spaces regarded as belonging to those spaces by virtue of my appearance as a black person but I did not experience the lived realities of some of my participants because I went back to my (middle-class) home at the end of the day.

Through informal semi-structured interviews and sometimes what I referred to as coffee or lunch dates with participants, I tried to understand how sexual subjectivities are mediated through online forums. Although social media played an important aspect of youth’s life, Winnipeg, their new home played an even more important aspect in shaping their sexual subjectivities. In this thesis, I introduce participants who identify with non-normative sexualities as well as participants who expressed heteronormative sexualities. They told me their stories and experiences of living in Winnipeg and things they have encountered pleasant or otherwise. I also

introduce participants who tell me stories of how they use social media to meet people and to form connections that they would otherwise not have formed offline alone. By discussing the youths' various experiences in Winnipeg, I explore the lived realities of African newcomer youth. Their experiences serve to debunk notions of a homogeneous African sexuality for youth.

### **Chapter 3. Youthhood and Settlement**

*“Because in Africa, well in Zimbabwe, being gay is not legal so there is a sense of having to be safe and more discrete. So when I came here, I needed to keep it [quiet]. I could not express myself or say certain things. I could not hang out with certain people because there was an association with the people you hang out with and your sexuality. Later on, coming to Winnipeg and realising that, yeah, you can be straight and have a gay friend. Now, it’s like no one has asked me yet but if you do I am not going to deny it. I hang out with whoever I want to hang out with. I am going to live my life. I never used to post my picture on Grindr. I only used to post, like, a picture of the torso, and now, when I post, I post my face. And even on Tinder I show myself. It’s a growth. When I came to Winnipeg I had to grow out of the whole thinking I should. I care less of what people think. Because they are not affecting my life. They don’t pay my rent, they don’t do anything for me, to worry about [them].”*

(conversation with Aomine, 2015)

### **3.1. Introduction**

The above conversation took place with Aomine Daike, a young male student from Zimbabwe who was 22 years old when I interviewed him. He moved to Winnipeg to further his education and had been living in Canada for about two years before our meeting. Being a gay man from a country that is not so tolerant, for him Winnipeg has played an important role in how he experiences, understands, and expresses his sexuality.

In this chapter, I show how the spaces that youth occupied and frequented have implications for the formations of their sexual subjectivity. My participants were from various backgrounds including having arrived to Winnipeg with refugee status while some were forced to leave their countries due to war. Others were international students who choose Winnipeg as a destination for the pursuit of an education. The ways in which the youth experienced the new country were very different from each other, as they were exposed to various circumstances brought on by their immigration status, which has influenced the spaces they live in and go about their daily lives (Marmah 2016). In this chapter, I argue that the spaces these youth inhabit shape them as individuals and, in particular, their ideas about sexuality. Additionally, this chapter seeks to convey how Winnipeg provided a space for some youth to express non-normative sexualities without the fear of repercussions they might have faced in their home countries. Winnipeg was also a space to express racialized desires and to boundary cross while upholding heterosexual privilege.

Winnipeg is geographically divided into various districts and neighbourhoods with each of these neighborhoods having a distinct reputation and uniqueness associated with it. My family and I lived in the North End of Winnipeg during the time I conducted this research. The North End of Winnipeg has a highly charged reputation of being a violent low income inner city

space and one with more Aboriginal presence than other neighbourhoods (Carter and Osborne 2009; also see Leo *et al* 1998). Usually when telling people from Winnipeg that I live in the North End, I receive sad looks and I quickly clarify that it is safer than people actually think or I respond by saying, “I live in the ‘safer part’ of the North End.” For the fieldwork for this thesis, I commuted in and out of the North End to the downtown core, another space viewed as “unsafe,” by bus or I drove when I could. To my participants, the downtown core of Winnipeg with surrounding neighborhoods that include the Exchange district as well as parts of the West End represents different things to them. To some, it is characterised by violence, drug use and sex work (Carter and Osborne 2009). To others, it is home after years of living in refugee camps and to others, like me, it is a space I enter on a regular basis to shop, to visit the many diverse restaurants and also to visit the various entertainment locales downtown Winnipeg has to offer.



**Figure 2.1.** The researcher in the field while volunteering

I became aware of my positionality as a young African woman and university student every time I went to downtown to conduct an interview with a participant or to volunteer with the two newcomer organizations. I tried my best not to seem out of place by interacting with



youth on a level that encouraged them to relate with me easily. One of the places I volunteered was aimed to attract youth living in the neighbourhood and surrounding areas for after school programming.<sup>13</sup> This is a space for all youth but mostly aimed at Aboriginal and African newcomer youth. It is advertised as a safe space for the young boys and girls who live and go to school in the neighborhood to hang out and participate in various activities after school. The staff at the organisation explained that the after programs provided an attempt to get the youth away from participating in gang-related activities. The organisation also serves as a first time employment opportunity for some of the youth. When I volunteered during the months of April 2014 to June 2015, what made me aware of my positionality was how the youth who were getting ready to graduate from high school and middle school were so excited and how the staff encouraged them and even attended a number of youths' graduation ceremonies. These moments spent with the youth who excitedly told me about their graduation made an impression on me because I never attached such importance to graduating from middle school or high school. Their excitement showed how important this achievement was for them. Volunteering at the centre made me self-conscious about my own racial identity because of how easily the African youth connected with me. Being that they were teenagers, I had assumed it would be difficult to interact with them but that was not the case. The youth openly asked me to play games with them and some shared with me what African music they liked. I assumed their openness and friendliness to interact with me was because I was African. During the time I spent volunteering I collected data at the centre based on some of the conversations and interactions I had with the youth. The ultimate goal was to link up with participants to participate in the project. Although I connected with some of the youth who showed interest in participating in the project, following through with them in order to participate in the project was unsuccessful. I, however, gained

considerable knowledge about the downtown core and learned about the spaces in which the young men and women spent their time.

### **3.2. Racialization of downtown**

Sociologist Sherene H. Razack (2000) notes that racial categories have been spatialized, which is true for Aboriginals and the reserves demarcated as territories they inhabit. Such spatial practices often achieved through law, she notes, mark off the spaces of the settler and the native, both conceptually and materially. The mapping of space and identity came to mean that urban places were increasingly seen as places where Indigenous peoples were out of place (Wilson and Peter 2005:398-399). The “inner” city in reference to any city, Razack further states, is a racialized space, the zone in which all that is not respectable is contained (Razack 2000: 129). Indigenous populations in Canada have historically been subjected to spaces cordoned off by governments as places containing the racialized “other.” This implies that spaces are marginalised and racialized and that these spaces are usually also marked with poverty as a result, in part, of limited access to jobs. Even though Aboriginal history of space in Winnipeg are significant to the organisation of downtown, the influx of immigrants and refugees have influenced the organisation of the space portraying the multiple layers of the racial dynamics in the downtown of Winnipeg.

As I learned from my volunteer work at the centre, Aboriginal youth had stopped attending the programs there once African newcomer youth started attending in significant numbers. This was related to complicated factors that are beyond the scope of this study; suffice it is safe to say African and Aboriginal youth as social groups had different historical trajectories, and yet shared colonization, that has unfortunately created conditions of hostility (Madariaga-Vignudo, Ghorayshi 2009; also, Armadahy and Lawrence 2009, Wilson et al. 2015). These

complexities are beyond the scope of the thesis. However, it is fair to say that the increase of African newcomers in the downtown neighbourhoods in Winnipeg has had an impact, especially in the competition for low-income housing that served to displace one group for another and also youth identity politics as played out in gang formations and conflict. As Carter and Osborne note, in relation to housing, the two groups are competing for very few units, generally of lower quality and at prices that are higher than they can afford (Carter and Osborne 2009: 15). It is important to note the historical tragedies of Canada pertaining to Aboriginals and the legacy and implications that continue today. In my thesis, I am concerned with racialization of the downtown spaces of Winnipeg and how this affects African newcomer youth. This is because the youth who live and spend considerable time in the downtown face similar hardships and come into contact with similar racial biases as Aboriginal youth. In this locale, some African youth come into contact with sex work, drug use and trafficking, which has considerable influence on the shaping of their sexual subjectivity. The presence of Aboriginal youth at the community center has largely been displaced by increasing numbers of African youth, according to the staff member at the drop in who informed me. Aboriginal youth are not absent from these spaces—their presence (and visibility as well as invisibility) has affected the participants in my study, even though Aboriginal youth were not directly part of my fieldwork.

It is also important to note that not everyone living in these spaces are poor or view themselves as poor. Owing to the recent revitalisation that has been occurring in the downtown of Winnipeg, young adults and professionals are encouraged to live in the downtown; therefore, the downtown's population is increasingly becoming diverse in nature (Of Place and Potential, 2016). Also, some immigrants are leaving extreme poverty and humanitarian conditions to live in Canada. Therefore, what the dominant group characterizes as poverty is not necessarily what

some immigrant groups and asylum seekers themselves view as being poor. They might view their living situations as well off compared to what they had escaped, or their measure of wealth is not solely based on economic values; therefore, poverty is subjective.

### **3.3. Four African Newcomer Youths' Stories of Winnipeg: Race, Space, and Sexuality**

As previously mentioned, immigrant youths' status as an immigrant or asylum seeker can make a significant impact on how different youth experience the downtown core of Winnipeg. Refugees' housing choices are limited by many factors including financial constraints and, according to Carter and Osborne (2009), they generally face the greatest housing challenges of all newcomers. The downtown core of Winnipeg has affordable housing that attracts refugees. Therefore, refugee youths' first contact with housing is usually with the downtown of Winnipeg where there are a number of resources dedicated to helping with housing and integration into the Canadian society. As mentioned above, the downtown core of Winnipeg is regarded as an urban space, which has many implications to different people. While some of my interlocutors viewed it as a space with violence, drug use and sex work, others viewed it as their home and space for entertainment. Youth who spend majority of their time in the downtown core of Winnipeg are exposed to different experiences. The spaces in which they spend their time can have significant impacts on their sexuality and how they express it (Frye et al 2013). For example, as I will elaborate further, Danny Zamba's experiences with the downtown and surrounding areas of Winnipeg made an impact on his settlement and sexual subjectivity as a young refugee male from South Africa.<sup>14</sup> I chose the stories of these four youths, Danny, Nathan, Aomine and Simone, because they were most closely involved with the downtown core in comparison to the other participants. This approach of storytelling based on ethnographic research is particularly helpful in revealing the connections between race, space, and sexuality that are central to

understanding immigrant youths' sexual subjectivity because they reveal the lived realities of the youth themselves.

### **3.3.1. Danny's story: Exposure to transactional sex**

Danny participated in a neighborhood walk with the lead researcher on the research team I was part of and my thesis supervisor, Susan Frohlick, and me. On this walk, he showed us the first house that he and his family had been located in as renters when they had first settled in Winnipeg. The house, which is located near a busy inner city corner, looked so much better now than it did when he and his family had lived there, Danny explained to us. He described to us how, when he was a young boy new to Canada, he could see from right outside his bedroom window sex workers standing by a public bench located nearby at the corner of his street. He told us that is where he met his mentor who taught him about life on the "streets" and advised him not to get involved with gangs as that would be very dangerous for a young immigrant. Months later he found himself trading drugs for sex with numerous women in his new life as a newcomer to Canada, as I explain further.

During this neighbourhood walk, Danny told us how he used to sell drugs around the neighbourhood. He showed us the different locations where he had asked customers to meet him, from the apartment next to his house to different locations a few blocks around his house. He also recounted stories about the frequency with which the sexual services of young women would be offered in exchange for drugs. Danny narrated that when young women could not afford to pay for drugs, they exchanged sex for drugs. These transactions, Danny further explained, would take place in his friend's apartment a few blocks from his parents' house. In that space, he and his friends had parties and invited some of the young women indebted to him. The young women settled their debts by having sex with Danny and his friends. As Danny later

explained, he was conscious about protecting himself and others against sexually transmitted infections and sometimes provided condoms to his friends. In my curiosity, I asked Danny if the young women he used to hang out with were of a particular racial or ethnic identity. He noted that the young women were heterogeneous, with some being from affluent households but wanted to be associated with the “bad boys.” Some of the young women he mentioned lived in relatively affluent or “safer” parts of Winnipeg but spent time with Danny and his friends downtown, which is characterised as unsafe. Danny’s sexuality was profoundly shaped by the locality of his family’s first home because he became involved in transactional sex through his drug connections and the street sex work in this part of the city. While the women “sold” sex, he and his friends were the “buyers.”

