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Abstract approved:

Adam Keul, PhD., Dissertation Committee Chair

As the global transnational sexual economy proliferates, female sex tourism too is on the rise, particularly in the Caribbean region. Yet little is known about the experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of those who participate in this phenomenon, nor of the communities who observe it. This research contributes to ongoing scholarship by converging the seldom-heard voices of four distinct populations from the island destination of Caye Caulker, Belize. A passive snowballing technique was used to recruit local male sex workers (5), female sex tourists (2), local residents (2) and expatriates (2) for in-depth qualitative interviews. Observation conducted over peak tourism seasons (2013-2019), informal discussions with key informants (42), and member-checking were among the ethnographic methods integral to this study's unique design. Tourist women reported suspending reality, eroticizing otherness and relational intimacy as key motivations for involvement with local men, and leveraged their privileged positions to exert influence over relationship outcomes. Local men described pursuing tourist women to attain lifestyle upgrades, sexual gratification and peer recognition, and employed affective labor, ethnocultural commodification and masculinity performance as strategies to those ends. These findings challenge the dominant discourse which posits binary conceptualizations of tourist

women as either 'exploited' (romance tourism) or 'exploiters' (female sex tourism), advancing the argument that these be reconsidered and reframed as stages in a developmental process.

Keywords: female sex tourism, sex tourism, Belize, sex work, liminal travel, Other

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Paradise Lost?
Female Sex Tourism in Belize

By

Danièle Lori

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APPROVED:

Adam Keul, PhD., Dissertation Committee Chair

Laura Tilghman, PhD., Dissertation Committee

Brian W. Eisenhauer, PhD., Dissertation Committee

Ann McClellan, PhD., Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Plymouth State University, Lamson Learning Commons. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Danièle Lori, Author

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With gratitude,

Danièle Lori, EdD

Preface

The pursuit of this research stems from twenty years of travel in Central America. Working with marginalized communities brought me to some of the roughest neighborhoods in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Belize. While sex tourism was observable in most of the coastal villages I spent time in, nowhere was this phenomenon more conspicuous than in Caye Caulker, Belize.

This quaint community is teeming with tourists from all over the world, although Americans, Europeans and Canadians make up the bulk of the visitors to the island. From young backpackers to semi-retired expats, Westerners blend easily with the local population who has grown accustomed to welcoming foreigners in the context of rapid tourism expansion.

Tourist-local relationships are a prevalent feature of life on Caye Caulker. Local men of all ages can be seen pursuing Western women with sexual, romantic and/or other intent, and sometimes the reverse is also true. This research takes a closer look at the contexts, experiences and perceptions which influence the dynamics between them.

This dissertation is original, unpublished work which I conducted independently as the sole investigator and author. The study is of interest to researchers, practitioners, students, and anyone who is called to examine the complex nature of sex tourism and sexuality studies.

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This work is dedicated first and foremost to those who have inspired the research. This paper just scratches the surface as to the complexity of the phenomenon and the profundity of adjacent issues. I see you, and I will not forget.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The bulk of the existing body of sex tourism research has thus far focused on male consumers (Oppermann, 1999; Sánchez Taylor, 2006), with studies specific to *female sex tourism* (FST) phenomena remaining few and far between (Sánchez Taylor, 2001b). Yet ‘unattached’ (Berdychevsky, Gibson & Poria, 2013) *Western women* reporting romantic and/or sexual motivations for travel are on the rise, particularly in the Caribbean region (Tami, 2008). Still, little is known about *local male sex workers* experiences with *female sex tourists*, nor of the perceptions and behaviors which govern the dynamics between them (Sánchez Taylor, 2001a).

Indeed, the very nature of the phenomena is rife with ambiguity, as competing frameworks have emerged throughout the literature (Herold, Garcia & DeMoya 2001). There is no consensus around FST and *romance tourism* (RT) terminology, and the limited availability of documented empirical evidence exacerbates definitional challenges and debates (Sánchez Taylor, 2001b). The dominant discourse posits a binary topology, whereby the women are either ‘exploiters’ (FST) or ‘exploited’ (RT) – a dichotomy which isn’t particularly useful. Rather, an expanded contemplation of the multiple layers of experiences, meanings, and dimensions of complexity is needed.

In this type of research, the voices of local male sex workers have been scarce (Nyanzi, Ousman, Ousman, & Nyanzi, 2005), and the convergence of the men’s, tourist women’s, *local residents*’ and *expatriates*’ perspectives virtually nonexistent. Understanding the experiences of both partners, along with the perceptions of the local and expatriate communities well-positioned to observe the phenomenon, is therefore a topic worthy of further investigation. The notions of FST versus RT, the exotification of desire and corresponding ethnocultural commodification,

liminal travel and suspending reality, and the role of intimacy in sexual-economic tourist-local relationships are explored.

Belize has become a major international tourism destination for Western travelers (Jackiewicz, Craine & Trujillo, 2019). American women in their twenties, thirties and early forties traveling alone or with friends are the most frequent visitors – more so than any other age, gender or nationality-based cohorts (Belize Tourism Board, 2018). This compelling trend illustrates the significance of Belizean tourist hotspots as data-rich locales for FST research, positioning the increasingly popular island of Caye Caulker as the ideal site for this study (Jackiewicz & Govdyak, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the experiences and perceptions which shape romantic/sexual-economic relationships between *local island men* and Western women tourists in Caye Caulker, Belize. By documenting examples of such experiences, a better understanding of the transnational sexual economy within which such exchanges take place may be ascertained (Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014), thereby contributing to the body of knowledge on female sex tourism.

Using a phenomenological approach, this qualitative study explores the experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of past, current, or would-be local male partners with regards to the female tourists whom they pursue with economic, sexual, romantic, or other intent. The experiences of female sex tourists, and perceptions of local residents and expatriates, are also examined. Observation in Caye Caulker and individual interviews conducted remotely were the methods used for collecting data.

Definition of Key Terms

Hustler, Land Shark, (Local) Male Sex Worker, Romance Entrepreneur

A variety of epithets to describe the local men who pursue Western tourist women with economic, sexual, romantic or other intent can be found in the literature (Johnson, 2012).

Although the use of some sobriquets is critiqued in the Literature Review, the more widely-used of these are retained in order to qualify the ill-defined nature of the phenomenon in Belize, to acknowledge the broad-ranging ancillary activities in which the local male subjects participate, and in keeping with research precedence on the matter.

These are the prevalent terms ‘hustler’ (Herold et al., 2001; Jeffreys, 2003; Kempadoo, 2001a, 2004; Phillips 1999, 2008; Sánchez Taylor 2001a, 2001b, 2006), the Belizean equivalent ‘land shark’ (Gorry, 1999; Van Wijk, 2006), and the more inclusive and less demeaning term ‘romance entrepreneur’ (Bras & Dahles, 1999; Gorry, 1999; Van Wijk, 2006). When ‘beach hustler’ is used in this text, it is to denote a romance entrepreneur who hustles at the beach, and is not to be confused with Phillips’ (2008) typography (i.e. the ‘rough and ready beach hustler’).

Hustler, land shark and romance entrepreneur nomenclature are to be understood as akin to ‘(local) male sex worker’, in that ‘sex work’ is the practice of engaging in sexual activities (e.g. ranging from flirtation to copulation) in exchange for goods (e.g. alcohol, clothing, electronics, cash, etc.) and/or services (e.g. transportation, accommodations, venue admission fees, etc.) (Government of Canada, 2012).

Expatriates, Expats

For the purposes of this research, the term ‘expatriates’ refers to individuals who live in a host country outside of their native country (“Expatriate”, 2007), and for whom the colloquialism ‘expat’ may be used interchangeably with expatriate to describe such persons. Unless otherwise

specified, expatriates and expats refer exclusively to persons whose host country of residence is currently Belize.

Female Sex Tourism/Tourist, Romance Tourism/Tourist

In the context of the substantial and ongoing typological debate surrounding both ‘female sex tourism’ and ‘romance tourism’ terminology (Bauer, 2014; Pruitt & LaFont, 1995), female sex tourism/tourist are the terms retained for the purposes of this study.

Correspondingly, ‘sex work’ is to be understood as the practice of engaging in sexual activities (e.g. ranging from flirtation to copulation) in exchange for goods (e.g. alcohol, clothing, electronics, cash, etc.) and/or services (e.g. transportation, accommodations, venue admission fees, etc.) (Government of Canada, 2012).

Local (Belizean) Residents

For the purposes of this study, ‘local (Belizean) residents’ are defined as Belizean nationals aged eighteen years or older, who have resided in Caye Caulker for at least two years prior to participating in the study.

Local (Island) Men

‘Local (island) men’ form the core cohort of the research subjects selected for this study. This population is defined using the following criterion: male, between the ages of eighteen and forty years, who are Belizean nationals either native to Caye Caulker or having resided on the island for at least two years prior.

Other, Othering, Otherness

Spencer and Bean’s (2017) depiction of ‘otherness’ (Said, 1994) as referring to “the exotic and enticing characteristics associated with hypersexualized black bodies in Caribbean tourist

destinations, borne from a history of racism and multifaceted exploitation” (p. 15), is employed for the purposes of this research.

Western Women (Tourists)

For the purposes of this research, the term ‘Western women (tourists)’ refers to individuals who reflect the socioeconomic profile of international female travelers who, through financial or professional power, hold a considerable degree of mobility – particularly when contrasted with the corresponding positionality of local men. More specifically, native English speakers who identify as white women, and who ‘grew up’ in (i.e. were socialized) and retain many of the privileges (e.g. socioeconomic, citizenship, etc.) associated with originating from a Very High Human Development Index (VHHDI) country.

VHHDI classification is a weighted aggregate country grouping ascribed to nations with the highest-ranking nexus of health, education and income indices, as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (2016).

Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter explores the scholarly underpinnings germane to female sex tourism (FST), beginning with the legacy of colonialism and its influence on modern-day structural inequalities and transnational economies of desire. FST as an emerging sector and hedonic motivations of the female traveler are examined, followed by a discussion of the contested meanings of FST versus those of *romance tourism*, and the typologies of women who travel for love and for sex.

The review continues with a closer look at the production of embodied capital (Carrier-Moisan, 2015) by *romance entrepreneurs* (Bras & Dahles, 1999; Gorry, 1999; Van Wijk, 2006), and the corresponding prevailing classifications from the literature. Considerations as to how the experiences of suspending reality, eroticizing *otherness*, and intensified intimacy facilitate the demarcation of touristic terrains as sexual spaces are outlined. The chapter concludes with contextual information about the field site, and how Belize has become a prime destination for unattached Western women travelers.

Sex Tourism in the Caribbean: Historic and Economic Precedence

“The Caribbean has long been portrayed in the global imagination as an exotic, resourced-filled region of the world.”

(Kempadoo, 2004, p. 1)

The Legacy of Colonialism

Hundreds of years of trade have resulted in the Caribbean region being well-positioned for the present-day global commerce which unfolds there today. While underlying histories and hegemonies vary sub-regionally, certain commonalities traverse national boundaries (Higman, 2011). Notably, the extended saga of conquest by diverse foreign forces have long begotten the

unremitting shifts in power structures and local modes of being throughout the Caribbean (Higman, 2011).

The centuries-old commodification of sugar, minerals and bodies for barter in the global marketplace is inextricably tied to contemporary schemas of an 'exotified' Caribbean (Kempadoo, 1999). Western ideological constructions of dark-skinned persons in particular, once conjured images of animalistic beings whose sexual depravity was insatiable (Kempadoo, 1999). Much of these racist preconceptions still carry over to, and are even perpetuated by, the tourism industry today (Nelson, 2005).

The mythologized, exotified black body, ripe for consumption by the West, is a portrayal of Caribbean people that has been developed, marketed and merchandised to suit an evolving sex tourism market. As Kempadoo (2004) succinctly stated, "Territories that once served as sex havens for the colonial elite are today frequented by sex tourists, and several of the island economies now depend upon the region's racialized, sexualized image" (p. 1).

Particularly in coastal zones, where pressures to accommodate change are intensified, ongoing interactions with overseas visitors have promulgated the need to continuously reinvent exchanges in order to adapt to market demands (Tami, 2008). In this sense, beachside tourism could be conceptualized as a modern-day incarnation of colonialism and neocolonialism dating back to the sixteenth century (Kempadoo, 2001a).

The historical exercise of power over black slaves, whereby sexual labor was interwoven with domestic labor, formed a nexus of three income streams: labor, prostitution, and reproduction (King, 1975). Parallels can be drawn from the racialized division of labor under slavery and colonialism, with that of present-day tourism, sex tourism, and associated migrations (Kempadoo, 2001b).

Economic Inequality and the Currency of Desire

The interplay between micro and macro forces in the context of capitalist globalization have undoubtedly influenced the political economy of sex and sexuality in the Caribbean. As existing imperial structures between the global north and south perpetuate ethnicized, gendered, socioeconomic and nationalistic hierarchization, migration remains among the survivalist strategies often elected by marginalized persons faced with deepening economic inequality under neoliberal restructuring (Meszaros, 2014). Chief among these mechanisms for relocation, is marriage migration.

