

# “Daddy, Today We Have a Match!” Women’s Agentic Strategies in Initiating Sexual Intercourse in an Urban Ghanaian Community.

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## Research Questions

- (1) What are the silences surrounding Ghanaian women’s sexuality and do they apply across all categories of women, and in the same way?
- (2) To what extent is sexual intercourse initiation an issue of agentic skills?

## Background

Agency signifies an individual’s control over their own body and sexual choices (Crown & Roberts, 2003). Majority of prior research that focused on women’s sexuality in relation to reproduction argue that men control women’s sexuality (McFadden, 2003).

Yet a few have argued otherwise, noting the effect that individual sexual experiences, sexual agency, formal education, and exposure to media let women to wield power over their own sexuality (Bennet, 2011; Meyers, 2002; Pereira, 2003).

Studies in Ghana provide support for both perspectives. Among the Akan, women control their sexuality; sexual dissatisfaction of a married woman could constitute good grounds for divorce (Pereira, 2003). However, among the Anlo Ewe, men control their wives sexuality; men use charms to restrict women’s sexual activity (Abotchie, 1997).

Despite these different perspectives, we know little of how women navigate sexual power. Using a sample of urban women I examined this.

## Methodology

Six months of field work was carried out in 2012 in Madina, an urban community in Accra, Ghana. Exploratory and in-depth interviews

The study conformed to ethical guidelines ([NMIMR-IRB CPN 048/11-12](#)).

## The setting and Informants

Madina is predominantly occupied by migrants which makes the community a classic setting for examining women’s sexuality.

16 female participants with mean age of 34 years; 8 were married, 3 ever divorced with 2 remarried; 8 Christians and 8 Sunni Muslims.

## Data collection and analysis

Contacts were established with participants through community gatekeepers. Interviews were conducted at home and at the office of participants. Interview duration was 45mins to 2hrs. Interviews were conducted in Twi, Ga, Huasa and English.

Participation was response driven & purposive —Bauer & Gaskell, 2000.

The data was transcribed verbatim into English. Theories for the analysis were primarily drawn from Meyers, 2002 and Baber, 1994.

**Limitations:** The choice of Madina was based on convenience; Sexual matters are sensitive.

## References

- Abotchie, C.K., 1997, Social Control in Traditional Southern Eweland of Ghana: relevance for modern crime prevention, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, pp. 10-145.
- McFadden, P., 2003, ‘Sexual Pleasure as Feminist Choice’, *Feminist Africa*, Vol. 2, pp. 50-60.
- Meyers, D.T., 2002, *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery & Women’s Agency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pereira, C., 2003, ‘Where Angels Fear to Tread? Some thoughts on Patricia McFadden’s Sexual Pleasure as Feminist Choice’, *Feminist Africa*, Vol. 2, pp. 61-65.

## Explain Women’s Sexual Silences

Silences about women’s sexuality is a complex blend of both socio-cultural and individual factors including moral/religious values, forced sex and open-mindedness of partner.:

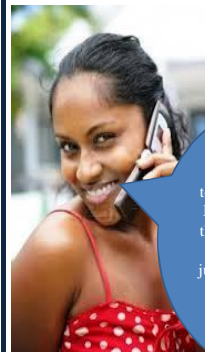
1. [laughs] It’s a problem oh. No I have never asked him, am shy to ask. I know women also have feelings, but my mind tells me not to (Trader Zongo, 53 years)
2. My aunt’s child raped me so I don’t like visiting it [the rape incidence]. I cannot forget although he asked his adult friend even to plead. I am sorry but talking about sexual experiences even with my husband I really feel uncomfortable. He forces me aaaa [so many times] before (Seams, 36 years).
3. Maybe when you tell him [initiate sex] he would think you are spoiled, you see. (D.Tet, 37 years).

However the silences were, women did not lack control over their sexuality.

*Sex is not for the man, neither is it for the woman, sex is for both of us. I feel like it, I initiate it. (Lect KYA, 37 years, postgraduate).*

## Women’s Agency in Sex Initiation

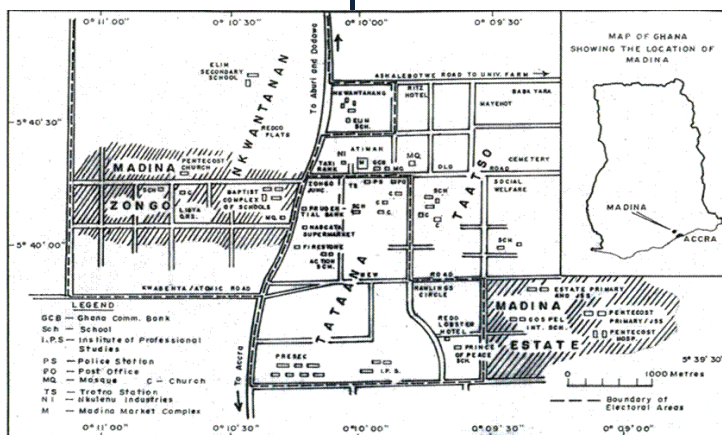
Women use innovative ways (seductive and non-seductive) such as wearing specific clothes and perfumes, making phone calls and using code language to initiate sex.



It’s simple. I call him and tell him “daddy today we have a match. But if you really are at the point you should be able to talk about it or just drop a text message or end an email or something you see” (Hajia, 48 years)

To Another

*Me, if I haven’t enjoyed I won’t be ok, I climb him and do my own thing (Amina, 25 years).*



## Discussion and conclusion

Consistent with other studies (Jejeebhoy & Bott, 2007), a considerable number of women interviewed had experienced forced sex and this impacted negatively on their sexual reception within marital unions.

Compared with older women, younger women were more likely to initiate sex with their partners, and held low commitment to religious beliefs.

Differences in demographic profile (Age, marital status, religion and moral values), sexual experience, partners’ understanding, being in a ‘bad mood for sex, and menstrual cycle created different barriers to sex initiation amongst different categories of women.

But, the results show that women do not lack control over their sexuality. Women used agency and innovation around sex initiation.

Therefore, I support the view (e.g. Meyers, 2002) that connects women’s own voices to their lives as well as to their sexual agency.