### **3.3.2. Nathan’s Story: Space to live life “as I can”**

Nathan Kanu at the time of this research was a 22 year-old international student at the University of Manitoba. He was from a middle-class family from Nigeria and identified as gay. During our initial meeting to build rapport, I told Nathan about my project and how important social media was to my research and whether he had ideas about social media and sexuality. Because I did not expect an African gay man to be so forthright about his sexuality, I was surprised when his response was “First of all, ... me being gay makes it different from what straight boys do and what straight girls do. I have absolutely no clue what they do. I would not be able to help you with that aspect.” We both laughed at that. Mostly because of the way he said it, which was meant to be funny. Nathan, who was sitting across from me, smiled. I knew this was the start of a genuine conversation where we both could be comfortable disclosing personal information about his private life.

Nathan came to Canada when he was 17 years old. He did not start dating until he was 20. When he participated in the research with me, he was not “out” to his family but he had the sense that his dad would be the one family member to notice that he was gay. This is because his dad was away for extended periods of time so he was the parent to notice there were changes in him. Nathan revealed that he was talking to his dad on the phone one day when his dad told him he should do whatever he wants and that he just wants Nathan to be happy. This made him think his dad was aware of his sexuality. Nathan revealed to me that he thought his sister might know about his sexuality, too, but that he had not yet told her himself. He was trying to live his life “as he can.” When he returned to Nigeria for visits he did not plan to be hiding his sexuality and, he and his family would have to have a discussion about it. He claimed he was fine with his sexuality and that he did not try to make anyone comfortable around him by pretending to be “straight”. Nathan strongly believed that gay people should not have to come out as gay since it is not a requirement for straight people. He believes “coming out” sets a double standard.

His acceptance and not hiding his sexuality from anyone was exemplified when he mentioned how an acquaintance had asked him if he was gay after seeing pictures of him on Facebook from Winnipeg’s Pride Week. Nathan had responded with a yes. He was not going to announce his sexuality by going around telling people he is gay but he was okay with people knowing or with people finding out about his sexuality through other people or social media. The way in which Nathan experiences Winnipeg varies greatly from other youth because of the other participants’ specific stories about their interaction with downtown, either those who identify as gay or heterosexual.

Winnipeg had two gay clubs at that time, both located downtown. One of the clubs, Club Zero, was a diverse space for non-normative sexuality and attracted people from different

backgrounds. The second club, LIGHTS, was less diverse and, instead, had a clientele consisting of mostly white young gay men. Nathan explained that LIGHTS attracts predominantly white young men while Club Zero, which is also in close proximity, attracts an older demographic and a diverse population and as Nathan pointed out, a lot more Aboriginal people. Nathan preferred to go to Club Zero because of its racial diversity and music selection.<sup>15</sup> He characterised “LIGHTS” as “Neo Gay” meaning “new gay” with Club Zero being a bit more traditional. He noted that “LIGHTS is a typical white [space] with majority of the people [being] white.” What he defined as “typical” was that “it has music that caters to that population or that crowd. And it’s what it is. It’s typical, it’s very stereotypical in the sense that it a gay club. It’s a gay club but it’s a bit more tame ...compared to Montreal or Toronto.” As shown in Nathan’s narrative, the spatiality of the bars shows how sexuality and race comes into play. Even though the clubs are close to each other, factors such as class and race play into the locale where people choose to spend their time to display their sexuality and, in turn, to be the bodies within that space.

### **3.3.3. Aomine’s Story: Fluid sexuality—not gay, not straight**

I was introduced to Aomine, who is also an international student, through another participant. The opening vignette is taken from an interview I had with Aomine where he explained to me about how it was being gay in Zimbabwe. During this interview, he also discussed how being in Winnipeg affected his identity and sexuality as a gay African man. I had my first meeting with Aomine at a restaurant at the University of Manitoba. I was nervous to meet him because he was the first person I was meeting by myself to ask to participate in my research and had hoped that a mutual friend might be able to join us as a buffer, but he was unable to join us. I met Aomine on my own, and although I was nervous to meet him alone, I acted like I was not. However, I should not have been worried because Aomine was outgoing and we ended up talking for two hours.



Aomine walked into the lounge where we were meeting wearing black tight fitted jeans, a black V-neck T-shirt and a green army jacket. He told me about his favourite foods and how he missed playing field hockey. I told him my own experience in Winnipeg, too, including some of the things I miss most about Ghana. Although I knew he was gay because I was told beforehand, I wanted his sexuality to be something he raised, if at all. Aomine and I made plans to meet up at another time and to continue with the research. A couple of days after our initial meeting, Aomine sent me a text and asked when we could meet. I got a sense that he was very eager to participate in the research by doing an interview and because I wanted to capture his stories and opinions about the subject matter before he lost interest, I immediately set up that interview time and place with him.

During the first interview, which was conducted in a quiet office at the University of Manitoba, it became apparent to me that he did not mind talking with me about his sexuality. In the same fashion and boldness exhibited by Nathan, Aomine talked openly about being gay. When I asked him if his family had the same expectations for him as they did for his sisters since he was the only son, he replied that the expectations are high. They had expectations for him to have a girlfriend, get married, and to have children—heterosexual expectations that, perhaps, especially made sense because he had not yet informed his parents that he was gay and might not have children (although his identification as gay may not have made any difference to his parents). He explained that more was expected from him in terms of marriage and children than from his sisters, since in his African culture family lineage is carried forward through patrilineality, that is, the men's lineage and their children. After Aomine had related this story to me, I felt more confident to be able to ask him directly about his experience as a gay man in Winnipeg compared to his experience in Zimbabwe.

*So it's like right now I am into men but you never know next I might just find a girl. Right now I define myself as a gay man but then I am not always set in that box. Because I know I can find a woman. I can be interested in a woman. So I guess when I came here after a few months I said to myself, okay, "Yes I am gay and am fine with it and I am happy and I am going to live like that I am not going to pretend." I surround myself with people who understand and I feel are not going to be homophobic and I can be friends with. So I guess that was three years ago when I came here that's when I accepted [my sexuality]"*

Aomine and Nathan had very different experiences, which is an important point that draws attention to the heterogeneity of African youth more generally. Aomine grew up in Zimbabwe where homosexuality is illegal and yet is in close proximity to South Africa, which has legally recognized gay partnerships. Unlike Nathan, Aomine was “an early bloomer” who had his first sexual experience at the age of eleven in a mixed (both boys and girls) boarding school when he was in the primary grades. As he explained, he thought his first sexual experience at age eleven was very normal because everyone he approached reciprocated and that “there was no miss.” Both boys and girls he approached to express his desires responded back with their reciprocal desire for him. He explained to me that during this time period he did not know there was a category of a gay person and that he thought people were just sexual. The way he understood romance and sexuality was that he could have romantic feelings for men and women as well as sexual desire. When he was 16 years old, during a debate friends asserted that being gay was wrong. That is when he realised there was a term “homosexual.” Prior to that incident, he had not known there was a term. Now that he lived in Winnipeg and was situated

within a Canadian sexual culture, Aomine claims a gay identity but is not opposed to having sexual intercourse with a female when he desires.

Similar to Danny, Aomine and Nathan also navigated the downtown core and experienced firsthand how race, space, and sexual subjectivity are interconnected. As international students from relatively well-off families in Nigeria and Zimbabwe, they both lived and worked in relatively safe neighborhoods, which contrasted to the downtown core and the poverty that some immigrant youth faced. To express his sexual fluidity, Aomine explained to me how he occasionally has sexual encounters with young women he meets at the club. He called this being “straight curious.” The two gay clubs, LIGHT and Club Zero, were spaces where Nathan and Aomine spent time and were important in shaping their sexual subjectivity in Winnipeg. In their experiences the clubs were “safe” spaces where they could express their non-normative sexualities. Most importantly, they felt that they did not run the risk of meeting African immigrants in these spaces and therefore their sexuality in the community remained secretive.

#### **3.3.4. Simone’s Story: White men, white spaces, and the racialization of desire**

Simone Jones, from Zimbabwe, is 22 years old. She was one of the few females I had the opportunity of interviewing. She had been in Canada for about a year at the University of Manitoba. Simone was living in a neighbourhood close to the downtown area when I first met her but moved to the university residence after the summer session was over. The university residence is located some distance from downtown. During the time I spent with Simone, she told me on several occasions about her preferences for “white men” that is Euro-Canadian men and other non-African men, especially men who are not Nigerian. She explained, “I don’t like Africans... it’s not a stereotype but most of the people I have met ...they have this traditional

view about women. Like ... ‘Do your house work!’ Like, backwards. I don’t like that at all.” Her preference was derived from her analysis that African men expect women to perform stereotypical gender roles whereas white men and men from cultures other than African cultures do not adhere to patriarchal norms. She used stereotypes in her articulation of a racialized heterosexual desire. Although Euro-Canadian men are just as prone to patriarchal norms as black men, in Simone’s assessment of racialized and nation-bound masculinities, they were the most desirable sexual and romantic partners for her.

As a heterosexual single young adult woman seeking potential intimate encounters and relations, Simone’s preference for and attraction to one group of men (“white men”) over another racialized group (“African men”) had implications for where she went out in Winnipeg on her leisure time. More specifically, she attended various clubs in the city and around downtown of Winnipeg whose patrons are mostly white in hopes of meeting white men.

Simone is an immigrant African woman from a middle-class family in Zimbabwe and, hence, is situated within privilege. She went to a private school in Zimbabwe where her classmates were mostly white Zimbabweans. Simone spoke English fluently. I speculate that since she went to school with largely white kids her interest in white guys may have started in Zimbabwe. Her experiences as a heterosexual female with a privileged background are different from other immigrant and refugee experiences. She could afford to live in spaces deemed as safe and transverse the downtown whenever she wanted to. Although she has lived in Winnipeg for only a year, her education and income gained from her mother from Zimbabwe afforded her a level of “integration” into dominant white Canadian spaces that was very different from other newcomers who had been living in Winnipeg for much longer than one year.

### **3.4. Rules of intimacy**

As mentioned previously, I conceptualise sexuality as fluid and in constant negotiation and renegotiation depending on gender, race, economic background and many other factors including country of origin (Donnan and McGowan 2010). In theorizing the links between immigration and sexuality, we can begin to understand how immigration affects young immigrants' sexual subjectivities by looking at how the rules of intimacy in the new host country are played out, often in contrast to the sexual cultures back home in African countries (Parker 2009; Frohlick 2013).

By rules of intimacy, I am referring to implicit rules and cultural codes of dating and rules of who can be with what partner and what those rules entail (Parker 2009; Donnan and McGowan 2010). Drawing attention to the rules is important because it helps to de-naturalize sexuality as that which is innate and taken-for-granted. The anthropological approach to sexuality looks at how sexuality is socially organized, that is, along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class and other factors, and produced and performed in specific socio-spatial contexts (Frohlick, Migliardi, and Mohamed forthcoming). For instance, Danny explained that when he was an adolescent he used to “hang out” with girls back home who shared his African identity, before the whole family had to move to South Africa. His use of the term “hanging out with girls” suggests an implicit code of dating, that is, a desire for erotic or emotional intimacy with girls from his culture and also an un-stated awareness about being heterosexual and performing masculinity. In Canada, as he got older when it came time for him to introduce his girlfriend to his family he used the category “wife” to refer to her. Although not formally married, the term “wife” allowed him to signal heterosexual normativity, with the implicit understanding that the relationship is monogamous. In contrast to his reference to his wife, when he talked about his

casual sexual relationships with a range of different women before and during his involvement with his wife he used the category “hit and runs” to refer to these brief encounters. This linguistic dexterity suggests how his heterosexual masculinity was bound up with sexual prowess and casual hook ups with sexually available women from different racial-ethnic backgrounds (Cameron and Kulick 2006). In Danny’s case, immigration to Canada during his adolescence and early adulthood involved negotiating different rules of intimacy, which in turn affected a change in his dating practices. While back home in Africa he spent his adolescent years hanging out with girls entirely within his cultural group, once in Winnipeg, a multicultural diverse city, his process of enculturation authorized new rules, such that he had sexual and intimate relationships with women from “outside” of Africa/ South Africa (also see Frohlick, Migliardi, and Mohamed forthcoming).

The changing facets of the rules of intimacy apply to Simone as well. During our interviews, she stated that her previous intimate encounters in Zimbabwe had been with black men but when she was living in Winnipeg on a student visa she chose to date men from different ethnic backgrounds, especially white men. As mentioned previously, Simone believed that African men have stereotypical ideologies of gender roles and, therefore, she preferred to date non-African and especially Euro-Canadian men. I would like to explore further this shift in her subjects of desire and erotic/sexual preferences. Owing to her own ideologies and preferences, by virtue of being in Winnipeg she had access to a range of men from various cultural backgrounds as potential boyfriends or sexual partners. In this view, the societal rules regulating whom she is authorized to date changed with a new locale of settlement. This facilitated her interest to date men from other racial backgrounds and to explore intimacy with men from other ethnicities propelled by virtue of being in Winnipeg. Through the process of immigration, rules

of intimacy change and youth try to adapt to the rules and norms of sexuality in their host country.