Indeed there is incentive for emigrating away from one's place of origin in an effort to mitigate much of the social shame associated with engaging in sexual-economic exchanges, which Pheterson (1996) coined 'whore stigma'. Whereas the transnational market for marriage continues to thrive, so too does commercialized intimacy as a viable revenue-generating alternative to north-south as well as south-south undocumented immigration (Kempadoo, 2001b; Kempadoo, 2004). Each of these migratory traditions are among the age-old trajectories familiar to the Caribbean region.

In the context of employment scarcity and low-wage work, transactional sex – including in the absence of migration – has been driven by the international market demand for economies of desire (Cabezas, 2009). Particularly in the Caribbean, where sexual labor is more fluidly conceptualized than in the West (Brennan, 2004; LaFont, 2001), a spectrum of intimate interpersonal relations are routinely negotiated between locals and visitors (Tami, 2008). Within this range of transactional exchanges, sexual labor is a medium for trade; a currency which may be bartered for opportunities beyond monetary compensation alone to include shelter, security, marriage migration and more (Kempadoo & Mellon, 1998; Tami, 2008).

The Women Who Travel for Love and for Sex

“Dem ‘gyals they come from *cold* places, and it’s our job to warm them up!”

(Romance entrepreneur, late twenties Belizean male)

An Emerging Sector

Facilitated by the onset of discounted airlines and all-inclusive packages (Tami, 2008), tourism has gained increasing traction as a global service industry, bearing tremendous economic, cultural and diplomatic significance (Jafari, 2000). Although consumers of tourism are often classified according to their primary purpose of travel (e.g. business, leisure, etc.), rarely does a single aim motivate travel (Oppermann, 1999).

Contemporary (postmodern) studies in tourism reveal what Kesgin, Bakir and Wickens (2012) describe as “conflicting interpretations of what motivates tourists” (p. 113). Conceptually, travel motivations are both influenced and determined by the tourist’s social (external) and psychological (internal) environments (Kesgin, Bakir & Wickens, 2012). Granted the inherent complexities in deciphering and effectively categorizing tourist motivations, many typologies have emerged in the literature (Wickens, 2002; Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002), along with the development of corresponding market segmentation therein (Shoemaker, 1994).

Tourists are now generally understood to have multifarious motivations for travel beyond any chiefly presenting incentive (Jönsson & Devonish, 2008), with increased opportunity for sexual encounters among them (Bauer, 2008).

Women Travelers

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen an influx of women in the workforce, particularly in the West (Rutherford, 2017). More recently, there has been an upwards tide of younger women opting to pursue higher education and careers, bringing about a later onset of

childbearing and marriage (Levy, 2005). There has also been a net reduction in the rates of heterosexual marriage overall, and a steady rise in divorce (Carbone & Cahn, 2014). The convergence of these economic and cultural shifts have dramatically impacted the contemporary tourism landscape. For one, Western women's disposable personal income is at an all-time high, with less familial obligations in terms of spending and responsibilities (Levy, 2005).

As hedonic motivations are considered important drivers in the experience economy (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019), the tourism market is now flooded with opportunities for women to travel alone or with friends, and to engage in 'adventures' and 'retreats' specially designed for them (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). Women's confidence to travel unaccompanied, or at least in the absence of male companions, has risen in kind (Berdychevsky, Gibson & Poria, 2013). In this sense, the notion of 'Western women tourists' refers to individuals who reflect the socioeconomic profile of international female travelers who, through financial or professional power, hold a considerable degree of mobility.

Not surprisingly, the aforementioned trends have not only culminated in the proliferation of women as consumers of tourism, but have also facilitated the emergence of female sex tourism – particularly by Western women (Wickens & Sönmez, 2007).

Sex Tourism vs. Romance Tourism

The idea of a 'sex tourist' typically evokes the image of a white male, quintessentially strolling along a sandy shore in a developing country, arm-in-arm with a much younger, racialized, woman, man or even child (Brennan, 2001). Howbeit, investigative interest in the romantic and sexual behaviors of women on holiday has also garnered recent attention, notably in response to increased observation of the phenomenon (Sánchez Taylor, 2006). Some researchers even claim that certain destinations, namely in the Caribbean and Western Africa,

attract a greater number of female sex tourists than male (Oppermann, 1999). Notwithstanding, a variety of frameworks for understanding sex tourism by women travelers have emerged in the literature (Herold, Garcia & DeMoya 2001), and not without debate (Bauer, 2014).

Pruitt and LaFont's (1995) seminal research on the incipient yet global phenomenon of female sex tourism (Frohlick, 2007) culminated in the coining of the now widely-used term, 'romance tourism'. Romance tourism denotes a nuanced distinction between women's dual motivation for emotional and sexual fulfilment, as contrasting with an assumption as to men's more basic sexual intent (Bauer, 2008).

Oppermann (1999) too argued that while financial remuneration tends to be considered the primary factor in constructing notions of sex tourism, that female sex tourists' relationship with compensation is differential. Oppermann's (1999) work endeavored to move beyond sexual-economic exchange as the foremost criterion for defining sex tourism. He proposed that an array of parameters be considered, including motivation for travel, trip duration and the nature of the sexual encounter(s).

Herold, Garcia and DeMoya (2001) developed a typology for conceptualizing romance tourists and female sex tourists according to a continuum of motivations. The three typical profiles that emerged during their research in the Dominican Republic are the 'romantic returnee', the 'committed sex tourist', and the 'adventurer sex tourist' (Herold et al., 2001).

The romantic returnee denotes a woman who became romantically involved with a local man during a previous trip, and who then returns to visit with the intent of pursuing the relationship. The committed sex tourist refers to a woman who returns to resume an existing relationship that is primarily sexual in nature; thus, to renew a relationship that is free from the

traditionally 'romantic' expectations of commitment and monogamy. Finally, the adventurer sex tourist engages in casual sex with multiple partners while traveling abroad. (Herold et al., 2001)

This typological framework is helpful for making sense of the myriad of nuanced circumstances surrounding tourist-local relationships. However, a disaggregate approach is nonetheless warranted, as the genuine motivations and realities of women who travel for love and for sex are, as variegated as the women themselves.

In the context of the substantial and ongoing typological debate surrounding both female sex tourism and romance tourism terminology (Bauer, 2014; Pruitt & LaFont, 1995), 'female sex tourism/tourist' are the terms retained for the purposes of this study. Correspondingly, 'sex work' is to be understood as the practice of engaging in sexual activities (e.g. ranging from flirtation to copulation) in exchange for goods (e.g. alcohol, clothing, electronics, cash, etc.) and/or services (e.g. transportation, accommodations, venue admission fees, etc.) (Government of Canada, 2012).

Who is Exploiting Whom?

Beyond terminology and typology, there is congruity in the literature that Western women are increasingly actors in "a form of tourism that demands sexual participation from the local population" (Kempadoo, 2004; p. 138). As Richards and Reid (2015) have noted, although "women engage local men in countless tourism destinations" (p. 5), the growth of female sex tourism is markedly prevalent in the Caribbean. This is attributed to the tantalizing carrefour of "sun, sand, sea, and sex, as well as the carefree lifestyle idealized in reggae music and propagated by the international tourism industry" (Richards & Reid, 2015; p. 5). The overdependence on a steady stream of tourists contingent on locals' wholesale production of

'paradise' (Sheller, 2004), pave the way for geographies of desire that are transfused with economic elements ranging from the discreet to the overt (Nixon, 2017).

When critical race theories and feminist approaches are applied to the north-south female sex tourism exemplar, there is much debate in the literature as to who is exploiting whom. Some argue that it is the vendor (i.e. local male) who is inordinately vulnerable and with the most at stake, and who is thus disproportionately susceptible to exploitation (Pruitt & LaFont, 1995). Whereas others contend that if a tourist sends remittances to a sex worker in between visits, albeit it under the guise of gifts and/or support for a partner with whom they imagine to be maintaining an ongoing symbiotic relationship; that the tourist is the one being exploited (Oppermann, 1999).

The economic inequality which prefaces tourist-local relationships serves as a platform wherefrom foreigners may exercise their Western privilege (O'Connell Davidson & Sánchez Taylor, 1999). Women can operationalize their positionality to consciously or unconsciously subjugate local partners through dominion over the financial aspects of the relationship – and maybe more (Smith, 2015). This perpetuation of the neocolonialization of bodies is a predictable outcome, granted that tourists' very presence is predicated upon contemporary global inequities (Sánchez Taylor, 2001a), with deep roots drenched in racist and exploitative histories.

The dominant discourse in the literature posits a binary topology, whereby tourist women are either 'exploiters' (female sex tourism) or 'exploited' (romance tourism) – a dichotomy which isn't particularly useful. Rather, an expanded contemplation of the multiple layers of experiences, meanings, and dimensions of complexity is needed.

Romance Entrepreneurs: Mythologies and Typologies

“She came for the sun, but stayed for the ‘dick’.
We give ‘dem lovin’ that no white boy can give.”

(Romance entrepreneur, mid-twenties Belizean male)

Imagining and Leveraging Racist Mythologies

The influence of tourism, and of corresponding cultural narratives on Caribbean and diaspora sexual identities, have long fueled a Western desire for regaling in ‘local delicacies’ (Nixon, 2017). The construction of black men, in particular, has been the object of powerful sexual stereotypes which persist across cultures and around the world (Chevannes, 2001).

Herbert’s (1998) research revealed widely-held characterizations of black men’s sexuality, whereby black men were imagined as being “a sexual superman whose potency and virility is greater than the white man’s” (p. 42). Richards and Reid’s (2015) work on gender stereotyping in female sex tourism produced similar findings, notably around how the mythology surrounding black men’s sexuality contributes to the eroticization of otherness when it comes to sex tourism motivation:

“the prime motivation for sex tourism is, after all, sexual fantasy, specifically sexual fantasy derived from racist mythology or stereotyping of the ‘exotic Other’ such as the hyper-sexualized Black male” (p. 420).

Considering the residual internalized sense of inferiority left over from slavery and its aftermath (Akbar, 1984), interracial coupling – thanks to enduring racism – provides black men with a medium through which to elevate their status (Fanon, Markmann, Sardar, Bhabha, 2008). Thus, the seduction of white women may be perceived by local men and by observers, as an opportunity for not just economic advancement, but for social promotion as well (Chevannes, 2001). Further, ‘taking possession of’ (i.e. having sex with) what is deemed to be a universally prized ‘showpiece’ (i.e. a white woman), is thus conceptualized as a true expression

of sexual potency – the very embodiment of Caribbean men’s masculinity (Chevannes, 2001; King, 2014).

Accomplishing sexual conquests of this nature (i.e. bedding tourist women), can bring with it a sense of superiority and even disdain over peers who have not achieved the same rate of success (King, 2014). The result is a mutually perceived status hierarchy, separating those who benefit from relationships with Western women, from those who do not – particularly for those who have tried and failed (King, 2014). Granted the limited employment opportunities generally available to would-be romance entrepreneurs (Richards & Reid, 2015), idle *hustlers* must instead continue to earn a living through hard labor. The meager alternative subsistence that could be carved out from conventional work is thus regarded – by hustlers, by aspiring hustlers and by their peers – as being altogether beneath them (Chevannes, 2001).

Through engaging with female sex tourism, local men gain access to an arena from which to assert sexualized conceptions of maleness. As mediated through enticing sought-after tourist women, the men are able to demonstrate their prowess while simultaneously ameliorating their material/economic outlook and social standing amongst peers, at least in the short term (King, 2014).

Typologies Abound

Throughout the literature, a variety of epithets have been used to describe the phenomenon of local men in developing economies who pursue Western tourist women with economic, sexual, romantic or other intent. The men generally adopt a diverse array of strategies for generating revenue, typically ranging from menial service jobs in the tourism industry to participating in the informal economy. They then utilize these positions to increase opportunities for engaging, both squarely and obliquely, with sex tourism exploits. (Johnson, 2012)

Some prominent examples of sobriquets that have emerged are ‘hustler’, ‘beach boy’, ‘gigolo’, ‘rent-a-dread’ (Jamaica), ‘sanky panky’ (Dominican Republic), and ‘bumster’ (The Gambia) (Herold et al., 2001; Jeffreys, 2003; Kempadoo, 2001a, 2004; Nyanzi et al., 2005; Phillips 1999, 2008; Sánchez Taylor 2001a, 2001b, 2006). In Belize, these men are often referred to as *land sharks* (Gorry, 1999; Van Wijk, 2006). While such nicknames may seem relatively frivolous, King (2014) made an excellent point when arguing how demeaning they truly are.