### **3.5. Space, race, and sexual subjectivity**

As youth from Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Nigeria settle in Winnipeg as international students, refugees, and immigrants, the spaces in which they lived and spent their time played a considerable role in how youth navigate the sexual spaces of Winnipeg. In theorizing the link between space, race and sexual subjectivity I now shift to the anthropological works on the subject matter. As noted by Allen, “gender and sexuality effectively limit movements of black bodies through public space” (2011: 21). Racialized bodies tend to have different experiences in spaces than unmarked bodies. However, based on the experiences of the youth in these four ethnographic stories, we see how the spaces in which they occupied played a role in their sexual subjectivities in Winnipeg. Danny’s exposure to the downtown core of Winnipeg where he was exposed to sex work and selling of drugs shaped the way he experienced the sexual terrain of Winnipeg with sex being commoditized in his line of work. Unlike Danny’s experience with the downtown, Aomine and Nathan frequented the downtown to attend the clubs, to shop or enjoy the many other establishments the downtown of Winnipeg had to offer. They experienced the downtown as an avenue to explore the gay clubs and sometimes other clubs whose clientele are heterosexuals. Being in the clubs for Nathan and Aomine meant an opportunity to explore their sexuality in a predominantly white space. Aomine recounted that white girls usually questioned his sexuality when he told them he was gay in those spaces, which provided him with a complex socio-sexual space to navigate and perform his fluid sexuality.

What this chapter shows is that the different spaces youth occupy, especially the social-economic demographics of neighbourhoods where they live, plays an important role in their

identity formations and how they come to understand and navigate their sexuality in Canada, their new host country—and also that their racial and sexual subjectivity and positionalities influence the spaces they go and the spaces in which they are regulated and/or express sexuality. During the course of my research I am now more aware of how my sexual subjectivity shifts more frequently in the different spaces in Winnipeg I spend my time. I am more aware of my racial subjectivity when I enter clubs and different spaces such as restaurants in Winnipeg whose clientele turns to be white or other ethnic groups. My research with my interlocutors challenged my own understanding of spaces in Winnipeg. I came to realise how space is central in creating sexual subjectivities such as the clubs which Nathan and Aomine could go and dance with other men. As I found through my research, youth utilised social media spaces as a medium to meet intimate partners and to form connections with others in Winnipeg. It is to this topic that I now turn.



## Chapter 4. Social Media and Sexuality

*“By being on black blogs, I found other people who were black gay, queer and I like [that]. It’s a circle of other black blogs. I mean, I still follow lots of other people too but it’s like finding that niche. Finding other people that are the same. There’s obviously a difference because a lot of the people I follow are from the United States and I’m in Canada. But it’s... opened my eyes to a lot of things that I can relate to black gay people... I didn’t know how much racial discrimination still goes on. And on Tumblr I was able to [learn]. Like when Trayvon Martin died, it was huge. Because Tumblr went all out and they were talking about it. And it went on and on and on about it. So that’s basically... social media activity. It’s finding people around the world... that you are probably never going to meet but all of you are similar in the sense that you guys all stand up for the same thing. It beats... having to deal with people you actually know in real life, but you guys don’t have [similar views]. It’s not stressful going on Tumblr, because it’s like ‘Yes, I can go on here and just relax’.” (Conversation with Nathan, March 5th 2015)*

#### **4.1. Social Media and Sexuality**

As noted by Johnston (2015), the virtual spaces that social media provide aid in the construction of sexuality. Many social media network sites exist through which interactions can impact sexuality, including the performance and expression of sexuality. Social media not only influences the way partners are selected but it shapes the types of encounters and interactions including the language used to express desire (Fisher 2016).

Social media, according to Johnston, “is another example of virtual space providing new opportunities for sexual identities, connections, interactions, and communities to emerge” (Johnston 2015: 3). For this thesis, social network sites or social media sites as defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007) are “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system” with the aim of making connections through categories which may vary from site to site. Although some sites such as Facebook aim to maintain previous social ties, others are formed with the intention of connecting strangers with shared interests or activities such as Tumblr (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Other social network sites attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities or lifestyle interests (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing. Some of these social media platforms have the capabilities of transforming sex lives and shaping sexualities, a claim that I explore ethnographically in my thesis. Social media networks can be used to maximize partner choice as people can use it to seek potential partners, thereby broadening access to the dating scene, multiplying the possibilities for desire, and upholding but also going beyond heteronormativity and monogamy (Fisher 2016).

Social media technologies and their usage by youth and how they express their sexuality and sexiness is an important aspect of understanding newcomer African youth in Canada. Researchers have found that youth are using new technologies and devices that can have significant implications in their social interactions (Byron, Albury, and Evers 2013: 35). Research (Hasinoff 2012; Lee 2012) into the social media sites youth engage in helps facilitate an understanding of how youth are using such technologies to navigate the complexities of their identity, that is, Canadian, African, Nigerian, Canadian-African, and so forth. Social media plays an integral role in sexualities by mediating the avenues that enables people with diverse sexual identities to find support and means of socializing through online forums (Burgess et al. 2016: 1). While social media has become a platform used by youth to mediate the sexual avenues available to them, my research shows that African newcomer youth engaged with different platforms to achieve their intended pursuits be it for friendships, sexual interactions, or for outreach/activism.

During my research I found that youth used social media in diverse ways. Youth engaged with multiple platforms of social media depending on their sexual identity or their interests to achieve various goals. For example, Nathan from Nigeria who identifies as gay uses Grindr to meet other gay men, and he also uses Tumblr to stay connected with black culture and activism while using Facebook to stay in touch with family and friends in/from Nigeria. Also, while I found a gendered component to using social media amongst the youth, both young men and women were aware of the risks and benefits of using social media. For example Danny mentioned to me how on one occasion he found out that the girl he had been having intimate conversations with on Facebook was actually his girlfriend at the time's friend and they later confronted him for being unfaithful. He linked this to why he did not like using social media, in

particular, Facebook because “you know, you don’t know who you’re talking to. The way the young women interacted with social media technologies differed in considerable ways to how the young men used social media which I will discuss in this chapter. In this chapter I will discuss the different sites and forums youth use to make intimate and casual connections as well as the role social media plays in the youth’s agentive lives and how youth are using social media to express sexuality as they navigate the realities of their new home, Winnipeg.

#### **4.2. Making connections via social media**

While youth employed social media for different purposes, one of the main reasons why they used social media was to form new connections in Winnipeg. Another main reason was to stay in contact with relatives and friends from “back home,” that is, African countries of origin. Most of the youth I spent time with used a combination of social media applications to form new connections as well as to stay in contact with family and friends. WhatsApp and Facebook were the most popular networks youth used to stay in contact with family and friends from their country of origin. During my conversation with Danny, originally from South Africa but came to Canada with his family as refugees he noted, “the reason why I use Facebook is because of my family back home. They want to know how we are doing and stuff like that. I can’t talk to them every day it would be like \$50 or \$100 a day.” Therefore WhatsApp and Facebook provide a cheap avenue to stay in contact with friends and family as they are free to download and available on most cell phones, which the youth mentioned were the main technology they used in accessing social media. WhatsApp has a free calling application that uses minimal data that allows for family and friends back home to easily have access and stay in contact. I use WhatsApp and Facebook frequently; therefore, I could relate to the benefits the youth have using them to stay in contact. The youth who came to Canada as international students had used

Facebook before coming to Winnipeg. Therefore, they were already familiar with it. However the young men and women who had refugee status when they came to Canada only started to use social media when they settled in Winnipeg. The youth who had refugee status arrived in Canada at a younger age than youth with international study permits and many had used the social media before. What was new to some of my interlocutors, then, in arriving to Canada as young adults was how they learnt about and began to use applications for romantic and sexual connections, in other words, to have “hook ups.” These platforms filled in a gap by providing opportunities via social media for some youth looking to form intimate connections to meet people with similar interests. Participants such as Mike spoke of having busy schedules and having difficulty meeting women and the cultural barriers that come with being in a new space dissimilar to the African context of approaching women and that social media provided the avenue to meet people by fitting it in his busy schedule.

#### **4.3. Social interactions, connections and sexuality online**

The opening vignette is taken from a conversation I had with Nathan where we discussed social media and sexuality in his life. I introduced Nathan in Chapter 2 and discussed his settlement and acceptance of his sexuality as a gay man in Winnipeg. Here I return to his story to talk specifically about his use of social media. During my interviews with Nathan he explained that when he was younger and in Nigeria he knew of his sexual preference and prayed to God for him to be “normal.” After living in Canada for four years, he had, instead, “accepted” his non-normative sexuality and was not worried about people knowing his sexual orientation. He used Grindr and Plenty of Fish, both popular dating websites to meet and form connections with other gay men, and Tumblr, a social networking site for bloggers to follow other black gay men. However, as Nathan pointed out, social media can be a space of contentions and dealing with a

lot of racism and prejudice. Although Grindr is supposed to be a space where gay men can meet each other, in Nathan's experience it can be a place of internalised homophobia. In Nathan's words;

*People come from lots of places so they come with a lot of internalised homophobia. Grindr is one of the most racist. As gay people, you think because we are gay, we should be more tolerant to other like race and whatever. But you go on Grindr you hear... people are very racist even though they are gay. So it's like how does that work for you. There are lots of these, I don't know if it's still there but they were profiles "into only white guys. No Asian, no Blacks." You'd see people write it boldly, no Asians no blacks, no this, no that. No fems. This means they are not into effeminate guys. So lots of internalised homophobia because you are basically hating on your fellow gay people.*

Nathan was crossing new boundaries as a gay black young man living in Winnipeg, and seeing men of other ethnic and racial groups. Social media exposed him to a lot of the complexities of the gay culture in Winnipeg; he had to navigate social media platforms dealing with racism and prejudice similar to heterosexual racialized groups. Social media had become an integral part of Nathan's settlement into Winnipeg and a technology that aided the construction of his sexuality.

Some social media applications cater to heterosexual and gay relationships, which subscribers use to meet people with similar interests. Amongst the platforms meant for dating

and “hooking up,” youth used Plenty of Fish, Grindr, and Tinder to meet people. Mike, a 27 year-old participant from Congo, explained:

*It's just, to be honest to say, to me nowadays it's all work especially. Let's say if you work the whole day you come home you are tired and maybe you get a shower and have a bite to eat and then you are on the computer for half an hour watch a little bit of TV. You know, you off to sleep. The next day, same routine. So it makes it [...] harder to find someone... If that is all your life is about just work and home, work and home, you tend to just talk to those people and make some friends, so yeah, it kind of makes it a little bit more difficult. So the only thing to do is to go online and see who you can find. And sometimes, of course, it ends up other people are also busy nowadays. That is why I find the Internet is kind of okay. It's not too bad.*

Due to their busy lifestyles these social media platforms filled in some gaps youth had in terms of meeting someone and forming relationships. During the first interview with Mike, I met him at an Ethiopian restaurant in the downtown core. I had previously met Mike on two other occasions to build rapport and to explain to him what my research was about. To Mike, social media was an avenue to meet women with whom he could form intimate connections and have sexual relations. In his busy schedule, social media afforded him the opportunity to date as well as have casual intimate encounters with similarly minded females. He used an online dating site named Plenty of Fish. In his words;

*Plenty of Fish is you put a picture on there and write a few stuffs of yourself to make a page. Or you message one person. Those are the people when you*

*apply they would bring you some people who are a little bit into your category. Click on the one you like, “hi my name is and that, we should meet.” If she responds to you then you move on to the next conversation “what’s your name? You in Winnipeg?... Plenty of Fish is like a bit fun. Girls who were there pretty much knew what they wanted most of them [are there for] hook ups just hooking up.*

Just as Nathan expressed his sexuality as a gay man on social media, social media was also an avenue through which Mike performed his heterosexual subjectivity and, in particular, his masculine heterosexuality and African-ness. Mike consciously filtered his encounters to specific ethnic groups of women who were not black because “I don’t think a ‘proper’ black girl would be on POF.” He sought out experiences online that were with women of non-black or non-African ethnic backgrounds. I will explore more of these racial boundaries in my next chapter. For Mike, social media provided him the avenue to meet and form connections with women who he filtered to his personal specifications. As Mike pointed out, “when you [are] talking online, you can pretty much say anything, you say all the sweet, sweet stuff,” meaning that he said whatever he felt might be compelling to that particular person for a potential “hook up.” When I asked Mike if he is more confident to approach women online versus offline, he confidently told me that “it’s not that it makes me feel more confident, I’m always confident.” It seemed strange to me that if he was confident and comfortable to approach women why would he use social media as a medium to meet women? But then Mike explained that he uses social media to bridge a cultural barrier in approaching women because of different social practices in Canada compared to back home. In his words,



*I had that mentality. [I approached women saying] “Hey sister, I want to talk to you” but every time I try to talk to someone [here] it seems like I was running after someone. Like [they are saying] “Yeah, hey I am busy get away from me.” I [said to myself] like what is wrong with these girls. My friend told me “man check out HI 5” there was another one called MSN. He said, “Check out those, talk to just some random people who are there” and I was pretty good and it kind of worked out for me and I was like “I am going to stick to it then.”*

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Mike was introduced to online dating by his friend. He now uses the online platform as his major way to meet women for “hook ups.” Although, for the most part, Mike’s online experiences were positive, he spoke of one of his bad experiences online with a potential “hook up” noting, “sometimes it doesn’t work out. Sometimes people will put a picture but [it] is actually not [them]. You end up meeting the person [and say to yourself] “I thought you were 100 now you are 107, sorry, not interested.” A lot of crazy stuff from this site.” While this may have been one of Mike’s negative experiences, at the same time, he is guilty here of ageism and of regulating women’s bodies through his assessment of women’s appearances. His sexual subjectivity is entangled with power relations associated with masculinity and femininity. Having experienced the positive and negative aspects of online dating, Mike found that online dating was a useful platform to meet life partners—because it was through the sexual connections he made online he hoped that one might progress to an intimate long-term relationship. While Mike used online platforms to make sexual connections and to meet women of different ethnic backgrounds, other youth used social networking sites to form friendships that potentially might lead to romantic relationships.

My interlocutors used social media for more than the pursuit of sexual relationships. Friendships were also formed, thereby raising the question of how sexuality, gender, and race mattered when forming friendships online. Damien Mare was an international student from Nigeria from a wealthy family who explained to me that social media had also, in his words, “expanded the dating scene” for him to a wide range of sociality, making it easier and increasing the opportunities to make new friends and form new relationships. During our discussion, which took place at an office space on the university campus, Damien explained,

*It's weird because I think I have actually made lots of friends on social media. Even if I didn't get to date the person or anything [...] I just go to connect with different people over social media. Yeah, I have had relationships that started out with social media. Like a follow or something on Instagram or Twitter... Sometimes it might not even be that way, it might be you see the person on social media and you know the person on social media and you see the person in real life. Like that kind of conversation, like I have you on here, like something like that, that's why you look familiar. So social media has actually expanded the dating scene I guess.*

Although both Damien and Mike met women online and had intimate relationships with them in offline encounters, social media was also an avenue to make platonic relationships as shown in Damien's statement. Therefore, in this context he had used social media to expand his circle of friendships as well as the number of women available to him to date. But as Damien explained, the dating scene in Winnipeg was also limited for him because people know each other and it makes it easy for people to find out about you. As he explained,

*I was in a relationship for a long time but the problem is that Winnipeg's social scene is just too small so lots of drama in the relationship and things like that... Like everyone knows each other in Winnipeg, it's like even if I don't know you, you know this person [who] knows [another] person [who might know me]... Let me give you a random example: The girl that I am actually seeing right now, she found me on Facebook. We were chatting on Facebook.... Having random conversations and she invited me to come out to a club. I couldn't make it, so we kept on talking and she eventually found out that, no, rather, I eventually found out that she was close friends with my cousin here. So that's just how small this city is; it's like you never know who knows each other.*

When I had asked Damien of his dating preferences he noted, "I've stopped dating African girls just because of the drama." He continued by explaining further, "I know a lot of African girls but I told myself that I'd stop dating Nigerian girls [because] they are quite a handful." What Damien was explaining to me in the above conversation was that the Nigerian community was too small and that "drama" seemed to find him in the Nigerian dating scene. Therefore, his newfound preference for dating non-Africans and specifically avoiding Nigerian girls emerged in his settlement context in Winnipeg. In expressing his sexual subjectivity as a heterosexual Nigerian young man in Winnipeg, the Nigerian social scene was limited because of the potentiality of people knowing each other, which may cause "drama" for him. "Drama" in this sense refers to how girls he had dated previously might know each other, which may lead to potential problems in his new relationships. But also "drama" has a deeper underlining meaning which Damien may not be aware he is reproducing about African/black women in general. The

“drama” which Damien is referring to is more than just women knowing one another, it also refers to female aggression or a stereotype of such aggression as well as stereotypes of emotional femininity (Barrett and Bliss-Moreau 2009). This plays into stereotypes about women’s possessiveness of men from a heteronormative framework. As noted by Stephens and Phillips (2003) beliefs and attitudes about African American women’s sexuality and aggression appear to be sanctioned by society. In furthering their analysis they note several stereotypes of African American women including being characterised as “divas” meaning that African American women “have an attitude” (Stephens and Phillips 2003: 13). Also Celeste Walley-Jean (2009) describes the stereotype of the “angry black woman” that has permeated and continues to influence society’s view of African American women (Walley-Jean 2009: 68 also see Kretsedemas 2010). These stereotypes play into how Damien views Nigerian women and in turn his characterisation of Nigerian women. Damien is reproducing a stereotypical narrative about African women owing to his description of Nigerian women as being dramatic. In other words – much as these recently arrived Africans still identified as Africans, being black people, they could not totally disentangle themselves from the existing North American racialized stereotypes.

Aomine, the gay man from Zimbabwe, used social media to socialise as well as make both platonic and sexual connections. To shift from one sociality to another, that is, from friendships to sexual connections, he utilized different social media sites, where he had different profiles. He felt that there were many benefits to using Grindr in finding partners for long-term relationships and friendships. He also mentioned the “sexual scene” of Grindr: ,

*Facebook is really not a place for sexuality. Really, like for me, I just use Facebook to keep in touch with my friends and get contacts when I want to*

*get a number from someone and then read posts, that's how I use Facebook. But when you are looking for sexuality or sexual stuff or looking for whatever, Grindr is the place. It's really easy, if all you want to do is to just get off, get Grindr and you would definitely find someone, that's the benefit from Grindr. Sometimes you just want that. There is nothing wrong with it. You just blow steam off and then you carry on so and I guess it's accessible... most of my friends that I have are from Grindr. If you are like one of the lucky people you can actually get both (friendship and sex). But, then, maybe like 90% is sexual, because most people you talk to them and then [tell them] "yeah I am looking for friends" and they end up not talking to you. So it ends up being more of a sex thing.*

In the above statement Aomine utilised different social media sites for different purposes. Facebook was primarily for maintaining friendships and familial relationships. While he utilised social networking sites such as Grindr for intimate encounters, Aomine still sought out friendships from Grindr as well. This is true for a number of the youth I interacted with due to the importance of privacy, especially for the youth who identify as gay men but were not public about their sexuality in the local communities.

Using social media to meet other gay men in Winnipeg allowed Aomine to form friendships that transcended the online forum into his offline or "real" life. Although the majority of participants who used social media networks for hook ups were mostly young men, these platforms are also availed by young women who also used it for similar purposes.

When I began this research, I was interested in how African youth were using social media technologies to represent themselves and to explore and experience sexuality in Winnipeg. I found gender to be an important aspect of how youth express their sexuality online. This factor arose early on in my fieldwork. When I was invited by a community member to be a volunteer for a group of immigrant teenagers, I was able to interact in a school setting with African newcomer girls who explained their use of social media. But, more importantly, they explained the care they took in the use of social media and the content they posted online. Hasinoff, who specialises in social media and sexuality, illustrates and challenges common concerns about the negative effect of digital and mobile media on how girls communicate and who they can communicate with. She argues that thinking about sexting as media production would encourage researchers to pay more attention to the opportunities of social media as well as the risks (Hasinoff 2012: 449). Hasinoff argues that since the Internet and mobile phones permit instant communication that is removed from traditional social contexts and consequences, the concern is that girls are more likely to make inappropriate sexual decisions when communicating with these technologies and find themselves in uncomfortable situations through their online encounters (2012: 452). Arguing against the position that social media is risky for girls in ways that it is not for boys, Hasinoff offers another perspective. While discussing sexual topics with online strangers may be risky for youth, in Hasinoff's view, these strangers are separated by distance and, moreover, relative anonymity can be of crucial benefit for some teenagers. This may help provide girls, queer teens, and other marginalized youth, in particular, find refuge from some of the stigmas and restrictions they experience at home and at school.

Therefore, when I began to conduct interviews with female participants, I was not surprised to find that they had used social media differently in many aspects compared to the

young men I interacted with. Simone, whom I introduced in the previous chapter, was a frequent user of social media. She was one of the few women I interviewed who used social media to meet men, to form connections, as well as to express her sexuality. Simone described herself as asexual since coming to Winnipeg because she did not want to have sexual intercourse, noting “I have just been a zombie of late.” For Simone, using social media to express her sexuality and her sexiness was very important. In the first interview I had with her, Simone noted,

*Well, if you [are on] Facebook, I guess you could meet more people or try to express yourself, but sometimes you can't really do that. Because I have my mother [on Facebook] so it's not like I can post freely or anything like that, but if it's Instagram I can post whatever I want and it's easy. They have a feed [on Instagram] where you can see a lot of other people's posts and stuff so you can see a lot of other things. But with the other ones I don't really. ...SnapChat as well, I mean since you can't really save and it goes, you can post anything you want on your stories. Usually I can wear what I want. Facebook I can't really do that. Like sometimes I wear really exposed stuff like I can post it on Instagram and people will see that that's what I am. I guess I can express myself better sometimes on Instagram. I usually don't have to say anything because the pictures say a lot. They are saying this is a very sexy girl.*

Simone used social media on a daily basis, and the importance of social media to her was apparent in our discussions. She was, however, careful about what she posted on each site due to possible negative repercussions of judgment and shaming from family and friends she wanted to avoid. It is important to note that, although she wanted to freely express her sexiness and

sexuality online, she was still conscious of the boundaries that are placed by society; in this case, she was particularly concerned about her mother who follows her on Facebook seeing her express her sexuality. Simone dressed “sexy” regularly, therefore, she was able to display her sexual appeal both online and offline. However, by posting pictures she found “sexy” on Instagram or Snapchat, Simone was expressing a sexuality that was meaningful to her while at the same time negotiating boundaries she could transgress, made possible in using social media networks, due to surveillance from family and community members.



**Figure 4.1.** Picture of Simone posted on social media.

Simone also used social media as an avenue to meet men who she might wish to date.<sup>16</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Simone was attracted to white men and non-black men due to her assumptions that black men hold on to stereotypical gender roles while men from other cultures do not have such beliefs. While I argue that this is a false assumption as men from various cultures and backgrounds can also hold on to stereotypical gender roles and such assumptions are not limited to certain cultures, what is important in my thesis is how she expressed her desire for a particular “racialized” masculinity in these online environments. In her



effort to attract men Simone used Tinder, a social media platform to meet men. She explained to me how Tinder works,

*I think I mentioned it, Tinder. There you put your picture and then people will swipe right or left. So if they want to see you, if they like your picture they swipe right and then you can also swipe right. If you match, then you talk to them. That's the only way you can talk to them. It has a lot of attractive people and I have talked to them but then I haven't really met... yeah okay I have met someone. I met them at the club and then I totally ignored them. I didn't say anything. Because... he was like "come to my room" and I was like "no." That was the first thing he said. I was like "you don't even know me." He was too forward. So then I saw him and we made eye contact and I was like "oh God." So I told my friend and she was like laughing, "Oh yeah that's the guy I met on Tinder I told you about. I moved like away from him and he ended up sending me a message saying good night I guess. He was like, 'your pictures are really nice on Tinder.'*

Using social media to meet men to date was important to her. However, as she pointed out, a main reason why social media was an important avenue to her was to meet the men who she was interested in. She felt that some men of other ethnic backgrounds (for her Euro-Canadian men) found it difficult to approach black women offline due to their perceived assumption that black females are "crazy. She pointed out that the online platforms gave some men an avenue to express their desire to meet her. She noted,

*The problem with other races is that they are very timid. I feel like I am intimidating sometimes. I think I am intimidating sometimes because they seem like they want to talk to me but they can't. They will come close and they will chicken out. I see this so many times. I am not going to do anything. They think like black people are crazy. Like black girls are crazy. I am not crazy. [Not] yet! Because at least I feel like when I am on social media they are not afraid to talk to me because I am not there in person. I guess I can express myself differently on social media then they are able to reach out and be like "I like you. I want to talk to you." So it's better there. The good thing about social media is that what you see is what [you] get. Like, yeah, I mean of course people filter and stuff but you have the general view of someone then you can meet them. So you can use it and not be afraid, at least you know what they look like.*

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It is important to note the attribute of being labelled as “crazy” by her non-black suitors. This is a version of the “angry black woman” narrative mentioned above by Damien in his articulation of Nigerian women. These stereotypes unfortunately perpetuate racialized discourses from the Jim Crow era about African-American femininities (see Kretsedemas 2010 and Walley-Jean 2009). By using social media to express her sexiness (Donnan and Magowan 2010) but also her blackness as an attractive quality or exotic quality for men, Simone hoped to attract white and other non-African men for a relationship. However, Simone preferred long-term sexual relationships with men she meets and preferred to avoid emotional relationships. This is a point of view she has had since she was back home in Zimbabwe where she had engaged in

several “physical” relationships. What Simone meant by having “physical” relationships were sexual encounters without penetration.