Although there is a general shift as of late towards acknowledging sex work as work (Willman & Levy, 2010), the local men who participate in the female sex tourism economy remain largely unrecognized as veritable workers (Dennis, 2008). The term ‘romance entrepreneur’, deemed more inclusive and less degrading than most others, is thus retained for the purposes of this study (Bras & Dahles, 1999; Gorry, 1999; Van Wijk, 2006). Nonetheless, hustler and land shark nomenclature are also used interchangeably throughout this text in order to qualify the ill-defined nature of the phenomenon in Belize, to acknowledge the broad-ranging ancillary activities in which the men participate, and in keeping with the research precedence on this matter.

Each of these terms (e.g. hustler, land shark, romance entrepreneur) are to be understood as akin to ‘(local) male sex worker’ in the context of ‘sex work’ as previously defined (i.e. participating in a range of sexual activities in exchange for goods and/or services). When ‘beach hustler’ is used in this text, it is to denote a romance entrepreneur who hustles at the beach, and is not to be confused with Phillips’ (2008) typology which follows.

Phillips (2008) developed a compelling typology for classifying local men who become involved with tourist women, based on her research in Barbados. The study identified three primary ‘types’ of romance entrepreneurs, ranked linearly (but not statically) according to the

relative financial success garnered from the proceeds of sex work earned in service to female clientele. These are the ‘rough and ready beach hustler’, the ‘middle ranking beach boy’, and the ‘old veteran’ (Phillips, 2008).

The rough and ready beach hustler depicts an inexperienced romance entrepreneur who is new to the game. He may acquire some material goods (e.g. brand name clothing) and items beyond his normal reach (e.g. entrance fees into clubs), but ‘gifts’ of concrete capital remain scarce. Typically, the men are illicitly underemployed (e.g. drug dealers) or low-skilled laborers (e.g. beachside vendors of handmade crafts), who cultivate strategies for coming into contact with (e.g. starting a conversation) and developing intimacy with (e.g. first name basis and warm greetings) tourists. Often younger and plagued by unstable living arrangements (e.g. temporary housing, staying with friends, or sporadic renting when funds allow), spending time with tourists offers an interim lifestyle upgrade, albeit fleeting. (Phillips, 2008)

The middle ranking beach boy is somewhat older, typically aged between 25 and 35. Having benefitted from relationships with tourists in the past, he may have acquired some assets (e.g. a small motorboat or apartment), or even traveled abroad to visit a tourist in her home country (with associated expenses assumed by her). He has a strong command of what locals refer to as “American English” (Craig, 1986; Rickford & Traugott, 2019), and has likely learned some catchphrases in European languages thanks to regular mixing with visitors from overseas. He may have a primary provider (i.e. tourist woman) who spends several months of the year living locally with him (in accommodations that she pays for), who then returns to her home country to work, often sending remittances. They may even have a child together. (Phillips, 2008)

The old veteran is regarded as being top-ranked along the hustler continuum of success. He may co-own a local business with his female tourist partner (turned part-time expat), and even employ some rough and ready beach hustlers for menial tasks. He is typically the eldest of the three types at some 38-50 years old, and conversationally fluent in at least one European language. He regularly accompanies his tourist partner in travel abroad, whether for vacations to neighboring countries or to visit her extended family back home. He is revered for his successful business endeavoring resulting from association with a Western woman. As such, old veterans are viewed as leaders by the broader community, and idealized as role models by aspiring romance entrepreneurs. (Phillips', 2008)

Moving beyond some of the stereotypical clichés described here, local men who become involved with female sex tourists are as diverse as those who do not. Intra-group commonalities render typologies pertinent to generalized trends overall, but must be juxtaposed cautiously so as to not oversimplify key characterizations of individual identities and lived experiences.

Facilitating Factors: Escapism, Exotification and Intimacy

“Everybody [tourists] comes to Belize to forget their problems and act crazy.”

(Local shop owner, late fifties Belizean male)

Suspending Reality While on Holiday

The concept of leisure is first and foremost understood as being ‘not at work’, which brings with it a certain liberated outlook (Smed, 2010). Godbey (2013) captured this perception by associating leisure with ‘freedom’, in that “individuals believe that they are free or that they are controlling events rather than being controlled by events” (p. 5). While a sense of unrestraint is arguably also an important feature of not only leisure but of tourism motivation, it is the added

notion of ‘escapism’ that distinguishes holiday travel from other leisure experiences. As Carr and Poria (2010) explained:

“Leisure is associated with the home environment (i.e., the locale in which the individual lives) and tourism with the holiday environment (i.e., a place located away from the home). The physical and socio-cultural distance between the home and holiday environments is potentially important as it may provide the opportunity for the loosening of social restraint and an associated increase in perceived personal freedom for the tourist compared to in the leisure environment” (p. 5).

This combination of freedom and escape enable a tourism environment whereby the personal and social expectations which govern the liminal spaces are distinct (e.g. perceptually more permissive) from the non-tourism environment (Godbey, Shen & Crawford, 2010).

Infrastructural features emblematic of vacation contexts, such as hotel rooms, nightclubs and the beach, thus become spaces where boundaries can be pushed and hedonistic pleasures performed and consumed (Carr & Poria, 2010) – including that of sex tourism.

Wickens, Sönmez and Apostolopoulos (2007) defined sex tourism as being “specifically motivated by persons interested in finding sexual adventure at destinations where the social norms and restrictions of their home environments are suspended” (p. 215). This notion of conjuring a sense of ‘suspended reality’ by way of hedonic experiential pursuits whilst traveling, has been amply supported in the literature (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019; Ryan & Hall, 2001), as has the increase in risky sexual behavior associated with it (Lewis, Patrick, Mittmann & Kaysen, 2014).

Bell (2008) spoke to the context-specificity of risky practices as integral to the sex tourist’s liminal experience of holidays, whereas Frohlick (2007) characterized sex tourism as contributing to a “disruption of local norms of sexual conduct and relations” (p. 148). The concepts of alcotourism (Bell, 2008), of drug consumption tourism (Hoffmann, 2014), and of

marginal and ethnicity tourism (Ryan & Hall, 2001) are other examples of liminal travel experiences entailing temporarily suspending reality.

Exotification and Commodification

Romance and sexuality-motivated travel by women has been found to be incrementally and concomitantly linked to ethnosexual tourist destination industries (Wickens, Sönmez & Apostolopoulos, 2007). Jacobs (2009) asserted that like their male counterparts, Western women tourists employ sexual fantasies of otherness to “affirm their own sexual desirability” (p. 43). Frohlick (2007) also advanced the notion that female sex tourists actively eroticize otherness in their local male partners. This exotification enhances the women’s experience of their romantic/sexual relationship(s), by upholding the fantasy that their exotified local partners’ involvement is not in fact commercialized, but based instead on mutuality and reciprocity (Frohlick, 2007).

Bauer’s (2008) extensive investigation into romance tourism found that Western women were susceptible to local men’s marketing of indigeneity narratives as courtship strategies. The women interviewed reported physical difference as their foremost incentive for romantic/sexual attraction to indigenous individuals, bolstered by displays of cultural and local knowledge congruent with the latter’s portrayed identities (Bauer, 2008).

The situational disinhibition of travel abroad (Berdychevsky, 2013), combined with Western constructs positioning locals as the cultural brokers (Sánchez Taylor, 2001a; Tami, 2008) of ‘exotic’ Caribbean experiences (Njeri, 2017), provide clues as to how romantic/sexual intrigue may manifest across ethnic lines. One might surmise then, that the tendency to *other* representations of local males may serve to substantiate women tourists’ framing of tourist-local exchanges as romantic relationship narratives. Storying in this way could further avouch the

tenability of the relationship itself, thereby vindicating a liminal, emotionally-charged experience.

This tendency to correlate *othering* with the intensification of lust in tourist-local relationships is not practiced uniquely by tourists. Studies in both the Caribbean (Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014) and in West Africa (Nyanzi et al., 2005) found that local black men openly professed to embody centuries-old racial myths when courting white tourist women. The men touted claims of well-endowed genitalia – and corresponding sexual capability – as inherent features of their ethnocultural identity, thereby tendering a distinctly exotic opportunity for would-be partners.

For these men, highlighting the ethnosexual dimensions of their identities when performing masculinity was understood to not only enrichen the tourists' experience of their shared romantic/sexual sojourns, but to be precisely the most prominently desirable collateral they have on offer (Aitchison, 2001). There is thus warrantable incentive for locals to commoditize their identities by emphasizing blackness, maleness, and autochthonal scripts when pursuing tourist women.

The Role of Intimacy in Risk Perception

Cultural imperialism aside, feelings of emotional connection to a local partner may influence perceptions of risk and safer sex practices by female sex tourists involved with local males while on holiday. For instance, Sánchez Taylor (2001b) noted a positive correlation between tourists' perception of sexual-economic relationships with locals as being authentically romantic in nature, the relative emotional intimacy experienced in the context of such relationships, and condom use. The more enamored and emotionally 'connected' the women felt with their partners, the more likely they were to have unprotected sex.

Meszaros and Bazzaroni (2014) also explored the role that emotional intimacy played in the construction of sexual-economic relationships between Western white women and Afro-Caribbean men. One key finding was that many female tourists who became romantically and/or sexually involved with locals may not have realized that they were participating in the commercial sex economy, and were therefore more likely to engage in risky sexual practices with their partners.

Sánchez Taylor (2001b) surveyed female sex tourists in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Her study concluded that “single or unaccompanied female tourists to the Caribbean are much more likely to have sex with new sexual partners whilst on holiday” (p. 752), when compared with surveyed tourists to Europe (Clift & Forrest, 1999).

It is also worth noting that women in their thirties who are recurrent visitors to Caribbean destinations may engage in sexual encounters with local men more frequently than lesser-traveled females of other age-based cohorts (Sánchez Taylor, 2001b). As such, the tourists’ age, trip location, and travel chronicity are all factors believed to influence the preponderancy of female sex tourists to engage in risky sexual relations with local men.

Field Site: Tourism in Caye Caulker and Belize

“We like it here. They speak English and it’s cheaper than Mexico.”

(Tourist, mid-forties American female)

The island community of Caye Caulker, Belize, is the field site chosen for this study. Although a geographically Central American country, Belize is generally conceptualized as part of the Caribbean due to shared ethnocultural, political, and socioeconomic similarities (Kempadoo, 2004). Located on the sub-continent’s mainland and including a large range of adjacent outlying cays, Belize is a full member nation of the Caribbean Community

(CARICOM) and of the Commonwealth of Nations. This dual designation – of being both Central American and Caribbean – bestows a unique identity upon Belize, and fits it squarely within a tourism zone that has been extensively recognized as a region of significance in sex tourism literature (Richards & Reid, 2015; Tami, 2008).

While the majority of the research on this topic has been conducted in the Caribbean (e.g. Jamaica, Dominican Republic, etc.), in Central America (e.g. Costa Rica, etc.) and in Africa (Kenya, The Gambia, etc.), only two studies known to this author were conducted in Belize. The first formed the basis of Gorry's (1999) doctoral dissertation, which focused on female sex tourists on holiday in Caye Caulker. The second resulted in Van Wijk's (2006) journal article, which centered on local male sex workers in San Pedro Town on the nearby island of Ambergris Caye. Much has changed in Belize in the thirty and fourteen plus years, respectively, since these studies were published.

Belize has emerged as a major contender in the international tourism market space (Jackiewicz, Craine & Trujillo, 2019). The Belize Tourism Board (2018) reported 489,261 overnight tourists arriving in 2018 alone. The overwhelming majority originated from the United States (320,221), Europe (59,319) or Canada (35,190). These figures are in addition to the 1.2M visitors annually who disembark from luxury cruise lines to spend the day in Belize. Both overnight and cruise tourism have seen double-digit increases over peak season months spanning the past few years. (Belize Tourism Board, 2018)

This robust growth of tourism to Belize is particularly impressive when considering that the country's population is a mere 385,854 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018). Of the overnight visitors to Belize, an average of 14% are solo travelers, while an average of 45% are visiting with friends (Belize Tourism Board, 2018). More women than men visit Belize, with 25-34 year

olds being the most populous cohort, flanked by equal numbers of under 25 year olds and 35-44 year olds (Belize Tourism Board, 2018; p. 52, table 2.11; p. 53, fig. 2.6).

Once this data is cross-referenced, it becomes clear that American women in their twenties, thirties and early forties, traveling alone or with friends are the most frequent visitors – more so than any other age, gender or nationality-based cohorts (Belize Tourism Board, 2018). This compelling trend illustrates the significance of Belizean tourist hotspots as data-rich locales for female sex tourism research, positioning the increasingly popular island of Caye Caulker as the ideal site for this study (Jackiewicz & Govdyak, 2015).

Located some 20 miles from the nation's largest city (Belize City) (Go Caye Caulker, n.d.), Caye Caulker is a world unto itself. Initially a tranquil fishing village, the island now boasts a vibrant tourism industry but has still managed to maintain much of its small town allure (Sutherland, 2018). Marketed as “the epitome of a laid back lifestyle” (para. 1), opting to simply “hang out” (para. 2) at any of the array of eclectic restaurants and ‘watering holes’ which dot the beach and sandy lanes is encouraged (Tropic Air, n.d.). Watersports such as snorkeling and diving the cay's azure waters, along with kayaking, sailing and sport fishing, are also popular attractions (Lonely Planet, n.d.).