*I feel like females should be allowed to have their sexual nature. Like guys can just fuck anyone right? But you when you do, it's like you are called a whore. It's not fair. It's a double standard. So you should be able to do whatever you want. That's the stand that I have. Because I don't like relationships. I don't do relationships like dating people. Like physical relationships, that's fine with me.*

Simone had a sexual life back in Zimbabwe but since immigrating to Winnipeg, she became asexual. This is because she had not had the drive to meet someone with whom she connects for physical encounters. She used social media in the hopes of meeting someone for an intimate physical relationship. She noted, “I am trying to put myself out there, because maybe there is that one person that I will meet and I will be able to connect with them. That's what I am hoping for. But I am slowly losing hope.” Social media provided Simone an avenue to express her sexual identity in the pictures she posts, her sexiness, and also her sexual agency in the hopes of meeting someone for a long-term physical relationship.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

The numerous ways youth use social media in order to make new connections, form intimate partnerships, as well as to learn about sex and sexuality, shows the important role social media plays in the lived realities and settlement of African youth in Winnipeg. In this chapter, I have shown how social media is important to youth in their everyday lives for the purposes of connecting with others for friendships and for intimate relations including “hook ups.” The

patterns that emerge are the numerous ways youth display and perform sexuality online. I found that sexuality was expressed in clever manipulations of different sites. By using Grindr and Plenty of Fish to meet other gay men to form intimate connections and sometimes Facebook to form platonic friendships, both Nathan and Aomine were using social media as a tool to express their non-normative sexualities in Winnipeg as young African men. I found that gender matters in that young men and women used social media in different manners to express their sexual subjectivity by displaying their agency in a number of ways. Social media was used to select who they found attractive and who they wanted to date. For Simone, social media was a space utilised to meet non-black men. Although at the time of this interview she had not met anyone offline yet, by displaying her “sexiness” through her outfits and pictures online, she was able to negotiate and transgress boundaries made only possible by social media. Moreover, Simone challenged gender norms and expectations by using social media in the same manner as the young men who I spoke with. As mentioned by Simone, social media made her seem more approachable to “white” men. This was because to her “white” men found black women intimidating owing to colonial stereotypes of black female aggression which have persisted. In this chapter, the various media applications youth use in accessing social media and interacting with friends and intimate partners or potential intimate partners are central to how they express their sexual subjectivity. Through the relative anonymity that the internet provided the youth I interacted with were able to express their sexual agency although within certain parameters. Through their stories, it is evidenced that social media played an important role in the formulation of their sexual subjectivity in Winnipeg helping them navigate the sexual terrain.

## Chapter 5. Religiosity, Racial Boundaries and Sexual Regulations

*“It is part of us, as human beings to want to be loved. If it is cuddling or kissing or something. Sometimes you just need that affection, right? It’s just that sometimes I feel that people are promiscuous and they tend to, in my opinion, go about sex in the wrong way, which brings about a lot of disease and stuff. But when it comes to it, even if you want to be sexually active you should. At the end of the day as a woman, well, for me anyway, how would you feel knowing that, that person used you just for sex? I mean if that’s what you wanted then it is okay. But I have heard many people say they were so hurt because what happened should never have happened in the first place.*

*I don’t know if using condoms or not using condoms would have made them feel better. I know someone who was dating someone back home. And they had been together for four years before she came here. So the plan was that she was just coming here for school and then finish and they will get married. But I think because of the long distance they started fighting a lot and then she met a guy here. They were still together but they were broken up pretty much. And she found someone here and they were talking over the Internet and then he ended up coming to Winnipeg. The guy she was talking to was in a relationship too. He was living with his girlfriend. When she decided to mess around, she did not protect herself and she ended up getting pregnant. And then she had to have an abortion. I was so hurt because she was my really good friend and she didn’t tell me about it. I heard about it from someone else.*

*Since then I have learned not to be open about my sexual orientation or my views on sex because I do not have a lot of knowledge on it and when people talk about it I just play along. Because I feel that people judge you. She [her friend] claims “I guess I didn’t tell you because I felt you were going to judge me.” She said it was such a painful time in her life. I get emotional every time I think about it. But she said “Oh yeah I didn’t tell you about it because I felt you were going to judge me. Because you are supposed to be the goody two shoes.” And I just felt so bad because to me, I will never come from a place like that to say do not do that. Like even when she started I told her it is ultimately up to you. You just have to make sure you do it the right way. So when it comes to sex, condoms, things like that, I just feel like people should do what make them happy. I have a boyfriend so I think it is harder for men to stay celibate, right? They just feel like “Okay, everyone is doing it so why can’t you be doing it too?” But I feel there are other ways to show affection and to be intimate with someone”*

*(Conversation with Kemi, September 15<sup>th</sup> 2015).*

## **5.1. Introduction**

As Kemi, a 30 year-old university student from Togo who had been in Winnipeg for 8 years, was talking about her friend's abortion she started to tear up. I sat there quietly and listened to her explain to me why she felt so strongly about her friend not telling her about that difficult moment in her life. Kemi's explanation of how she views sexuality and the impact of her friend's abortion made me ever more aware of the religious underpinnings of sexual norms. During the course of my research, I found that religion had a significant influence on newcomer youth's upbringing and was an influence in certain choices these youth made after migrating to Winnipeg. The youth discussed how they were raised in Christian homes and, therefore, were expected to follow specific rules regarding conduct and morality. They, however, believed that due to their residency in Canada, they could circumvent some of these rules because they believed Canadian society is much more liberal than their country of birth. This chapter's focus is to discuss the influence of religion on newcomer youth sexual subjectivity and how it affects the assimilation process in Winnipeg. I explore the kind of everyday changes they experienced and the decisions they made, and how living in Canada influenced those choices. More specifically, my research fosters a deeper understanding of how religion not only influences but how it governs or controls sexual subjectivity of newcomer youth in Winnipeg. This is important because the youth I interviewed discussed their transition from religious homes and strict moral codes (defined by religious beliefs) to what they see as a liberal Canada that, in their opinion, allows for various avenues to express and explore sexuality.

Related to the question of religion having a shaping effect on sexual subjectivity, I will also discuss sexual boundaries and regulations and how the communities govern women's bodies. The issue of race and racial divides becomes important as the youth informed me about

dating preferences in relation to race and the defined racial boundaries that are implicit in the spaces the youth spend their time. What factors govern these choices? Reasons for their dating choices imply and hint at more complex topics underlying the youths' narratives. Racial divides and regulations become important as youth informed me who they prefer to date and why they choose to date from certain groups over others due to community assumptions and personal preferences.

## **5.2. Newcomers and Religiosity**

Anthropology of religion has shown that daily life dynamics are impacted by multiple religious philosophies (Gilles and Kai Wai 2008; Barkan 2006). These influences are sometimes tacit, meaning that people are not aware of their influence. Various laws and policies that are derived from religious norms thus have significant impacts on social interactions. According to Barkan, Durkheim “considered religion a potent moral force for inducing conformity” (2006: 407). Religion is thus seen to teach people moral behaviour and help them learn to be “good members” of society through a set of common beliefs that aid in the socialization process (Barkan 2006: 408). According to Levitt, migrants use religious institutions to live their transnational lives because religion is a global societal system that is transnational in its operations and adherents “can choose from an array of membership options which reach far beyond their communities and cultures... and transform local religious” (2003: 408). Religion has in many ways been a guiding force for what people believe and what people do with respect to sexuality including dating and marriage. People choosing life partners can follow rules of endogamy based on their religious beliefs, for instance, Christians marrying only Christians and Muslims marrying only Muslims. Within these larger groups, there are many different denominations and, therefore, people choose partners based on the denominations they belong to, such as Catholics marrying only Catholics

and Jehovah's Witnesses only marrying members who belong to their denomination. Sexuality is constructed through religious discourses. From a Foucauldian framework, it is not that sexuality exists on its own and is influenced by religion (or medicine) but rather that sexuality comes into being through for example, the Ten Commandments or passages in Leviticus, which sets rules for human behaviour and conduct. Religion's influence on decision-making, therefore, can be said to have a significant influence on sexual beliefs and also on the way people perform sexuality and the racial boundaries that are inscribed and upheld.

As noted by Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, religion and life, both private and public, remain strongly linked in Africa (2005: 93). From my personal experience, this is certainly true of Ghana, as all aspects of the society are rooted in religious doctrine. Children are raised to share the religious beliefs of their parents. I grew up in my grandparents' home with my mother and I was raised with my grandparents' Christian denomination while my mother chose to attend a different Christian church. My grandparents were Presbyterian. Therefore, I was baptised into the Presbyterian Church. My mother, however, used to attend the Action Chapel, which is a different denomination. After moving to Canada, although my mom only occasionally attends church, I decided this was not the best option for me and I no longer belong to any religious organization. This decision was in many ways influenced by my immigration to Canada because mainstream Canadian society and the political-legal system is not as immersed in religion as my country of birth, Ghana. Had I decided not to be practicing Christianity in Ghana when I was 16, my family and friends would have tried to talk me out of becoming non-religious. This is exemplified because anytime I return to Ghana for a family visit my aunts expect me to attend a church service, and I usually oblige. Some friends who know about my non-religious beliefs try



to teach and preach to me the importance of believing in God and try to convince me to attend church.

For African newcomer youth who are religious, religion plays a significant role in their daily lives as it guides most of their decisions. In Ghana specifically, and in Africa by extension, the vast importance of religion is stressed and made visible through various outlets such as TV shows, radio stations, billboard advertisements, and so forth (Meyer 1995). Some parents expect their children to adhere to the beliefs and behave accordingly. However, settling into a new country with different societal norms where religion is less stressed or less visible in their day to day interactions means that youth are not exposed to the same constant display of religiosity. This means that because religion is not stressed throughout every aspect of society and there are no religious posters, churches and mosques in every city corner in their daily lives as they were when living in their country of origin, they may decide to stop practicing the religion they grew up with such as not going to church or to the mosque. This affects the assimilation process of my interlocutors as they are now navigating a society that is relatively less overt with its religious articulations compared to their home country, while dealing with parents who expect them to maintain their religiosity. This tension can lead to intergenerational conflicts in the family.

### **5.3. Religiosity and Sexuality**

Extending Durkheim's view that religion is a moral force for inducing conformity, Barkan (2006) notes that scholars have argued that there is an inverse relationship between religion and sexual performativity whereby religious people are less likely to participate in what their religion calls "deviant sexual practices" (Barkan 2006: 3). I argue that the notion of "deviant sexual practices," however religious institutions define such practices, pathologizes sexuality. Such moralizing over sexuality as deviancy has led some African gay and queer youth migrants in

Winnipeg to internalise such assumptions, as they, too, perceive their sexuality as being deviant (Fubara-Manuel 2015). For Nathan and other gay or queer participants, Winnipeg provided them with what they saw as the space and time away from religion to reflect on sexuality.

### **5.3.1. “I’m Gay”- Accepting one’s sexuality in the mist of conflicting religious believes**

In the case of Nathan, a Nigerian international student I introduced in Chapter 2, during his first few years in Canada, he tried to “discover himself” because he knew he was not like other boys. He dated a girl when he was in high school in Nigeria but upon reflecting on that years later when living in Winnipeg, he realised he liked her for her intellectual capabilities. After his close male friend left Nigeria to travel abroad without informing him, he described feeling heart broken and in pain. When his male friend left he understood the concept of “your heart hurting.” His one prayer, which he really wanted answered but never got, was for “God, please do not let me be gay.” He described himself as a “good boy” so he did not understand why that particular prayer was not answered. He got everything he ever prayed for, such as coming to Canada, everything that was important to him, so he did not understand why that prayer, which caused him a lot of pain, was not answered. During my conversation with him, Nathan told me he came to the realisation that if he was still gay, despite his prayers to God to make him not be gay, that means his prayer had been answered and God had given his approval of Nathan’s sexuality. He noted that he was going to live his life and “be true to himself,” that is, live his life as a gay man as opposed to getting married and having a family as a gay man or being in a heterosexual relationship. In his words,

*So, deconstructing sexuality at 19 was, like, I don’t have to do all these things and its fine and it is okay. So, I guess, that was basically it. And I always say this was the most important thing. Waking up every morning looking at*

*yourself in the mirror and saying “I’m gay.” It’s so hard to do. For me, it was one of the hardest things I could do. You say it every morning until you’re able to say it. You wake every morning and you say I’m gay. You say I’m gay. Just say it once. Until you’re able to say it and it doesn’t get stuck in your throat.*

To Nathan, having a heteronormative or even homonormative family is not his main aim in life, and he came to this realisation after accepting his sexuality. He noted that if he eventually marries a man and has a family with his spouse, he will be fine with that path in life but he does not have to take the socially accepted path of marrying a woman, or anyone for that matter, to fit into the norm. Nathan expressed his excitement about not having to follow that path and not having to pretend that is what he wants out of life. He attributed that sense of not having to pretend to being in Canada.

One of his profound realisation when he came to Canada was that he did not need religion to be “a good” person. All he needed to do was just live “a good life,” which he defined as living by the teachings in the Bible, which talks about love instead of living by “what God hates.” He used to go to church when he first came to Canada and he would see many university students at church whose weekly lives were vastly different from what they portrayed in church. He noted that a university professor who taught Catholic Studies was a huge influence on him because the professor by his standards was a really good person. What Nathan meant by a good person was that the professor was objective and taught both the good aspects and bad aspects about Catholicism. To him, that was when he came to realise he did not have to ascribe to a religion to be a good person and live a meaningful life.

### 5.3.2. “I used to pray to be straight”- Youth coming to terms with non-normative sexuality

Nathan was aware of his international student status and the privilege it provided him to be distant from his family, which allowed him to reflect and explore his sexuality. For other participants such as Aomine, who I introduced in the previous chapter, he started exploring his sexuality in Zimbabwe where he was faced with a number of struggles in relation to his Christian beliefs, some shared by Nathan. In talking about his years in Zimbabwe when he was figuring out his sexual identity, Aomine said,

*I went to a Christian school, right? Christian school was horrible though, they just bash you so I was, like, I'm not gay anymore for a bit. So from 16 years [old] that's when I started battling with the fact that I am not gay; it's not happening. I guess I spent a lot of years trying not to be [gay]. You know the whole bible tells us that if you want something it's supposed to happen then I realise that, [...] I used to pray to be straight. I used to pray to not like guys. So after ... literally going through lots of ups and downs and then eventually I fell into the temptations, like they say. And, then, that's why I'm like, "No, it should be gone by now. I was like screw this. I do believe, I am not a Christian per se, but I do believe there is a higher power. I do believe there is a God but I just don't believe what the bible says.*

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Nathan and Aomine's experiences with religion and sexuality are similar in a number of ways and differ in many other ways as well. They both share similarities of struggling with their faith in the context of formulating sexual identities and understanding desire and erotics.

Whereby Nathan explored his sexual subjectivity in Winnipeg and performed gay masculinity

within certain spaces in Winnipeg, Aomine formulated his sexual subjectivity in Zimbabwe by looking at gay magazines from South Africa and making friends with other gay men from the advertisements that were posted. Aomine spoke about having to be very careful when communicating with people via Facebook and text messages, for instance, by using specific codes to relay messages. However, after he immigrated to Winnipeg, he spoke about how “free” he is to make friends and not having to hide his sexual preferences. He was able to have gay friends without the fear of being associated with being a gay person, which was a concern for him back in Zimbabwe. It is evident in both Nathan and Aomine’s stories that Winnipeg did not necessarily influence the youths’ decisions to stop attending church. Aomine’s decision to explore and accept his sexual subjectivity irrespective of his religion was fundamental in his expression of same-sex sexual orientation. This can be attributed to the close proximity of Zimbabwe to South Africa where same-sex relationships are legal; therefore it can be argued that South Africa’s influence in Zimbabwe’s “hidden” gay culture allowed Aomine to find and explore the gay scene in Zimbabwe before coming to Winnipeg. However Nigeria has laws that criminalise same sex sexuality (Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill (SSMPA)) that was signed in 2014 by former President Goodluck Johnathan. The law as noted by Isaack (2016) imposes a 10-year prison sentence on anyone who “registers, operates or participates in gay clubs, societies and organization or anyone who “supports” the activities of such organizations” (Issack 2016). Such laws make it difficult to express one’s non normative sexuality when the expression of sexuality is criminalised.

### **5.3.3. Rules of Dating in a heterosexual household**

Nathan and Aomine each migrated to Winnipeg on their own without family members. For other youth who migrated with their families to Winnipeg, religion was practiced in the household and

the youth were expected to live by those rules, which pertained to heterosexual youth that I interviewed, such as Mike. Mike, from Congo who I introduced in Chapter 3 and who uses social media to meet women, mentioned the rules of dating in his family's household, based on gender,

*When it comes to the sister and men it's different. Me, I am going out there to look for a woman. [For] her someone else is coming [to date her] so there is a difference, of course, when it comes to the men and women. I mean coming from my Christian family. School, first of all, is priority. My parents are, like, "No, you should have to finish school." Dating (for the sister) might be when you go to the University, you can date and we have to know the guy. You would have to bring him home, that's for her. With me, too, I would have to bring the girl. We have to know her. Still, I am a man. I did sneak around sometimes.*

Coming from a strict Christian home, Mike's parents continued after immigrating to Winnipeg to expect him and his siblings to live by the values and expectations of their religion and of the country of origin. Mike, however, mentioned how he did not follow these rules very closely. He told me a story of having a girl over in his room and his father walking in on him and his date. His example suggests that religion may not have shaped his sexual subjectivity except insofar as the taboo against premarital sexuality did not deter him from having sex. Mike's pursuit of sexual relationships might be complexly linked to his upbringing in the context of migration to Canada. To me, his rebellious attitude towards his parents' insistence that he comply with Christian doctrines that forbid pre-marital sex or sex outside of marriage suggests his sexual practices were linked to Christianity, both in Congo and Canada, as well as to changing masculinities in migration.

#### **5.3.4. Kemi's Story- "I do not judge" Navigating religiosity and sexuality in a heterosexual relationship**

Kemi, whose narrative appears in the epigraph above, was thirty years old and from a Christian home in Benin. She told me how religion was important growing up and how it remained an important aspect of her everyday life in Canada. Kemi came to Canada on an international student Visa and acquired a permanent residence status a couple of years later. When I met Kemi, she had recently been granted her permanent residency and she was excited about having that residency status. Kemi's religious beliefs were deep-rooted and made it very clear to me that her religion guided her actions. She felt that her religiosity would guide her attempts to be open-minded towards other people's decisions and aspired to refrain from judgement. She wished to follow her own religious beliefs while not expecting others to do the same. During our conversation, I had showed Kemi a picture of two girls kissing. This was because as part of the research process together with my interlocutors we went over media images, and participants were asked to give their opinions about them. She responded,

*I mean my culture and religion doesn't really permit me to but then. I don't know but I agree with her if that's how she wants to do things. Then it's fine. I think that everyone should be free to express themselves in a way that makes them happy, makes them feel loved and I think that's the ultimate thing for me, as long as they're happy, as long as they're... they're uhmm... they feel loved; because most people nowadays don't feel loved and so being with another girl, kissing another girl even if it's just once makes you feel happy and loved in the moment just alive... just for that once....*

Although Kemi had a boyfriend, she informed me that they do not have sex. By “sex” she was referring implicitly to sexual intercourse. She noted that they are waiting for marriage before she will engage in sexual intercourse. Their intimacy included engaging in other intimate forms of pleasure such as kissing and cuddling. To Kemi, religion was an important influence in her decision not to engage in sexual intercourse; however, she had a boyfriend and engaged in non-penetrative expressions of sexual intimacy, thereby exploring and expressing heterosexual desire and subjectivity.

Although the youth I interviewed generally characterised Winnipeg as liberal in culture and religion, some everyday changes and decisions to explore their sexuality were influenced by living in Winnipeg. By liberal I mean Winnipeg is not homogeneous and that aspects of sexuality were influenced by conservative factors/influences as much as by liberal influences. This is important in realising how by immigrating to Winnipeg youth’s ideologies are being influenced by the new locale they live in to explore and understand their sexual subjectivity more broadly.

#### **5.4. Sexual regulations and racial boundaries**

Although religion is a motivator in the youths’ sexual subjectivity in Winnipeg, one cannot exclude the sexual regulations, racial boundaries as well as racial fluidity that occur in Winnipeg. One of the interesting topics I stumbled on during the course of my research was the construction of “blackness” and, more specifically, the endogamous rules that governs sexuality in the various African communities (Tettey and Pupilampu 2005). My interaction with Segen brought this out acutely during the time I spent with her.

Recall the opening vignette for this thesis, which is a story told to me about an Ethiopian young woman’s leaked unauthorized photographs posted on Facebook by a community member



who wanted to send a message in order to disgrace the community? The opening vignette is important because it draws on a number of contestations over sexuality that occur in local African communities in Winnipeg, which newcomer youth must grapple with. One of these contestations has to do with the sexual regulations of young African women's bodies around who they can date and the consequences they face when choosing to have sexual relations with men from communities that are not deemed acceptable. During a conversation with Segen, she talked about the importance in the Habesha community for women to date only Habesha men. She explained that a woman who dates outside of the Habesha community will be talked about and referred to as only liking "black" men. Quoting Hall, Kumsa (2005) notes that "the discursive multiplicity and fluidity affirms that blackness is a historical category rather than skin colour" (Tettey and Paplumpu 2005: 188). This is exemplified by what Segen categorises as black. Blackness becomes a fluid category whose meaning can be understood in the interrelationships of class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Tettey and Paplumpu 2005: 6).

In talking about her dating and marriage rules and preferences, Segen was not attracted to white men and would only date from within the Habesha community. She stated that "Eritrean men gossip even more than females and they will tell each other if they have dated a girl." She stated that, "men want something not talked about. You can be known but as long as you are not talked about (as in having been with other guys or dating history), the man will be fine with it." She further explained that, if a young woman was to meet a potential partner in Europe and the partner came to Winnipeg and hears people mentioning the young woman's name in a negative light, that would be grounds for a break-up. Also, should an Eritrean woman date outside the Eritrean community, by dating for example a Nigerian man, she will be shunned. Considered as liking "black guys" this would deter an Eritrean man from approaching her, making it difficult

for her to date an Eritrean man thereafter. Although Ethiopians and Eritreans would generally be regarded in Canada as visible minority and in the category as “black”, the category of habesha is an emic description that sets them apart from other African groups.

The story in the opening vignette of the thesis draws on a number of themes discussed in this thesis and shows some of the conflict that resonates in the African community around issues of sexual and racial boundaries. My friend never got an answer to her question about why some of the Ethiopian community members think the young woman in the story deserved to be exposed for having sex with two Nigerians. My initial answer was that it was because she had sex with two Nigerian young men who are considered “black” in the habesha community and therefore not desirable suitors. I however believe the answer is much more complicated.

In addition to having sex with two “black” men I argue that shaming her was an avenue to preserve perceived cultural norms in the face of a changing community due to the large amount of people immigrating into other countries. The internet in this case was a tool to make this point on a global scale. In this way young women’s sexuality was surveilled by the young men in their communities. The internet has wide reaching capabilities which means that women in other cities or even countries can come across this making them aware that their sexual practices are also being surveilled. As pointed out by Segen, men in the Eritrean community want to date a woman not “talked” about in the community because she is seen as preserving these cultural norms. Drawing on Foucauldian theory it is evidenced that social media was used as a tool of discipline to police young women’s sexuality (see Sullivan 1996 and Wood 2006). Endogamous dating was preferred and the idea of people talking (at least for women) governed sexuality in terms of dating rules and prohibitions. Other youth from different African countries

felt that they were not under surveillance by their community about their dating choices and they spoke about choosing their potential life partners based on cultural similarities.