Only 5 miles long by 1.2 miles at its widest point (Go Caye Caulker, n.d.), Caye Caulker currently has just under 900 hotel rooms on offer. These are small-scale, predominantly Belizean-owned operations (Go Caye Caulker, n.d.) that host a diverse population of “tourists of all ages and incomes” (Lonely Planet, n.d., para. 2). Multiple water taxi services ferry customers to the island from the Belize City Terminal in about 45 minutes and for less than 20 U.S. dollars (San Pedro Belize Express Water Taxi, n.d.). More adventuresome tourists willing to splurge can depart from Belize City's International Airport in one of Tropic Air's low-flying nine-passenger

aircrafts for about 180 USD, and arrive in Caye Caulker just 15 minutes later (A. L. Ancona, personal communication, May 1, 2020).

The proximity to an international airport, array of accessible world-class ecoadventures, and collection of eclectic ‘easy-living’ venues make Caye Caulker among Belize’s top destinations for the ‘off-the-beaten-path’ traveler (Belize Tourism Board, 2018).

Summary

The latter half of the 20th century has seen an exponential growth in travel by Western women seeking ‘escape’, adventure, and ‘fun in the sun’. Romance entrepreneurs have, with varying degrees of success, honed the craft of enticing the culturally curious traveler along a journey of romance and intrigue as purveyors of commoditized ethnosexual intimacy. The complex colonial antecedents that give rise to the contemporary market forces of today’s globalized economy, have set the stage for the continued consumption of the erotic Other by female sex tourists to the Caribbean.

This study explores how local male sex workers and female sex tourists experience their relationships in Caye Caulker, Belize. The mutual appeal of suspending reality, sexualizing ethnocultural difference, and the production of intimacy form the core areas of investigation for this research. Contextual elements which influence the transactional nature of tourist-local sexual/romantic relationship dynamics are explored. These include how the relative mobility and sexual agency of Western women intersect with the economic disparity, gender performance and erotic capital of local men.

Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology

Problem and Purposes Overview

As the global transnational sexual economy proliferates, female sex tourism too is on the rise, particularly in the Caribbean region. Yet little is known about the dynamics which govern sexual-economic tourist-local relationships, nor of the communities who observe them.

The purpose of this research is to explore female sex tourism phenomena in Caye Caulker, Belize. The experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of four distinct populations were collected. A passive snowballing technique was used to recruit local male sex workers (5), female sex tourists (2), local residents (2) and expatriates (2) for in-depth qualitative interviews. Observation conducted over peak tourism seasons (2013-2019), informal discussions with key informants (42), and member-checking were among the ethnographic methods integral to this unique study's design.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following overarching questions, which served as the central tenets of investigation:

- What are the typical experiences and behaviors of local male sex workers?
- What are the typical experiences and behaviors of Western female sex tourists?
- How do the relationships between local male sex workers and Western female sex tourists develop over time?
- Are the notions of romance tourist and female sex tourist mutually exclusive, or could these be conceptualized as stages along a continuum in a developmental process?

Suspending reality, ethnocultural commodification, and relational intimacy are among the key factors believed to influence tourist-local relationships. Locals' formal education trajectories,

experiences in the labor market, and access to resources were also considered, as were tourists' age, trip destination, and travel chronicity.

The following questions were explored as sub-topics in the present study:

- Does ethnocultural commodification of local male sex worker representations substantiate female sex tourists' framing of sexual-economic exchanges as romantic relationship narratives?
- Are socioeconomic status, education level, lifestyle, peer modeling, high-tourist-contact employment activities, life course circumstances, and general access to resources factors which influence local men's participation in female sex tourism phenomena?

Conceptual Framework

The qualitative methodology best suited to address the research questions was a phenomenological approach. At the core, phenomenological methodologies are used as a means to elucidate the nature of the lived experience of a phenomenon for the reader (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989). This design is consistent with understanding the relationality, corporeality, temporality, and spatiality (Van Manen, 1997) of local island males' romantic/sexual involvement with Western women travelers.

Through observation and interaction, the inquirer collects the perceptions, intentions, and sensations (Husserl, 1970) of a heterogeneous group who has experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). During this process, "perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, [...] that cannot be doubted" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). Any raw data collected must therefore reflect a variety of angles of looking, which Husserl (1970) referred to as 'horizons'. In 'horizontalization', each perception is meaningful in ultimately 'boiling down' the data so as to reveal a composite description of the essence of the experience – the crux of a phenomenological approach (Husserl, 1970).

The inquirer must then equilibrate the subjective experience of horizons with the objective reality of the phenomenon, whereby “subject and object are integrated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59). From this synthesis, a generalizable description that is broadly reflective of the phenomenon may be extrapolated (Van Manen, 1997). To this end, interviews are theme-oriented and not person-oriented, in that researchers strive to tease out descriptions of experiences free from possible influence by participant rationalization or theorization (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to achieve this, questions were not developed as a means to test preconceived assumptions around what the findings might reveal (Moustakas, 1994). This can, at times, be difficult when considering how researchers generally tend to have personal interest in the phenomena which they study (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016). Per contra, the starting point of any phenomenological endeavor is the investigator’s own perception (Willig & Stainton, 2008).

Data Sources

Overview

This qualitative study utilized purposeful sampling to elicit an interview-based, respondent-driven phenomenological examination of romance/sexually-motivated tourism by Western women to the ‘Caribbean’ island of Caye Caulker, Belize. The contributions of key informants, both insofar as in the recruitment of subjects and for the purposes of data interpretation, was integral to the study’s design. Conducting observation at locales frequented by tourist-local couples, where daily interactions could be publicly viewed, pondered and discussed, was also crucial to the methods selected.

Field Site

Both Central America and the Caribbean have been extensively recognized throughout female sex tourism literature as regions of significance (Berdychevsky, Gibson & Poria, 2013; Tami, 2008). Field visits to Caye Caulker, Belize were conducted periodically over a span of six years (2013–2019) by the investigator. Observations revealed that romance/sexually-motivated tourism by Western women was a frequent phenomenon in this community, with the island thus presenting as a valuable site for this research.

Population

This study explores the experiences, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs vis-à-vis the research topic. While most studies have focused on either the local men's or tourist women's perspectives, few have included both frames of reference. Yet other studies have explored the perspectives of locals who were not directly involved in tourist-local romantic/sexual relationships, but who were in an advantaged position to observe them (e.g. staff at popular tourist accommodations). Few, if any, have included the convergence of each of these populations, nor the perspectives of foreign-born expatriates.

This study thus constitutes a unique methodology, designed to address the gap in populations studied by including four distinct vantage points from whence to collect data in this regard: (1) Local island men, (2) Western women tourists, (3) *Local Belizean residents*, and (4) Local expatriate residents.

Five core research subjects were selected using the following criterion: male, between the ages of eighteen and forty years, who are Belizean nationals either native to the island or having resided in Caye Caulker for at least two years prior, and experienced with romantic/sexual relationships with Western female tourists.

Two solo female travelers were also interviewed, selected according to the following criterion: Western women tourists aged eighteen and over, who were experienced with romantic/sexual relationships involving local males whom they met while holidaying in Caye Caulker.

Four Caye Caulker residents deemed well-positioned to observe the research topic phenomenon also participated in the study. Two subjects from each of the following categories of local residents were selected: (1) Belizean nationals, and (2) foreign-born expatriates to Belize. All were aged over eighteen years old, and resided in Caye Caulker for at least two years prior.

Only voluntary and consenting individuals who met the above-mentioned demographics, whom were not of diminished autonomy nor considered as being of vulnerable populations (National Research Council, 2014), who were fluent in English, and who voluntarily provided informed consent participated in this study. None were exposed to deception in the course of this research, nor received any form of financial or material compensation for participating.

Sample

The methodology best suited to address the research questions was a phenomenological approach, for which the recommended number of participants is a minimum of four (Creswell, 2013). This study enlisted a total number of eleven subjects for individual interviews.

Multi-stage purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants (Spencer & Bean, 2017). This approach facilitated the identification and selection of information-rich subjects who were especially experienced with and/or knowledgeable about the phenomenon, and thus best-suited to address the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Recruitment

The first stage of recruitment was undertaken through direct outreach to key informants, who then nominated potential participants who met the eligibility criteria. In order to empower the personal agency of potential subjects, and to provide added assurance as to the voluntary nature of their participation, the researcher refrained from establishing contact with individuals nominated by third parties (Berdychevsky, 2013). Instead, it was the potential candidates who initiated first contact with her. This passive snowballing technique was useful for leveraging the close-knit ties of the various communities represented by the sample, and social standing of key informants (Berdychevsky, 2013). Doing so legitimized the positionality of the researcher and of the study itself, thus facilitating access to the specific populations sought (Patton, 2002).

Research contacts and key informants were identified during preliminary field visits to the study location, conducted over the course of six years (2013-2019). The visits totaled seven distinct trips, each ranging from four to six weeks in duration: (1) December 2013–January 2014, (2) April 2014, (3) December 2014–January 2015, (4) March–April 2016, (5) March–April 2017, (6) March–April 2018, and (7) February–March 2019. When not on site in Caye Caulker, the relationships established during the field visits were maintained through regular chatting (i.e. Messenger, WhatsApp), occasional phone and video calls, and participation in social media forums (i.e. various Facebook groups and personal profiles).

Through encounters with key informants and potential subjects whom they referred, additional layers of sampling proved possible. This included expanding beyond the scope of the individual perspective to include site-level data collection (Creswell, 2013). This purposeful, multi-stage sampling strategy served to persuasively substantiate representative composites of

shared experiences, from which typical cases which exemplified the phenomenon could be identified.

Data Collection

Using a phenomenological approach, this study explored the experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of subjects apropos the research topic by way of remote individual interviews and on-site field observation.

Methods

Observation. From 2013-2019, the researcher returned to Caye Caulker at least once or twice yearly for 4-6 week visits. Each trip offered formidable opportunities for encountering and reconnecting with key informants, as well as for observation and discussion. The highly social, outdoor-based tourist destination study site naturally lent towards pertinent information being collected in this way (Sutherland, 2018). Corresponding field notes were either penned onto paper first and then digitally transcribed, or directly digitally entered in the Notes application of the investigator's personal smartphone. Voice memos were recorded on the same device, later transcribed using the application *TranscribeMe!* (*TranscribeMe!*, 2017, June 8), and used in collocation with field and interview notes. (Patton, 2015)

Engaging locals, tourists and expatriates in informal dialogue around female sex tourism in Caye Caulker was profoundly helpful in providing insights through which the cultural contexts of the field site and nature of the study could be understood. Socializing with the broader community was a key ethnographic method culturally adapted to the local population and research topic (Sutherland, 2018). Key informants entailed individuals who were in a position to observe everyday life on the island, of which tourist-local relationships were a prominent attribute.

Examples of key informants included the aging parents and sibling of a hustler, a local tour company owner and respective employees, expatriate retiree residents of the island originally from the United States or Canada, several restaurant and bar owners and servers, and a few local motel holders and maintenance staff. Several hustlers, local women, travelers and sex tourists also contributed, both by providing nuggets of insider information and by serving as a sounding board for deciphering impressions and averting biases. Their personal experiences and observations offered distinct and invaluable perspectives in helping to make sense of this multifaceted phenomenon.

When not on location in Belize, these relationships were maintained through regular text, call, and video call interaction via popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Messenger and WhatsApp (Pew research center, 2019, June 12). This multi-year involvement proved extremely useful for keeping up-to-date with local happenings, and in building and maintaining trust with informants, participants, and members of the broader community. It also facilitated a longitudinal view of the phenomenon from which to develop a more full-bodied interpretation of the data, thereby culminating in a deeper appreciation for the findings.

Individual Interviews. Individual interviews were deemed most effective in garnering useful information for this study, granted the sensitive nature of the research. This method has been found to elicit increased sharing by subjects around socially delicate discussion topics when compared with group interviews (Kaplowitz, 2000).

Interviews were based on a semi-structured and progressive model. This design proved essential in ensuring that all central questions were asked of each participant, while nonetheless allowing space for spontaneous inquiry and feedback to emerge from the discussion (Galletta, 2016). By the same token, questions were logically sequenced but not fixed, in order to capitalize

on opportunities for seizing unforeseen developments as they occurred (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews were guided towards a narrative inquiry approach to encourage participant sharing of personal stories about their lived experience in relation to the research topic (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

One-on-one interview guides adapted to each population were developed by the investigator specifically for this study. The range of questions are intended to evoke four domains of participant experience, as instructed by Patton (2015). These are, *behaviors, opinions, knowledge, and feelings* about the topic (Patton, 2015). A mix of open-ended and closed questions were used to elicit responses specific to the following six areas: (1) Demographics, (2) Perceptions of one's own and of (3) Others' experiences with romantic/sexual tourist-local relationships, (4) Current relationship status and future plans, and (5) Closing Questions.