Mike explained,

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*If I were to marry, for example, a woman who is from here, doesn't matter white or black she was raised up here. Especially if you were born here, you turn to have the same culture the way they are. I'm still old school, I may come back from work and [say] "hey where is my food" and stuff like that is different. Here, I have friends who have white women, and the wife has the leg on top of the other. It is the husband cooking. I have never seen that in my home. Yeah, of course, helping. I can help out here and there. It's just [that] the cultural difference will be a big problem. Apart from that, if I find someone we can agree on the same cultural stuff, yeah, no problem. Doesn't matter where you are from but it's really hard. It's really hard. That is why sometimes an African woman makes a little bit [more] sense [in that] they seem to understand. If I was to tell a white woman "Oh can you go and make me [breakfast], it would be like what? You want me to wake up and go and make you breakfast?"*

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Although Mike was apprehensive about marrying someone of a different racial background in terms of his beliefs on gender roles or upholding cultural values, Damien was open to dating and marrying women from different racial backgrounds and ethnicities. For Damien, introduced in Chapter 3, from Nigeria who used social media to make both friendships and intimate connections, finding intimate partners had less to do with religion and more to do

with physicality (he noted that he likes women with “cute” faces) and his preference for “light skin” women. “Light skin” women when he first mentioned it during our first discussion seemed to suggest black women who had a lighter skin tone. However, during subsequent interviews with Damien, I asked him as part of my social media analysis to bring images from social media he found attractive and are reflections of his sexual preferences. Damien brought mostly images of “white” or very light skin black women. His conceptualisation of race was fluid and seemed to suggest that “light skin” could mean Euro-Canadian women or black women. As he explained to me during our meeting, his mom was religious and checked up on him frequently to make sure he went to church. But he was not very religious. He, however, noted that his mom was aware of his preference for “lighter girls.” He noted, “She actually always plays with me because she knows I kind of like lighter girls. So she’s like you are going to marry a white girl. So, she’s open about that.” In Damien’s case, his preference to date light skin women or women from different racial backgrounds was known by his mother and she was fine with his preferences. It is however important to note the sexual regulations from Damien’s mother. His mother regulated his religious adherence from constantly checking up on him and trying to find out if he went to church. However, Damien noting that his mother is fine with his choice of sexual partner suggests that his mother’s opinion and subsequent approval for him to date “light skin” women was important to his sexual subjectivity in Canada.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

Religion’s influence in African newcomer youth sexual subjectivity cannot be under-emphasized. This is because of the significant role religion has in influencing decision making and the role it plays in youth’s agentive lives in the formulation of a sexual identity. It is evidenced by this chapter that the importance of religion in youths decision making is situational

and dependent on a number of factors such as youths' sexual orientation and parental influence. For example, Kemi, who was the most religious youth amongst my interlocutors continued to go to church as well as made decisions based on a religious moral compass while engaging in certain physical intimacy with her partner. Her story is significant because although it can be argued she is removed from the intense religious influences that were present back home (such as the visible display of religion in the many posters and billboards appearing in her home town), while in Canada she formulated a sexual subjectivity around her religious upbringing. I argue that by deciding not to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage she was adhering to some of her religious upbringing. In contrast, for Nathan and Aomine, although religion was important in their formative years in their country of origin, it is not such a significant factor in their day-to-day lives in Canada. As they try to reconcile their religion with their sexuality by deemphasizing the influence of religion in their lives, they are able to re-categorize what a "good" person is in order to accept their non-normative sexuality. As they both mentioned to me, they had both at some point prayed to God to make them straight or to deny their sexual preferences. Being in Winnipeg and engaging in different social spaces removed from religious influences, aided Nathan and Aomine along with other youth formulate and express their sexual subjectivity in new and emergent ways in Winnipeg.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

I set out in this thesis to answer the question “How does Winnipeg as a social space shape African newcomer youth sexual subjectivity?” As mentioned previously, being that spaces are produced through daily social practices (Farrugia and Wood 2017: 210), it is not the physicality of the spaces itself that create sexuality but rather the ways in which spaces are occupied by people and their bodies and therefore how people encounter and relate to one another in these spaces (Browne et al 2009). I found that the relationships youth had in the various locales in Winnipeg as well as the various social media platforms greatly influenced youths’ sexual subjectivities. This is because these social settings influenced youth’s sexual identity, feelings and desires, especially in the context of immigration. These insights contribute to the theory that sexuality is not essential or inherent (biologically inherent) but rather it is socially produced through social relations.

As mentioned above, status of entry into Canada greatly influences the neighborhoods youth are exposed to. The particular neighborhood that youth live and spend time in influences their sexual subjectivity. For example, Danny who came to Canada with a refugee status lived in neighborhoods that exposed him to illegal activities in Winnipeg, which shaped his heterosexual subjectivity. On the other hand, youth who entered into Canada as permanent residents or with international student status had the possibility to choose to live in “safer” neighborhoods and had limited contact with the inner city, which leads to particular experiences in their settlement process in Winnipeg. Also, youth who identified with non-normative sexualities found that in Winnipeg there were spaces where they could explore their gay or queer sexualities removed from the scrutiny they faced and could have faced back in their home countries (and in some spaces in Winnipeg). To them, localized social media virtual space, such as Grindr, provided a

“safe” space to live “freely” and express their non-normative sexuality. Although at the same instances they came across new and unexpected barriers of racism and objectification.

In *Youthhood and Settlement*, I explained the various spaces where youth from different African countries and with varying sexual identities and orientations spent their time and met people. These experiences had significant implications on their sexual subjectivities. What this chapter showed was that the different spaces youth occupy, especially how the social-economic demographics of the neighbourhoods they live in, plays an important role in their identity formations and how they come to understand and navigate their sexuality in Canada, their new host country. These spaces were linked to wider settlement processes and also to poverty experienced by asylum seeking and refugee families and where they are able to afford housing. Danny’s story of navigating the downtown core of Winnipeg and being exposed to sex work and the drug trade is an important example of how settlement policies and practices by the Canadian governmental and assemblage of immigration services have a powerful affect on youth and, in particular, youth sexuality. For Danny, Winnipeg’s inner city as his first experience of home in Canada was a powerful shaping effect on how he understood sexuality as a young black male immigrant. Through his story we realise that not only was his encounters with spaces shaping his sexual subjectivity but also he was an active agent in shaping the landscape of Winnipeg in regards to where he and his friends had their house parties and the sexual encounters that occurred in those spaces.

In *Social Media and Sexuality* I discussed how African youth navigate sexuality in Winnipeg at the same time that social media is part of their lives. I showed that despite the assimilationist messaging African newcomer youth receive from Canadian institutions such as high schools, universities, and immigration policies, the youth felt it was important to retain a

sense of African-ness. Although Canada has a multicultural policy, in practice the governance of immigrants is about assimilation (Vokuv 2003). Youth grapple with both their parents' expectations and with the new host country's expectations for assimilation, which can result in conflicts that are gendered as well as differ across class and ethnicity. This was exemplified through Mike's interview where he told me he was allowed to date, whereas his sister was not allowed to. Although their parents expected her to finish high school without dating so that she would make it to university, Mike could date at a younger age and his obligation to the family was to bring his various girlfriends home and introduce them to his parents. Mike and other participants shared a similarity in maintaining some African values, which they thought were important to them, and shunning those which they viewed as not important. Also, this chapter showed how social media helped youth play an agentive role in departing from those ideas they viewed as traditional while at the same time using social media to participate in ways of being intimate that are in line with "tradition". This chapter showed how youths' "African-ness" was both maintained and departed from in Winnipeg.

*Religiosity, Racial Boundaries, and Sexual Regulation* showed the moral complexities that youth encountered in the process of formulating a sex life and persona. I discussed the moral underpinnings of sexuality and the struggles some of the youth had in coming to accept their non-normative sexualities. This chapter showed how being in Winnipeg allowed some youth to come to "accept" what they saw to be their "true" or "natural" sexuality because they were no longer in their country of birth, where heterosexuality was the only authorized sexuality, and they could "freely" live a sexual life in Winnipeg, a city they associated with dominant Canadian values of supposed sexual "freedom" (Kabesh 2011; Abu-Lughod 2013). This chapter had less to



do with religion and more to do with how Winnipeg was a shaping force on sexuality with respect to whether or not youth continued to adhere to their religious upbringing in Winnipeg.

I had previously been interested in conducting research that focused on African newcomer youth, social media, and sexuality without considering that the spaces youth spent their time could have significant impacts on their sexuality. By allowing the youths' own narrative to guide my research, I have shown how Winnipeg as a social space shapes African newcomer youth sexual subjectivity. The research I undertook backed up my argument as it showed that the different spaces and locales the youth spend their time shape their sexuality. By using social media, both young men and women showed that they can transgress boundaries that society creates in terms of who they can date and who they can spend time with.

### **6.1. Research Limitations**

There are several limitations to my research that warrant consideration. First, I have less to offer about femininities and sexualities than about masculinities and sexualities. Considering the topic of sexuality can be quite sensitive as most young women are uncomfortable talking about sex in general and fear judgment from community members for communicating desire or talking about sexual behavior, it meant that I could not gain a lot of young women's participation as I had hoped (Montemurro et al 2015). Having more female participants would have facilitated additional insights about important differences, and similarities, in how female and male African youth are using social media to talk about, learn, and to express sexuality in Winnipeg. However, the young women who participated in my research provided a lot of insight which enriched my research considerably. Because I wanted to learn about the African newcomer youth in urban Winnipeg, my participants being mostly men meant that ethnographic data about women is thinner than the knowledge I gained about men.

Second, my research was ethnographic in that I had the opportunity to interact with youth within spaces they frequented during their day-to-day lives. I also had conversations with them that were influenced by their own personal experiences. These interactions allowed me the opportunity to realise how diverse sexuality is and also to clear up some of my own preconceived notions of African youth sexuality. However the number of participants limited the scope I might have had on heterogeneity. Since my goal was to debunk notions of homogeneity this could have been better achieved using a larger sample size of participants. The number of participants I interviewed are perfectly in line with ethnography. However, the small number of participants, which is great for ethnographic analysis, does not allow me to provide an expansive array of examples to illustrate heterogeneous African youth sexuality. However, it shows that within this limited number of participants, heterogeneity was shown which supports my argument that sexuality is diverse.

## **6.2. Implications of Research**

This research is important because it adds to the ongoing discussion of the fluidity of sexuality while debunking the notion of a homogeneous African sexuality (Spronk 2012, Allen 2011). First, let me discuss the complex issue of fluidity as related to sexuality. Implicit to the notion that processes “shape” sexuality is the understanding of sexuality as “fluid” rather than fixed as if by biology or god-given innateness. Specifically, my research showed how sexuality is shaped, that is, expresses a fluidity in the immigration process as indicated in the stories told by my interlocutors. Aomine exemplified a kind of sexual fluidity in his own sexual life by explaining that his sexuality was not set as a gay man and that he was open to having heterosexual relationships in the future. This realisation came about for him in Winnipeg because he realised that he does not have to have a defined sexuality. This state of fluidity is important in showing

that through the process of immigration the rules of intimacy change and so do the sexual subjectivities of African newcomer youth. What my research unearthed was that even though sexuality was fluid in the youth I interviewed, they were still regulated by different factors for example, by religious beliefs and youth's parental expectations.

Second, I return to the issue of heterogeneity. My research also, to some degree, debunks the notion of a homogeneous African sexuality through the stories told by my nine interlocutors and their varying experiences. The varying experiences of my interlocutors coupled with the ongoing changes of their sexual subjectivities shows that a notion of homogeneous African sexuality does not hold up to the ethnographic register. Aomine (an international student from Zimbabwe) shared similar experiences with Nathan (an international student from Nigeria). Their experiences highlighted the fact that African sexuality is heterogeneous. Both were aware of their non-normative sexuality from a young age. While Aomine could explore his sexuality in Zimbabwe at a young age and had access to social media platforms to meet other young men, Nathan was unable to explore his sexuality fully till he settled in Winnipeg. On the other hand, Danny (from South Africa) who came to Winnipeg as a refugee and Max (an international student from Nigeria) are both heterosexual but diverge in their settlement experiences. For both Danny and Max Winnipeg has provided an opportunity to have sexual relationships with women from other ethnic or racial backgrounds (specifically white and light skin black women). Although their experiences add to the ethnographic data that African sexuality is heterogeneous, I have shown in this thesis that blackness does not accrue to all African bodies, or not in the same way, for example the idea of being Habesha versus "black". Also the religious discussion shows that religious beliefs and practices are significantly variant across my participants' lives.

Currently there is limited research written on how Winnipeg as a locale is shaping African newcomer youth subjectivities therefore, the information in my thesis as part of the larger project has implications for providing a basis of knowledge from which to build on for future research. My interlocutors were from different African countries and shared various experiences of sexuality in their formative years and these experiences continue to change as they grow into their adult years in Winnipeg. This research also adds to the growing literature debunking the notion that same-sex sexuality is un-African (Spronk 2012, Pincheon 2000, Murray and Roscoe 1998). This heterogeneity is shown through the various stories and experiences of my participants. Although I interacted with nine participants, we realise that though there were some similarities, their stories and experiences shared some differences.

Although my thesis did not discuss the topic of how the youth influence the spaces they interact, I do recognize it is an important aspect to consider perhaps in future research. Through my findings I realise that the youth are active producers of sexuality and they have in many ways shaped the landscapes and changed dominant narrative of sexuality in Winnipeg. The idea that space and sexuality are mutually constitutive is more in line with current theorization of space and sexuality. Also, thinking of how the youth shape space allows reflection on the youths' agency.

### **6.3. Future Research**

This research adds to the current knowledge about African newcomer youths' sexualities in cities in the global North (see Odger 2015; Mohamed and Frohlick 2017; Frohlick, Migliardi, and Mohamed forthcoming, Creese 2013; Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2016; Omorodion et al. 2007). As a growing population in Winnipeg, and Canada as a whole, this research could potentially be scaled up and be conducted in several urban and rural cities where different minority youths are

living in those spaces. This larger scale would provide even further insights as youth in those places are dealing with different issues. Research on “global sexualities” could also be conducted and a comparative analysis of how youth in an African urban city understand and perform their sexualities can be compared to that of African newcomer youth in Canada. The online world is a fascinating area and through my media analysis, I found that more youth than ever are using social media to get advice and to research on different aspects of sexualities. Different websites online are dedicated to youth to talk about sex, love and relationship issues with the promise of anonymity. This anonymity allows African youth both from the continent and those who have emigrated from their home country to different countries to talk about their challenges on the topic of sexuality and seek advice from the online forums.

#### **6.4. Final Personal Reflections**

My time and the spaces I inhabited and moved through as a young adult immigrant growing up in Winnipeg have greatly shaped my sexual subjectivity. The process of conducting this research and writing the thesis has given me considerable time to reflect on my own sexual subjectivity as a young African immigrant woman living in Winnipeg. I realise now that in my late 20s, at a point in my life course or maturity where it might be reasonable to expect frank conversations about sexuality with other adults, my mother and I barely broach the topic of sexuality in conversations together. My sister and I barely speak explicitly about sex and sexuality; however, as like my interlocutors, topics related to sex and sexuality are ones that my friends and I do not shy away from. For example, we talk about flirting with men, about sexy celebrities, about sexual practices, about which birth control methods they use, about LGBTQ as well as which dating sites my friends have signed up for and the men they meet on these social media sites. I have realised that these are the instances where my own sexual subjectivity have been shaped

and are expressed in the various spaces in Winnipeg I spend my time. Such as the middle-class nature of the university I attend or the clubs that I go to. The way in which I demonstrate my sexual subjectivity in these spaces are through the manner in which I dress, including the way I wear my hair, which some of my friends have named “sassy” and “professional.” I sometimes will wear a wig which my friends will relate as my “sassy” hair and other wigs which they refer to as my “professional” wig. I wear the “professional” wig to the university while I wear the “sassy” wig to the club. As this research progressed, I formulated my own new understandings of sexuality and sexual subjectivity, which challenged older ways of seeing sexuality as unchanging. Sexuality now I understand is very diverse and it encompasses different ways of being sexual or even asexual as some of my interlocutors described themselves. By understanding sexuality as encompassing the many ways people define themselves and display their sexuality, I was able to understand the heterogeneous nature of sexuality.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sarafina, which is a pseudonym, was a member of the research team and acted as a community liaison. She had heard about this incident from an insider in the Ethiopian community.

<sup>2</sup> Habesha (sometimes spelled Habasha) is a term that Ethiopians and Eritreans from Amhara and Tigrinya backgrounds use to describe themselves. See Habecker 2012. She describes how the term Habasha refers to “wandering one” and has been used by certain groups to differentiate Christians from Muslim and other religious ethnic groups who claim to have Semitic and “Abyssinian” origins that are distinctly regarded as non-black (Habecker 2012: 1203).

<sup>3</sup> My thesis is part of a larger project funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Community-Based HIV/AIDS Research Program led by Susan Frohlick, University of British Columbia. The larger project is entitled “What Risk? Whose Voices? An Intervention of “Risk” of HIV/AIDS Through a Participatory Ethnographic Project With African Immigrant and Refugee Youth in Winnipeg, Canada”. The research seeks to uncover how sexual risk discourses are taken up and resisted by African immigrants in Canada.

<sup>4</sup> Homosexuality” is a western term, even though same-sex practices have been around in African cultures and societies and nation-states historically, according to Murray and Roscoe

<sup>5</sup> These neighbourhoods as listed in the Winnipeg Health Region Community area Map are; St. James-Assiniboia, Assiniboine South, Fort Garry, St. Vital, St. Boniface, Transcona, River East, Seven Oaks, Inkster, Point Douglas, Downtown, River Heights.

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Kanu has said that some international students were lucky because they got housing on campus at the University of Manitoba and when they were ready to move out, they had enough knowledge of Winnipeg to ascertain where was best for them to live in.

<sup>7</sup> All my participants names are fictional. I asked all my participants to choose their own pseudonyms to reflect their individuality as well as to make them know they have a say in my research.

<sup>8</sup> I use fictional names for the locations to protect the identity of the spaces which the youth frequent.

<sup>9</sup> Black in this case is used to reference Africans who are not Habesha. There is a negative connotation to this. A woman who is known to have dated a non-Habesha male has a negative association to her and is referenced to as only liking “black” guys.

<sup>10</sup> The peer researchers agreed to be named in the project and it is only fair their invaluable work is acknowledged

<sup>11</sup> Some participants asked questions regarding the HIV component of my research and I explained to them it was part of a larger project but not my main focus for this research.

<sup>12</sup> Through Selam, the settlement worker with the settlement office, a team member and I volunteered in a school that had a newcomer program for girls called Girl’s Group. We were invited to lead some of the biweekly meetings and through this, we built rapport with some of the youth and I gained invaluable information for my project.

<sup>13</sup> I am not revealing the exact identity of the centre in order to protect the youth with whom I and the rest of the research team worked.

<sup>14</sup> Danny spent several years as a refugee with his family in South Africa, and therefore calls South Africa his home country.

<sup>15</sup> Nathan discussed this with Susan Frohlick during an interview with her; Nathan gave me permission to read his interview.

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<sup>16</sup> Simone provided a written consent for me to use the pictures of herself she brought to our interview. I have however obstructed her face to hide her identity.



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## Appendix A: Adult Consent Forms (18 and up)

Thank you for your interest in our study. Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide that you will participate in the study. We can read it for you, if you prefer. Feel free to ask questions at any time.

What is the purpose of the research? What are we asking you to do?

- ❖ The participation includes participating in an interview to talk with the researcher about your settlement experiences in Canada as a young immigrant or refugee from an African country, and specifically about sexual health education, where and what you have learnt, its meanings for you and your attitudes.
- ❖ We will also ask you about cultural attitudes about sexuality (dating, marriage, love, sex, sexual identity).
- ❖ The main focus of the research project is HIV prevention.
- ❖ To participate in an interview will take approximately one to two hours.
- ❖ You can end the interview before one hour though; it is your choice.
- ❖ You can say “no” to any question and go on to the next question, or you can stop the interview at any time. We will not be upset and there are no consequences.

What are the benefits of this research to you and to your community?

- ❖ This information will help researchers to understand ways in which newcomer African youth are vulnerable to HIV as a risk particular to their social group.
- ❖ This is an important topic because there is very little research on the actual experiences of HIV risk for youth from African countries new to Canada.
- ❖ The interview provides you with an opportunity to talk about issues related to sexuality and sexual health, to identify issues of concern, and to receive information about sexual health and, potentially, to influence HIV prevention.
- ❖ Otherwise, there is no direct benefit for you.

What about compensation for your time?

- ❖ We will give \$25 to you for taking the time to participate in the interview.
- ❖ We can also give you a return bus ticket, if you need one.
- ❖ If you need a ride to and from the interview, we can arrange for our Research Coordinator to drive you to the interview and return you home afterwards.
- ❖ This money comes from the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) through a research grant. You will be asked to sign your name when you receive this money and the bus ticket/s. Your name will be kept private and is for Dr. Frohlick’s records only.

Is there any chance that if you participate you might be harmed?

- ❖ Although all research is a step into the unknown and we don’t know for sure how the interview will make you feel, we do believe that the interview poses minimal risk.

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- ❖ The researchers all have gone through criminal record checks and child abuse registry checks. They have received training in research ethics.
  - ❖ However, you might want to think about these possible risks:
  - ❖ It is possible that when you are talking about your settlement experiences now and remembering what has happened to you in the past, this might cause you to feel sad or angry or have other adverse reactions to the questions. (We have a list of resources specific to newcomer youth and can help contact them, if you wish, plus we will talk with you until you are feeling better. We also have two people, one man and one woman, on our research team from the African community who are trained to help newcomers. If you want, you can contact one of them and they will speak confidentiality, or I can help you contact them.)

How will we record your information during the interview?

- ❖ For accuracy, we prefer that the interviews are audio recorded (only voice).
- ❖ The recordings will be confidential and used only by the researchers.
- ❖ However, you have a choice for us not to tape record you.
- ❖ If you do not agree to be audio recorded, we will take notes during the interview. These notes are confidential and will be seen only by the researchers.
- ❖ We will use a false name for you in our written transcripts to protect your individual identity and to ensure anonymity as best we can. We will not record participant names on any of the documents.
- ❖ It will be possible for you to request that the recording device be turned off at any time without repercussions to your rights as participants.

We will do everything we can to ensure your privacy is protected.

- ❖ You have a right to privacy in this project. Nobody, except you, will know if you give consent, or not, for your participation.
- ❖ Anybody who told you about the research will never know about what you say in the interview; they might not even know that you participated in the interview because we don't share that information.
- ❖ Only the researcher will ever know what you said or even that you are a participant.
- ❖ We will never use your actual name or other identifiers in any research notes.

We will store your taped interview safely and only in the researcher's possession (stored on a password protected University of Manitoba "cloud" server).

- ❖ We will keep hard copies of notes and interview transcripts, which will NOT have your name anywhere on them, in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Manitoba.
- ❖ We will keep the information you give us for 7 years and then safely destroy it.
- ❖ Even with all of the very careful measures that we would take to protect your identity and to keep private all of the personal information that you might share with us, as with all research there is a small chance that somebody might find out.

What about after the interview? What happens if you have questions for us?

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- ❖ Sometimes after an interview it is natural for the participant to want to talk to the researcher about how it went or just to have a longer conversation. We will be available after the interview for that purpose. We will turn off the recorder and stop taking notes then.
  - ❖ If you must leave right after the interview but later have questions or want to talk about how the interview felt for you, you can call us or email us. They will have our contact information and can contact us directly, if they wish.

How do you find out about the results of the research?

- ❖ We will be posting a summary of the results especially for our participants on a website that we have created for this project.
- ❖ Go to <http://africanyouthts.com/>
- ❖ If you prefer us to email the summary to you, provide us with your email address.

What will we do with the information we collect from you?

- ❖ The information collected will be used for a book and other reports and publications written by the researchers and also for a website about the project.
- ❖ The graduate student researchers, Allison Odger and Estella Marmah, will use the information to write their theses in Anthropology. Their theses will be available online once the theses are completed.
- ❖ The information will also be used by our research partner, the Sexuality Education Resource Centre, to develop HIV prevention messaging especially for African newcomer youth.

What if you change your mind once the interview begins?

- ❖ By agreeing to participate, you are not obligated to participate and you do not have to answer all of the questions we ask.
- ❖ You are free to decline from answering any questions or you can withdraw all of your information from the study. There won't be any consequences whatsoever if you change your mind.
- ❖ We want you to participate only if you want to.
- ❖ To withdraw from the study, let Dr. Susan Frohlick know at any time before December 31, 2015. Her contact information is on this sheet, which I can leave with you.
- ❖ We want to stress to you that there are no consequences if you choose not to answer any question or if you later want to drop out of the research project.
- ❖ Do you have any questions for me now?

Your agreement to participate does not waive your legal rights nor release the research team or the sponsors or the university from their legal and professional responsibilities.

Please feel free to ask for clarification. The University of Manitoba has a research ethics board that has approved this study. Their information is on the sheet that we will leave with you for

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your records.

Agreement:

1) Do you agree to participate in the research study described above?

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

2) Do you agree for you to be audio recorded? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I do agree \_\_\_\_\_ Initials

3) If you would like us to give you a summary of the research findings, provide your email address or phone number here \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information:

For questions about the research, contact:

Dr. Susan Frohlick

Associate Professor

Anthropology Department and Women's and Gender Studies Program

114 Isbister Building, University of Manitoba

susan.frohlick@umanitoba.ca

For questions about the ethics approval, contact:

Maggie Bowman

Human Ethics Coordinator

208 Crop Technology Centre, 194 Dafoe Road

University of Manitoba

Email: Margaret.bowman@umanitoba.ca

For questions for the community liaisons, contact:

Research Coordinators

Selam Gheybreyhones

africanyouth.selam@gmail.com

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## **Appendix B: Interview Schedule for Participants**

Tell me about the types of social media you use and what do you use them for.

-Is this new for you since coming to Canada or did you use them back in your home country as well?

-Access to the internet, your own phone, tablet, computer?

2.) What are the opportunities with respect to sex and sexuality you find with using the types of social media you use?

-Do you use it for expressing yourself differently than offline?

-Can you be more free on social media?

-Do your parents/relatives/older siblings know much about what you do online?

3.) Tell me about your identity as a woman, man, heterosexual, gay, African, Canadian, etc in using social media.

4.) Tell me about relations formed using social media.

-Do you meet people in person or remain online?

-If you meet people in person, how do you describe these relations?

-If you remain online with people, how do you describe these relations?

5.) What about any sexual health risks or any other risks that you think about in using social media in these ways?