The interview portion of the data collection was to take place in March through April of 2020. However, this timeframe coincided with sweeping measures by countries around the world to limit travel in response to the exponential spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) known as COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020).

Beginning on March 18, 2020, the Government of Canada announced progressively restrictive travel bans in an effort to curb the transmission of COVID-19. The first barred "foreign nationals from all countries except the United States (U.S.) from entering Canada" (Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, March 16, 2020, para. 4), effective immediately. Two days later, entry from the U.S. was also restricted (Tunney & Simpson, March 18, 2020), and ultimately so too was domestic interprovincial travel (MacGregor, April 2, 2020). Beyond the obvious health concerns, this proved problematic in the context of study logistics. There are

no direct flights between Montreal, Quebec (i.e. the investigator's place of residence), and Belize, with typical air travel routes connecting either at U.S. airports (e.g. Miami) or in Toronto, Ontario (Air Canada, n.d.).

The Government of Canada (n.d.) also published an Official Global Travel Advisory in the wake of the pandemic. The Advisory cautioned that all non-essential travel outside of the country was to be avoided, further citing an “extreme risk to your personal safety and security” (Government of Canada, n.d., para. 7) for travel to Belize. Likewise, on March 16, 2020, the Government of Belize began progressively closing ports of entry to foreign nationals, even prior to any confirmed cases of COVID-19 having emerged within its borders (Belize Press Office, March 16, 2020). Within a week, all of Belize's borders were closed to visitors with only citizens, diplomats, and foreigners with legal residency allowed entry – subject to mandatory self-quarantine for fourteen days upon arrival (Belize Press Office, March 22, 2020).

Belize was spared the brunt of the pandemic with only 18 confirmed cases of COVID-19 nationwide at the time of this writing. The origins of the reported cases were traced to infected Belizeans returning home from travel to the U.S. (Ambergris Today, 2020, April 5; BBN Staff, 2020, March 29; Ministry of Health, 2020, March 23), followed by community transmissions for others who had come into immediate contact with them (BBN Staff, 2020, March 25). On May 20, 2020 Belize was declared COVID-19 free after 31 days of no new known cases, making it one of only 12 regions in the world able to claim this enviable status (Lopez, 2020, May 20). Yet travel restrictions remained in effect, both for exiting Canada and for entering Belize, up until publication of this study.

These extraordinary circumstances rendered further travel to the field site impossible for a yet-to-be-determined period of time. Alternate data collection strategies were therefore

devised, and a synchronous virtual interview protocol methodology adopted. Internet-mediated research (Hewson, 2003) is particularly useful for connecting with hard-to-reach populations (Eaton & Struthers, 2002; McDermott & Roen, 2012) for the purposes of obtaining primary data (Hewson, 2017). In fact, virtual interviewing is thought to appeal even more so to participants (Mann & Stewart, 2000), granted the added flexibility and accrued convenience of remote exchanges when compared with the physical presence required for face-to-face methods (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004).

With participant accessibility in mind, Facebook's Messenger video call feature was decidedly the most practical software for conducting remote interviews. This everyday communication tool (Ahern, 2005) provides a free interface that is simple to download, easy to install, and popularly used (Walker, 2013). Further, the researcher already maintained regular contact with key informants and participants by way of this application, and so ease of use and technical requirements were anteriorly established. Researcher-subject communications – including interview coordinating, the interview itself, and post-interview reflections – were thus maneuvered exclusively using Messenger's text, voice message, call and video call functions.

To ensure a clear distinction between personal and study-motivated interactions, the researcher created a new, idiomatic Facebook profile exclusively for the purposes of this study (Pereyra-Elías & Mayta-Tristán, 2012). It included a short biography of the researcher and an overview of the project – essentially, a digitized, social media version of a recruitment flyer. The profile could thus be searched for by key informants, potential subjects, and anyone interested in the study; who could then enter into contact with the researcher using the Messenger function linked to the profile. This way, potential subjects referred by key informants needn't have been Messenger contacts of the latter in order to locate the researcher, and could instead initiate

contact in an autonomous fashion, independent of their respective social media associations. (Innes, Roberts, Preece & Rogers, 2017)

Participants were asked to identify a comfortable, private setting free from distractions (Carr, Boyle, Cornwell, Correll, Crosnoe, Freese & Waters, 2018), and with a reliable high-speed internet connection to mitigate extraneous variables (e.g. background noise) and forestall any unforeseen interruptions (Salmons, 2015). Participants elected virtual meeting times which were convenient for them (Carr et al., 2018), ranging from mid-morning to late at night. The length of initial interviews varied from approximately forty minute discussions to more than three hours of sharing, with follow-up interviews unfolding in much the same manner. Irrespective of duration, each interview revealed thick renditions of the subjects' experiences and perceptions with regards to the phenomena being studied.

Consent to record interviews was requested but not required, and unsurprisingly, all elected to decline. Most cited preferring the added anonymity assurance and the more naturalistic, performance-free feel that non-recording offered (Pink, 2004). The investigator scribed interview notes and post-interview reflections, converting them to digital Word files saved on her laptop computer when collating data.

Data Management and Dissemination

Data was managed according to standard research protocols and data storage guidelines (Patton, 2015). Field notes and electronic data were stored on the researcher's person, smartphone, laptop computer, and/or Cloud platforms. These devices and accounts are data-encrypted, auto-lock password protected, and under continuous supervision by the researcher, and/or locked in a secure location (i.e. the researcher's private dwelling) (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data was encrypted so as to remove the risk of breach of confidentiality by way of linking participants with identifiers (Grbich, 2007). Only the researcher had access to raw data during the collection and analysis phases. Data will be deleted and destroyed once the three year minimum storage timeframe required for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval has been attained (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012). Any dissemination of results through presentations and/or publications will redact or make anonymous any identifying information regarding study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data Analysis

Select data from all sources was transcribed verbatim to assist in searching for recurring themes or patterns. Data was ordered chronologically to emphasize the development of emergent ideas over time, and carefully analyzed via a thematic-based coding process (Patton, 2015). Significant statements of experiences and sentiments were organized by clusters of meaning, from which core consistencies were identified (Creswell, 2013). Descriptive normative pronouncements and intersubjective understandings were perception-checked during interviews and post-interview during the analysis stage (Patton, 2015). Findings were cross-referenced with existing literature on the subject throughout this process.

The investigator also relied heavily upon site-level observation to gain an experiential sense of knowing. Bearing witness to the symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1992) through immersion in the day-to-day realities of the sample added depth and dimension to the information gathered during interviews. This approach, when coupled with horizontalization (Husserl, 1970), shed light on the “underlying conditions, precipitating factors, [and] structural determinants” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60) of the phenomenon as experienced by the sample.

Borkan's (1999) 'immersion' and 'crystallization' techniques were also integral components of the data analysis process. These involved engaging in detailed and thorough readings of the data, then of suspending analysis to reflect upon the findings, before resuming these cycles repeatedly. These methods maximized the profundity of the findings.

Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity is not inherent to any single method (Maxwell, 1992), nor are methods alone a means to ensure validity (Sandelowski, 1993). Rather, methods provide a model for collecting, collating, organizing and interpreting data (Maxwell, 1996). Instead, it is the confluence of evidence that "allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions" (Eisner, 1998, p. 110), which lend to the validity of a study. Simply put, the quality of any given research is dependent upon the principled, frank investigation inherent in every stage of the process (Marshall, 1990).

The purpose of research is to aggregate fragments of evidence with which to form a convincing whole (Eisner, 1998), resulting in findings that are well-founded and well-supported (Polkinghorne, 1989). The research questions posed must be persuasively answered (Thorne, 1997), with congruence between the central questions, the methodology, and the findings (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2016). Consideration was given to validity throughout the research process, particularly at the onset of planning stages and during analysis (Whittemore, et al., 2016).

Reliability

As "evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84), it is essential that data be accurately recorded, reported, and interpreted. To this aim, the researcher was well-served by her prior experience of close

contact with the population sample (Fetterman, 2010). Being immersed in learning the culture, developing rapport, and building trust with key informants provided the context necessary from which to decipher which data was (or was not) salient to the aims of the study (Creswell, 2013; Greene, 1992).

The observational protocol included logging non-verbatim data as it occurred, integrating any hesitation, pause or silence in post-interview write-ups (Lofland & Lofland, 2006). Field notes were both descriptive and reflective, providing rich accounts alongside process, insight, and summary conclusions (Sanjek, 1990). Information was organized and refined by significant themes as these related to the textural descriptions, structural conditions, and essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Validity

Much of the credibility of phenomenological research hinges on the accurate interpretation of the subjective intended meanings conveyed by participants, thus requiring tremendous conscientiousness and sensitivity on behalf of the inquirer (Whittemore et al., 2016). With qualitative inquiry validity trending towards researcher reflexivity and an increased focus on the interpretive lens, the etic has become at least as important as the emic, if not more so (Creswell, 2013).

The investigator first developed substantive validation through careful study of the subject matter as seen through various sources. When interfused with her professional interviewing experience in the context of sexuality research, these skills proved to be tremendous assets in this endeavor.

Member-Checking

Various opportunities for member-checking were integrated into the data collection process, in an ongoing manner, to strengthen the accuracy of the data and validity of the findings. Most importantly, the researcher strived to foster a comfortable and confidential interviewing atmosphere to evoke honest, comprehensive feedback (Moustakas, 1994).

The interview guides served merely as points of reference, as conversations were informal and open-ended so as to promote candid and open disclosure (Moustakas, 1994). The established researcher-subject rapport and collegiality of the exchanges invited clarification throughout, so that any misconceptions could be dispelled in real time. The researcher also maintained ongoing access to the population, be it in-person while in the field or via telephone and social media platforms thereafter, and was thus able to solicit supplemental information as needed.

This ongoing input from participants illuminated the underlying complexities of the phenomenon in ways that sole interpretation could not (Grbich, 2007). As researcher perception is unquestionably positioned, located and temporal, achieving consensual validation is anchored in the negotiation of understandings (Angen, 2016). Ultimately, “writings are co-constructions, representations of interactive processes between researchers and the researched” (Creswell, 2007; p. 179).

By its very nature, phenomenological investigation is the co-creation between the inquirer and the inquired, in a given context and at a given time (Patton, 2015), and interpretations are indelibly subject to reinterpretation (Angen, 2016).

Language and Interpretation

Direct quotes were transcribed phonetically, by the researcher, in the language in which they occurred – including in instances when various degrees of Kriol¹ were used by the speaker. While the investigator does not claim flawless accuracy, a phonological-orthographic study of Kriol, principally using the Belize Kriol Project's (2009) English-Kriol Bilingual Dictionary as a key reference, was undertaken to assist with this endeavor (Crosbie, 2009). Kriol quotes were then independently reviewed by two Belizean Kriol native speakers from Caye Caulker for accuracy.

Triangulation

Triangulation, or the use of multiple sources, measures and methods; is regarded as one of the more crucial ways to bolster validity in social science research (Scandura & Williams, 2000). By comparing and contrasting findings to corroborate data in this way, trustworthiness in the overall study is enhanced (Patton, 2015). Particularly in inquiry involving a sole investigator, triangulation assists in uncovering biases by subsuming different voices to build audience confidence in the findings (Whittemore et al., 2016).

Interviewing distinctive populations with varying exposure to the phenomenon (i.e. local male sex workers, Western women sex tourists, local Belizean and expatriate residents), did not necessarily provide more certain data, but undoubtedly offered a much fuller perspective. Searching for recurrent themes whilst simultaneously scanning for outlying examples which may disconfirm interpretations or provide alternate views, yielded more meaningful findings (Eisner, 1998).

¹ Belizean Kriol, commonly referred to as 'Kriol' or 'Creole' (Salmon & Menjívar, 2016; Winford, 2006), is the native language of most ethnic Creole people of Belize – that is to say, of Afro-European descent (Johnson, 2019). Much like other Caribbean English Creoles, "the lexicon is basically English, but the phonology, morphology and syntax reveal heavy West African influence" (Escure, 1983, p. 30).

This use of varied methods, along with observation in the field and member-checking, increased the reliability of the evidence by way of mutual validation. Hence, it is the culmination of these sources and methods which strengthen the credibility of the study and commensurate meaningfulness of the findings.

Ethnographic Methods

By definition, ethnographic methods are not undertaken in a controlled environment, but instead aim to analyze and interpret people in their natural settings (Johnson, 2012). LeCompte and Schensul (2010) described the following three hallmarks of ethnographic methods: (1) The value of natural settings as field sites, (2) Researcher-participant rapport-building through intimate interaction, and (3) Findings that are consistent with participant perspectives. These principles were steadfastly held from the time of conception through to completion of the study.

The use of snowball recruitment techniques to identify participants for in-depth interviews, combined with field observation in popular tourist hangouts, are common research practice throughout the literature on this subject. By and large, these ethnographic methods have been shown to effectively capture the nature of romance/sexually-motivated travel by Western women to the Caribbean, whereby questions around ethnicity, gender, and intimacy are considered through the lens of tourism.

By design, the observation and interview methods of this study were selected for their potential to glean an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon. In order to achieve this, establishing rapport was deemed decisive in garnering rich data collection as to the object of study, particularly considering the sensitive topic of investigation (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). As Sánchez Taylor (2001a) so clearly stated, “the job of an ethnographer is to

get close to their research subjects in order to understand and interpret a given social practice or culture” (p. 52).

Similar to Johnson (2012) and Puccia’s (2009) circumstances while conducting data collection in the field, the researcher had the opportunity to develop and sustain long-standing trusting relationships with the key informants and subjects identified for this study. As informed by the literature, this particular dynamic facilitated observation in terms of practical and epistemological purposes, and significantly reduced any potential risk to researcher safety. Further, investigators have found that building rapport over time through regular interaction can quell any suspicion that could arise on behalf of participants (Jipson & Litton, 2000). Wrongful assumptions can be dispelled on an ongoing basis as trust is established, and protecting anonymity in of itself can leverage the expansion of trust in researcher-subject relationships (Jipson & Litton, 2000).

As was the case during informal pre-interview discussions, participants engaged candidly with the nature of the research topic, and the sharing of various facets of experiences, perceptions and relationships surfaced easily. The researcher’s sexuality and deviance interviewing experience with like populations intuited navigating data collection in ways which respected the integrity of subjects whilst maintaining researcher safety. Consistent with her professional and research practice of developing a high-consent climate, the investigator routinely reminded subjects how respecting their boundaries was imperative and that participation was entirely voluntary. Intrinsic to the methods, expanding on role clarification, the goals of the study, and how the findings would be used served to avoid the potential for misunderstandings (Jipson & Litton, 2000).

Research Precedence

Undergoing careful consideration of the risks inherent in field research was an essential step in determining the appropriate methodological approaches for this study (Kelly, 2004).

Methods used by preeminent researchers investigating romance/sexually-motivated tourism by Western women to the Caribbean, and their involvement with local, racialized men, were examined. The frequently cited works of Berdychevsky, Gibson and Poria (2013), Brennan (2001), Curtis (2006), Herold et al. (2001), Kempadoo (1998, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2004), Meszaros and Bazzaroni (2014), Phillips (2008), Sánchez Taylor (2001b, 2006), Spencer and Bean (2017), and many others; were keystone sources.

Methodologies employed by Susan Frohlick (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016), a fellow female Canadian researcher who has been particularly prolific and influential in the literature on this subject, were also closely studied. Frohlick's work was supported by major Canadian and international social sciences grant-awarding institutions, and includes eleven publications examining romantic/sexual relationships between Western women travelers and local black men in Caribbean locations between 2007 and 2016 alone. Frohlick, along with Berdychevsky, Sánchez Taylor and others, were regarded as leading experts on the phenomenon.

Doctoral dissertations by Berdychevsky (2013) and Sánchez Taylor (2000a), which presumptively substantiated in whole or in part some of their later works cited above, provided inventoried, comprehensive details outlining the specific components of their methodological approaches and learnings from the field. Johnson (2012) and Puccia's (2009) doctoral research was also especially useful in informing approaches and strategies for mitigating risk when

researching this topic and region, as was Gorry's doctoral research conducted in Caye Caulker, Belize (1999).

The works discussed here culminate in hundreds of interviews with local racialized Caribbean men who were romantically and/or sexually involved with Western women travelers. The present study looked to these research precedents when assessing for appropriate methodologies and corresponding risk analysis. Additionally, the numerous studies investigating comparable samples from beyond the region (e.g. West Africa, South America, East Asia, etc.), and extensive research conducted in the Caribbean but examining gender-reversed relationships (i.e. local racialized women romantically and/or sexually involved with Western tourist men), also proved useful in developing the methods for this study.

Potential Research Bias

While methods provide a framework for limiting bias (Maxwell, 1996), all writing is nonetheless a reflection of investigator interpretation as seen through complex layers of personal identity and sociocultural positionality (Creswell, 2013). Research integrity thus lies not only in the strength of the methods, but also in the self-reflection and self-criticism embedded within the investigative process (Creswell, 2013). As such, reflexivity on dimensions susceptible to biases, such as situatedness and partiality, are key practices for 'bracketing' author subjectivity in both the curation of information and in the production of text (Lather, 1991).

The exercise of bracketing, or 'epoche' (Husserl, 1970), involves recognizing one's prior knowledge yet limiting its influence on the direction of future experiences (Creswell, 2013; Sandelowski, 1986). By consciously restricting preconceived biases and presuppositions, the researcher can more adeptly see the data 'for the first time', and in so doing, gather a fuller account of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The text itself must endeavor to describe the

author's honest stance, in detail; effectively "distinguishing truth from authenticity" (Creswell, 2013, p. 173).

Often when one asks questions, we are in fact seeking to validate our own assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). In terms of methodology, this tendency could have a profound impact on whether the research questions steer the data, or whether the inverse is true (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The questions for this study were intentionally designed to be broad and open-ended to control for any unintended infusion of researcher presupposition into the tone or direction of the questions (Weis & Fine, 2000). In like manner, some of the interview queries were purely fellowship-building in intent, so as to limit undue projection onto participants and minimize the power-distance (Tilley, 2016) inherent in researcher-subject relationships (Nunkoosing, 2005).

The researcher being a Western woman herself brings with it tremendous power and privilege with respect to the population at the heart of this study. Granted the colonial history of Belize and the important geo-political and economic ties to North America today, presenting as a foreign national from Canada carries with it major implications germane to the topic of this research. Moreover, the extant influx of Canadian tourists to the site location (Belize Tourism Board, 2018) could also have influenced how subjects perceived the investigator and her research. Maintaining an acute awareness of this identity, role and relative privilege – and remaining vigilant as to how it may have colored interactions with the population and with the data – were imperative components of the methods integrated at every stage of this study.

The nature of the study itself, be it of interrogating black people about female sex tourism as a non-resident white woman in a post-colonial context, could conceivably have led to suspicion and reluctance on behalf of participants. Subjects may have considered averting

researcher attention as essential to upholding the discrete persona and reputational good-standing assumed necessary for developing and maintaining sexual-romantic relationships with visitors in general, and with women tourists in particular.

Fears of being objectified, exotified or exposed have been reported in other studies conducted by Western women investigating female sex tourism in the Caribbean (Curtis, 2006; Gorry, 1999). Important to this case, the researcher had the opportunity to sustain trusting relationships with key informants and participants over a relatively prolonged period. This, in addition to the snowball sampling technique central to the study design, aided in circumventing some of the hurdles borne by other inquiries.

Finally, coding during audio transcription was not done in a blinded fashion due to resource limitations and the general impracticality of doing so in the course of this study. However, the data collection, coding and analysis were corroborated by ongoing member-checking to increase the rigor of the methods, and correspondingly, the reliability and trustworthiness of interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent

Informed consent was executed prior to the start of interviews, and in conjunction with the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The language used in the ICF is of a high school level (i.e. Flesh-Kincaid score of 10.7) (Paasche-Orlow, Taylor & Brancati, 2003), so as to ensure comprehension by participants. The ICF was both sent to subjects digitally and read aloud by the researcher, in order to most effectively convey and obtain informed consent. The ICF included the study's purpose, risks and discomforts, benefits, alternative procedures, confidentiality

measures, how to terminate participation, the voluntary and non-remunerated nature of participation, where to direct questions, and a list of local support resources as needed.

The researcher verbally explained how anonymity would be preserved in the case of direct quotes, and how data would be used (Noy, 2008). Potential subjects were afforded sufficient time to evaluate the information provided in order to consider whether or not to participate, as well as to ask any additional questions that may have arisen at any time throughout the consent process, during the interview itself, or subsequent to participating. The purposes served by video-recording interviews, along with underscoring the option to opt-out of said recording, were thoroughly explained to participants; who were then asked to indicate their level of comfort with that procedure.

All subjects were assured that their participation was voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time (prior to publication) and without penalty. Subjects were then asked to indicate whether they voluntarily agreed to participate, and were over the age of eighteen years old. Should a participant have indicated that they did not consent, or that they were not over the age of eighteen years, the interview would have ended with no data collected. (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Risks for Participants

Subjects were exposed to minimal risk, as defined by the National Research Council (2014) of the United States. The potential for risk was assessed as unlikely to increase subjects' probability of physical threat or emotional harm, and was mitigated to the extent possible by adherence to research and data storage guidelines (Patton, 2015). Participants were made aware of the purpose of the research, the risks in participating, and how said risks would be attenuated during the informed consent process, distribution and review of the ICF, and prior to giving consent.

The chief risks to participants were invasion of privacy and loss of confidentiality (Patton, 2015). As participants were recruited using a passive snowballing technique, some subjects could, inadvertently, have become aware of others' participation in the study in spite of reasonable efforts to the contrary (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By way of design, the very small sample size served to abridge this risk (Carr et al., 2018).

Participating in remote interviews also presented its own set of risks. Social media applications, programs, software, and Internet connections are all subject to data-mining by third parties (e.g. spyware), viruses (e.g. malware), eavesdropping (e.g. Wi-Fi 'snooping' and 'sniffing'), and a host of other cybercrimes generally known under the umbrella term 'hacking' (Van der Schyff, Flowerday & Furnell, 2020). Although Internet browsers (e.g. Chrome) offer users options for blocking data extractors and cookies through their preferences settings and plug-ins (Pybus, Coté & Blanke, 2015), the social media application ecosystem remains inherently 'leaky' (Han, Jung & Wetherall, 2012). The subjects for this study were particularly vulnerable to hacking, since most exclusively used free Wi-Fi connections provided by local businesses when connecting to the Internet (NortonLifeLock, n.d.).

Nonetheless, research suggests that Facebook/Messenger hosts some 2.4M active users (Sindermann, Duke & Montag, 2020), most of whom are aware that there is no such thing as ironclad digital privacy protection when online and/or using apps (Pybus et al., 2015). Providers routinely update their products to fix bugs in an effort to close security holes and protect users from such risks (Doell, 2013, January 18). A gamut of antivirus protection software are available to help safeguard mobile and desktop devices, many free of charge (Garba, Kunya, Ibrahim, Isa, Muhammad & Wali, 2019, October). Facebook/Messenger users can and sometimes do choose to obfuscate their identities by using aliases and/or creating multiple accounts for varying

purposes (Penrose, 2019). Other measures to increase online security include only accessing password-protected networks, disabling file-sharing and auto-connecting, and logging out of apps when not in use to avoid leaving a ‘trail’ that could be exploited (NortonLifeLock, n.d.). The investigator provided an overview of these risks during the informed consent process, along with examples of corresponding prevention strategies that subjects could adopt to boost online security at their discretion.

Since Caye Caulker is a relatively small community, it is plausible that specifying the true names of establishments or locations where observations occurred could beget the possibility of inadvertently revealing participant identities (Johnson, 2012). As such, locales were blinded and pseudonyms bearing no relationship to participants’ actual names were assigned in order to protect anonymity (Noy, 2008). Subjects and observation locations were tracked using a coded log which included the dates that consent was given, in order to ensure that the number of participants initially approved by the IRB were not surpassed (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). The log was kept on the researcher’s person or locked in her private dwelling at all times, to which no other individuals had access (Fetterman, 2010).

Confidentiality

While the study methodology entailed upholding confidentiality for participants, no assumptions were made as to what participants may or may not want to see revealed in the final works linked to this research (i.e. publications, presentations, etc.). Instead, the researcher actively engaged subjects in discussion on the matter as part of the informed consent process (Grinyer, 2009). This revealed unexpected results. Assurances of confidentiality were refuted by

all but one of the participants, and anonymization by way of pseudonyms was desired in but two of the eleven individual interview cases.

The literature reveals that there is an upwards trend in subjects wanting to remain ‘authentic’ when reporting their experiences, and in perceiving disclosing their identities as a tangible mechanism for doing so (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2008). Therein lies a dilemma. Researchers must balance between the adjuration to convey authentic representations of participant voices, whilst simultaneously ensuring protection from harm (Wiles et al., 2008). This tension can, at least in part, be resolved by integrating strategies which obscure identity, and by working in a collaborative manner to negotiate how data can and will be used.

In the exercise of weighing the potential risks of exposure against the preventative protections of confidentiality, the benefits of erring on the side of caution were unambiguous. It was fair to assume, as have DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), that “some informants and research communities cannot themselves anticipate the potential consequences of publication as well as the researcher” (p. 189). It is thus “incumbent on the researcher to protect identities even when permission is given to use names of people and places, if s/he does not feel the participants can assess the full risk” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; p. 190).

While the autonomy of participants to determine for themselves which descriptive information should be included, omitted or distorted was indeed carefully considered and deliberated, participant preferences were nonetheless overridden in some cases and with regards to certain aspects. This decision was not taken lightly, but after careful and ongoing contemplation, since it is the researcher who ultimately has the responsibility to foresee possible impacts that the subjects may have overlooked. Safeguards which protect participants and uphold

ethical practices in the conduct of the research were therefore diligently integrated at every stage of the study.

In instances where participants were adamant that their real names be used, the investigator explained how this could bring about a cascading effect whereby readers might inflect or deduce connections by way of inference and assumptions of association (British Educational Research Association, 2018). As such a situation could impinge on the right to confidentiality of others, the idea of maintaining true names was vetoed by the researcher. In accounts where reporting distinctive stories may have increased the risk of identifiability, adopting a process of ‘fictionalizing’, or of disguising key characteristics, was necessary (British Educational Research Association, 2018). The modifications entailed developing composite sketches which rendered realistic abstractions in the place of individually discernible details (Morse & Coulehan, 2015).

The researcher drew upon detailed field notes to present data as vignettes, when appropriate, to flesh out and give texture to the findings; thereby providing a rich template of the experiences of female sex tourism in Caye Caulker. The cases were interwoven to illustrate comparative similarities and differences, beginning with description and interpretation (Chapter 4) before advancing to explanation (Chapter 5). This iterative process allowed the investigator to inductively reason from hunches to hypotheses, treating them reflexively as patterns and connections emerged, effectively replacing identifiers with paradigmatic portraits of the phenomenon.

A participatory approach was integrated, to varying degrees – depending on the individuals and circumstances – to validate the inclusion and/or exclusion of practical details, and to verify the validity of the portraits developed. This process redoubled the integrity of the

data by testing the rigor of the findings from the perspectives of the participants they are meant to represent. The culmination of these strategies ensured that subjects' confidentiality and integrity were upheld in the context of reducing the risk of any unintended consequences as a result of participating in this study.

Nature of the Research Topic

None of the participants for this study were considered as originating from vulnerable populations according to the National Research Council's (2014) standards. The notion that sexuality studies interviewing may expose subjects to undue harm, by virtue of engaging with a subject matter that may be viewed as 'sensitive', is empirically unfounded. Even in cases where subjects' practices are considered socially marginal, that is not to say that they are necessarily more vulnerable to research risk. (National Research Council, 2014)

Notwithstanding, participants were asked about their romantic/sexual experiences and perceptions, which can cause reflection on personal choices (i.e. limited psychological harm) (Clift & Grabowski, 1997; Ryan & Hall, 2001). They were also made aware of the purpose of the research, the risks of participating, and how said risks would be mitigated during the informed consent process and prior to giving consent. As Vagts' (2002) interpretation of risk suggested, should the interview questions or subject matter "cause the subject some unease, embarrassment, or discomfort, these are all acceptable under the Common Rule as emotions that are 'ordinarily encountered in daily life'" (p. 147).

Even so, participants were encouraged to signal any discomfort with the interview process and/or questions, and to refrain from answering and/or opt out of recording part or all of the interview if so desired. Participants were provided with both the researcher's and faculty supervisor's contact information, whereby questions and/or any wishes to withdraw from the

study could be addressed. It is worth noting that no participants expressed concerns nor a desire to withdraw from the study at any point during the conduct of this research. Subjects were nonetheless provided with a non-exhaustive list of local resources (i.e. annexed to the ICF) from whence to seek support services as needed and at their discretion.

Sensitive Data and Ethical Dilemmas

It is essential that all social science investigators foresee the possibility that subjects may inadvertently or intentionally reveal sensitive and/or potentially incriminating data (Feenan, 2018). While the researcher cannot reasonably be expected to anticipate each and every possibility, her established relationships and previous discussions with participants, experiential and nuanced understanding of the field site, along with personal and professional experience in the region and with similar populations and subject-matter expertise; provided an advantaged position for navigating sensitive data.

Ethically speaking, participants in this study deserve the same respect and protections due any and all research subjects. This included full disclosure about the aims, procedures, and risks of participating, and the opportunity to fully and voluntarily consent. For this study, the thoroughness of the consent process went beyond the ICF to include pre-interview discussion, in-interview clarification, and post-interview exegesis, when applicable, conducted as part of the study procedures.

In so doing, the researcher invoked dialogue around the types of transgressions which could arise during discussions, specifying that the examples provided were, evidently, not exhaustive (Surmiak, 2019). This included explicitly indicating that potentially incriminating information or data which could be harmful to subjects' personal, social, or economic welfare would not be solicited during the course of the study (Lee & Stanko, 2003). This discussion

framed the peripheries of data sought during the interviews, whilst effectively alerting participants as to the range of disclosure appropriate to the aims of the research (Israel, 2004).

Being advertent in not eliciting potentially incriminating data from participants, and clearly communicating these parameters at the outset and in an ongoing manner during data collection, greatly reduced the likelihood of ethical dilemmas arising (American Sociological Association, 2018), while simultaneously contributing to a climate of trust (Feenan, 2018). ‘Dilemma’, in this case, implies the tension which may be experienced by the investigator, borne between researcher obligation to uphold participant confidentiality and the moral impetus to denounce ‘wrongdoing’ (Israel, 2004). The tension arises from the awareness of the criminality divulged by participants, the dutiful responsibility to protect confidentiality, and the ethical incumbency to ensure that subjects suffer no adverse consequences resultant from participating (Scheper-Hughes, 2004).

Particularly with regards to sensitive topics (Becker & Becker, 2001) or in cases where the dissemination of data could adversely affect participants (Lee & Stanko, 2003), interviewee uncertainty as to whether data may be shared with third parties has been found to provoke participant reticence for divulging information. Both the American Anthropological Association’s (AAA) (2012) and the American Sociological Association’s (ASA) (2018) ethical guidelines for conducting qualitative research are clear as to how such situations compromise the overall validity of research endeavors. Further, investigators who breach confidence may not only reduce their own capacity for data acquisition, but also impede the efforts of future scientists by inadvertently fostering researcher distrust on behalf of participants and communities (Israel, 2004).

More importantly, championing subjects' individual right to limit access to their person, including informational, provides ample justification for maintaining absolute confidentiality through the whole of this study's protocol (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). The right to privacy is embedded within the respect for participants' personal agency, as is the right for subjects to autonomously determine which audience(s) may ingress their lived experiences (Israel, 2004). The AAA's (2012) Statement on Ethics explicitly specified how findings must not be used to place the social or physical lives of subjects at risk, entailing protecting privacy as an integral component to upholding research integrity. Likewise, the ASA's (2018) Code of Ethics affirmed that sociologists "have an obligation to protect confidential information and not allow information gained in confidence [to be] used in ways that would unfairly compromise research participants" (p. 10).

For these reasons and more, the procedures for this study included upholding unlimited confidentiality. Other examples of unlimited confidentiality include Lowman and Palys' (2001a, 2001b, 2001c) research on sex work in Canada, and Adler and Adler's (2002) work on drug smuggling in the United States. Kovats-Bernat (2000, 2002) also spoke to the importance of performing absolute confidentiality during his work with street children in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Moreover, he prescribed this method specifically in the context of anthropological inquiry conducted in areas generally considered to be 'dangerous' when viewed from Western-centric positionalities.

Ultimately, the researcher argues the importance of adopting an absolute confidentiality approach for this study. Researcher-subject communications are privileged and should be treated as such, and confidentiality is critical to the scientific relationships bounded by this socially valuable research (Palys & Lowman, 2000).

Perception and Mitigation of Risk

Peterson's (2000) writings on risk to researchers in the field asserted that "perceptions of risk are socially constructed and affected by mainstream ideas about participants, [and] where they live" (p. 184). As such, "perceptions of threat and danger are extremely relative" (Peterson, 2000, p. 182). Risk is fluid (Linkogle, 2000), and "views of what constitutes risk and danger vary with the position of the actor in a particular social context" (Peterson, 2000, p. 181). A prevalent assertion in the literature on risk to researchers in the field, is that academics with minimal field experience may not recognize potential hazards – much less have the skills to deal with them (Linkogle, 2000).

Jamieson (2000) contended that "perceptions of threat and danger within the field will obviously vary depending on who is undertaking the research, and their ability to negotiate and deal with issues which arise" (p. 63). Much like what Jamieson, a social worker, described, the investigator approached this study from a relatively advantaged position in having accrued substantial experience in interviewing populations analogous to that of the sample. The researcher had command of the culturally-specific skills necessary to assess and manage risk in the field (Linkogle, 2000), demonstrated by her previous work with marginalized communities in Central America and beyond.

Belize's Conflicted Reputation and Researcher Safety

In her research on romance-motivated travel by Western women to the Caribbean, Sánchez Taylor (2001a) described the region as being relatively safe for women. Generally speaking, the Caribbean region is not considered to be any more dangerous or violent than the United States (Johnson, 2012). While Belize is often depicted as a dangerous, crime-ridden

country in the media (Warnecke-Berger, 2019), it is also paradoxically portrayed as an idyllic ‘paradise’ in tourism literature (Hanson, Warchol & Zupan, 2004).

Although Belize does have a certain sensationalized reputation for violence, as does the wider Central American region, “there is no indication that foreigners are broadly targeted” (United States Department of State, 2017). Incidents that do transpire, occur overwhelmingly in the vicinity of Belize City and in capital city Belmopan (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). That is to say away from tourist destinations, and certainly removed from the quaint community of Caye Caulker where the study was conducted. The island is colloquially considered by expats to be safer than many U.S. inner cities (Belize Expats, n.d.), to which the researcher unreservedly agrees.

Even though Caye Caulker lays outside of Belize’s higher-risk areas (Government of Canada, n.d.), the routine precautions integral to any travel itinerary were observed. One such step that was undertaken by the investigator in order to ensure personal safety during each visit, was to reside in accommodations which do not lend towards petty theft or robbery. The same lodging criteria requisite to ensure safety from crime, also apply to protection from pests (e.g. sand fleas which nest in rotting wood) (Bader, Ramos, Otranto & Dantas-Torres, 2020), extreme weather (e.g. high winds, excessive rains, and above-average tides) (Chow, 2019), and other possible contaminants (e.g. amoebas and parasites from untreated water and/or airborne fecal matter emanating from insects, lizards, bats, and rodents) (Esselman, Jiang, Peller, Buck & Wainwright, 2018).

In the case of Caye Caulker, heeding these precautions meant residing in concrete buildings with modern amenities such as potable water, hurricane windows, and exterior nighttime spotlights. Additional measures included selecting accommodations where the owners

resided on the premises (thereby enhancing security), and relying on word-of-mouth as to the establishments' reputations. In the context of tourism studies, minimizing personal risk and prioritizing safety are central to both researcher conduct and tourist behavior alike (Sánchez, 2001a). In this sense, it is worth noting that the aforementioned precautions are the same standard travel habits that the investigator undertakes when visiting the Caribbean coast of South Florida, for example.

Practically speaking, the recommended policies for safeguarding personal welfare in the field include avoiding isolation, carrying a cell phone, and conducting research during daylight hours (Jamieson, 2000); measures that were built-in to the study's procedures. Naturally, should all else have failed and if faced with threat or theft, the researcher was not attached to her personal property and would not have hesitated to hand over any equipment (e.g. cell phone) or belongings (e.g. money), and to extricate herself from the situation as quickly as possible (Jamieson, 2000). As an experienced traveler, practitioner, and action-researcher in marginalized communities throughout Central America, such precautions come naturally to the researcher.

To conclude, Jamieson (2000) discussed how "researchers encountering and negotiating danger in the conduct of studies have been reliant on their own experience, judgement and common sense" (p. 61) – aptitudes readily at the investigator's disposal.

Sexuality Research and Women in the Field

Gendered discussion of how researcher identity correlates with risk in the field reveals counterintuitive yet unsurprising findings. Many female investigators chronicled how being a woman facilitated data collection in the conduct of female sex tourism research in the Caribbean (Johnson, 2012).

For instance, Sánchez Taylor (2001a) succinctly stated about her own experience, “I used the fact that, as a woman I was considered by most research subjects to be non-threatening” (p. 51). Yet she, like many others, also found that initial contact made with male subjects was sometimes misinterpreted as sexual advances. A commonly used strategy for mitigating this risk was to story fictitious husbands with which to posture non-availability when faced with unwanted sexual interest by interviewees. (Sánchez Taylor, 2001a)

The literature suggests that making explicit and overt the researcher-interviewee nature of exchanges reduces the risk of false perceptions of sexual interest by subjects (Angrosino, 2007). Doing so underscores the social distance necessary for conducting unbiased data collection, and defuses any underlying gendered power imbalances between female researchers and male subjects (Schensul et al., 1999). Sánchez Taylor (2001a) found that foregrounding the professional identity of ‘researcher’ not only opened avenues for accessing data, but also served to establish and develop trust while concurrently negating any misconceptions around sexual availability or interest.

Indeed, the investigator also credits her gender with granting her tremendous access to marginal populations in prior projects, and in having been advantageous in the case of the present study. Her presence posed little threat to the core population nor to the general public, who viewed it as unremarkable and benign. Whereas when interviewing women participants, gender sameness reduced the potential for tensions rooted in subject fear of listener biases (e.g. fear of being judged by the researcher). Instead, the presumed peer identification by female subjects seemed to facilitate the development of trust, thus improving the likelihood of compendious disclosure (Berdychevsky, 2013).

The researcher's risk of sexualization by participants was minimal, since key informants and subjects were already aware of her research intentions, and of her personal relationship status as being non-available (i.e. in a committed, monogamous relationship). She provided key informants with her academic business card, a gesture which further legitimized her research purposes. Distributing the card in this way doubled as a practical means for dispensing her coordinates, should questions or participation interest arise (Johnson, 2012).

By and large, the investigator benefitted from privileged access to participants by way of her non-threatening positionality as a female researcher already acquainted with subjects. This spared her having to jockey with the latent drawbacks of gender-based complexities that some female investigators have faced, notably when recruiting male participants who were previously unknown to them.

Summary

In this study of female sex tourism in Caye Caulker, Belize, multi-stage purposeful sampling was used to identify cases which revealed rich accounts of the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Individual interviews were conducted remotely with participants from among four diverse populations (i.e. local male sex workers, female sex tourists, local Belizean and expatriate residents). Observation and ongoing member-checking throughout the research process aided in capturing a manifold of horizons from whence to triangulate the data (Husserl, 1970).

The findings were analyzed using thematic-based coding methods. Intuitive approaches such as immersion, crystallization and reflexivity were employed to filter for researcher biases during the collection, interpretation, and production of results (Borkan, 1999). The culmination of the strategies integral to the study's design, when reduced, elucidate a textural portrait of the

sample's lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). The synthesis of meanings and essences resulting from this work have captured and convey the underlying invariant structures at the core of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Careful consideration was given to the ethical dimensions inherent in the research. Ensuring that adequate informed consent was achieved, along with conducting an in-depth assessment of the risks to participants with regards to the nature of the study, were foundational to the methods. The procedures leveraged researcher expertise in conjunction with best practices, as drawn from multidisciplinary fields of investigation. These informed the navigating of ethical dilemmas, should they have arisen during the course of the study, notably ensuing from any sensitive data that participants may have revealed.

Beyond the data collection itself, the perception and mitigation of risk from within the reputational context of Belize's contested 'safeness' are also outlined. Finally, properties innate to sexuality studies using ethnographic methods, particularly when implemented by women researchers, are discussed.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Introduction

This chapter begins with a detailed account of the observations gathered at the field site in Caye Caulker, Belize. Various tourist hotspots, such as beachside restaurants and bars, proved to be particularly well-suited for monitoring interactions between tourist women and local men. Facets of life on the island were gleaned throughout the course of six years of intermittent observation and discussion with nearly four dozen key informants during the high tourist seasons of December to April from 2013-2019 (Belize Tourism Board, 2018).

Individual interviews were conducted remotely with five local island men and two Western women involved in female sex tourism, and with two Belizean and two expatriate residents who were in a position to observe the phenomenon. The women's motivations for travel, experiences in navigating the local 'dating' scene, and embodiment of loosened social norms while on vacation were explored. Local men's perceptions of how to entice tourist women, of what it's like to be involved with female travelers, and of who should bear the financial burden in such relationships were also examined. The chapter concludes with a review of participants' views of the complex sexual-economic nature of such liaisons, and the factors that contribute to their eventual unravelling.

Observations

“Look’it him [gestures towards a young local man who is doing flips along the beach in front of young tourist women]! ‘Dem fools will do *a-n-y-thing* to try and get a girl.”

(Female local street vendor, mid-fifties)

“And they [tourist women] stupid too. They impressed by that foolishness. Nevah’mind he ain’t got no job, an’ no money!”

(Male local patron, late forties)

The Case of Caye Caulker, Belize

Hopping off the water taxi and onto the pier in Caye Caulker is like stepping into another world, and a simpler time. Crystal clear waters give way to white sand beaches, lined with colorfully-painted, mostly wooden structures only a story or two tall. The sun shines bright, with few storms to cloud the blue skies from December through till the onset of hurricane season in June (Blake, 2018).

Golf carts whiz by and bicycles are strewn about, as folks stop to shoot the breeze as if not a care in the world. With no cars, no paved roads and seemingly no rush on the island, the official slogan, “Go Slow”, starts to sink in (Belize Tourism Board, 2016). “It’s more than a motto”, philosophized the retired American expat with whom I shared a table overlooking a spectacular sunset. “It’s a way of life.”

Warm winds carrying Caribbean rhythms and aromas immediately greet you, beckoning passerby to duck in for some grilled fish and a well-deserved ‘cold one’ at one of the many beachside restaurants to choose from. Flip flops and a swimsuit are proper ‘anytime’ attire, whether lounging in a hammock beneath swaying palms or going out to eat. “No shirt, no shoes, no problem”, read the signs. The island captures the quintessential, picture-perfect ideal of a tropical retreat.

Caye Caulker’s laid-back atmosphere and natural physical beauty have lent towards its growing reputation as a ‘paradise’ for American, Canadian, and British retirees (Jackiewicz & Govdyak, 2015). Studies point to this destination being revered as one of the most desirable locations for hedonistic lifestyle-seekers from the West (Jackiewicz & Govdyak, 2015). With resettlement guidebooks sporting appealing titles such as *Easy Belize: How to Live, Retire, Work and Buy Property in Belize*, *the English Speaking*, *Frost Free Paradise on the Caribbean*

Coast (Sluder, 2010), it's no wonder that there are currently as many American and Canadian expatriates living in Caye Caulker as there are native Belizeans (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2017).

Add to that the high volume of tourists who visit the island, and the presence of Western women who are romantically and/or sexually involved with local men are not an anomaly in Caye Caulker, but a norm. Indeed, relationships between tourist women and local men are a highly visible feature of the tourism that takes place in Caye Caulker. It is possible to observe interactions between tourist-local couples at pretty much any hour of the day or night. The beach and beachside businesses, parks and street corners, restaurants and hotels, in or around bars and nightclubs, are all fertile grounds for observing the phenomenon (Sánchez Taylor, 2001a). As Anderson-Fye (2003) also noted for other destinations in Belize, "The tourism industry is not separated from 'real life' in the town".

Local Hotspots and Hustler Antics

Tourists tend to converge at a select few of the most crowd-pleasing venues, aided by the proliferation of budget travel books and online guides such as Lonely Planet, and word of mouth recommendations shared along popular travel routes (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2004). Throngs of visitors arriving during the high season further draw street vendors, transportation providers, tour pushers, and all manner of persons hoping to excise their share of earnings by panning their wares to the willing vacationer – land sharks among them. These tourist 'hotspots' provided fertile grounds for observing interactions between Western women and local island men.

Throughout my time in the field, I kept a detailed, coded log of the various locales and individuals most pertinent to the aims of the study. Certain characters emerged as particularly prolific in terms of the sheer number of attempts I observed them make in trying to engage with

vacationers. Beyond the exuberant flirting (e.g. “You’re so beautiful!”), grandiose romantic gestures (e.g. swooping-in with flowers freshly plucked from an overhanging tree), and exaggerated shows of feigned intimacy and affection (e.g. hugs imposed on someone they just met); the men also used even more inventive strategies to try and capture tourists’ attention.

Examples included staged scenes of one local ‘accidentally’ bumping into a female traveler. Then another local (his friend), would immediately step in to ‘save’ her by demanding an apology on her behalf. This way, the ‘good Samaritan’ intervener could strike up a conversation that would open with something along the lines of “That’s no way to treat a beautiful young lady!” The friend would come off as the ‘good guy’ who had the tourist’s best interests in mind, and the goal of initiating contact with a tourist woman would be achieved.

Another, albeit less creative, means with which I observed some of the younger local men attempting to beckon female travelers’ attention, was to simply trail behind a group of visiting young ladies as they moved from one location to the next. The men would call out a few random “white people names” – like ‘Jen’, ‘Amy’ or ‘Stephanie’ – in hopes that one of the women would turn around. If initial hollers went ignored, then they would simply yell more loudly until ultimately, the women would end up looking to see what the commotion was. That’s when the men would, in turn, seize this opportunity to engage by claiming to have simply mistaken their names. I witnessed novice hustlers act-out these types of schemes innumerable times and on a near-daily basis.

The theatrics employed by these men in the pursuit of tourist women could be conceptualized as corresponding to the lowest rung of Phillips’ (2008) typographical continuum – the ‘rough and ready beach hustler’. The hustlers would actively intercept tourist women in unsophisticated, even childish ways; thus revealing their youth and inexperience. And yet,

sometimes their antics were effective. Many women, particularly the twentysomething tourists, were charmed by the men's forthright approaches and all-around outgoingness. I also took note of women who seemed to not only welcome this type of attention, but who actively pursued it.

Informal discussions revealed that many female tourists appreciated the overt attention bestowed upon them by local men; attention they did not receive back home, or at least not to the same degree nor delivered with the same "exciting", infectious energy. The element of surprise laced with an ostensibly healthy dose of 'risk' appealed to their 'adventure' travel mindset (Mullings, 2000). The women were intrigued by what fraternizing with local men might bring them, like discovering "secret spots that only locals go to", among other avenues for accessing a more intimate ethnocultural tourism experience. Most predominantly, the women I spoke with credited the men's physiques, "sexy, exotic look", and outward expression of a zest for life – features they interpreted as innate to the local culture – with being the most compelling factors in their decisions to engage with them.

Yet not all of the women I observed or with whom I interacted appreciated the men's advances, which could, at times, veer towards sexual harassment. Some felt intimidated, particularly if it was late at night, occurred in a more isolated area where they'd felt "outnumbered" by locals, or if the men's insistence took on an aggressive tone. Beyond these more disquieting instances, the women could too be distinguished by their level of distaste and irritability with the men's approaches. The more experienced and higher along the career ladder of travel (Huang & Hsu, 2009), the more easily annoyed and impatient they became.

One beach hustler, who I'll call 'Lloyd'², entrusted that he would "test" tourists in this way. The less agreeable women he considered as being "too much work" to win over, and so

² Pseudonyms were assigned to all persons mentioned by name.

Lloyd would instead focus his energies on those deemed more susceptible to his overtures. He perceived women who welcomed his attention as novice travelers, who hadn't "already slept with a bunch of local guys". Lloyd went on to explicate how, "A guy wants a sexy girl who's not a whore"; suggesting that a restrictive – yet oscillating – script was the idealized performance by Western women.

Gender Dynamics and Cultural Cues

Taking a Saturday evening stroll around Caye Caulker's tourist hotspots, the energy feels festive and sexually charged. The night air is warm and humid, with a slight leeward breeze wafting off the reef. Beachside shops blast dancehall reggae and reggaeton music, equalized a little too heavily on bass frequencies to register comfortably. Crowds gather to socialize on front stoops, at busy street corners, and atop the concrete stands of the oceanfront basketball court. Food vendors frenzy over sizzling grills, and empty red plastic cups line the ditch, discarded after a few sips of hard liquor from a shared bottle.

Sexual innuendos abound. Bars serve classic cocktails like Sex on the Beach and Blow Job, but also others I'd never heard of anywhere else, like Bikini Martini and Strawberry Strip Tease. Some concoctions bore names laden with obvious genitalia euphemisms, such as Banana Cock-Tail and Pink Pussy. Belize's best-known local favorite is disturbingly titled Panti Rippa – Kriol for 'panty ripper'. It can be seen scrawled on the chalkboards of virtually all of the beachside bars that display their menus.

I was initially quite taken aback by this particular drink name, since, at least from my perspective, it alluded to the involuntary removal of a woman's underwear, presumably after she'd had several of these high-octane drinks. It struck me as blatantly trivializing sexual violence. Eventually, I came to view my interpretation of the drink's title, along with its

popularity and my reaction to it, within the context of a wider bias. I realized that when in Caye Caulker, I'd often felt triggered by what I perceived as a generalized misogyny. In speaking with other women, whether local, expatriate or tourist; I found that my impressions were not unique.

Local men and women in the Caribbean are subject to strict gender codes (King, 2014). Interestingly enough, hip hop and rap music, while considered a hypermasculine art form in the U.S. where it originated (Greene, 2008; White, 2011), was termed "faggot music" by the beach hustlers I spoke with. Instead, dancehall reggae reigned supreme among the hustlers' musical preferences – a genre hailing predominantly from Jamaica, typified by unflinchingly vulgar lyricism denoting sexual conquest, overt homophobia and unrestrained use of violence (Hope, 2006). The style glorifies society at the margins, serving as a lifestyle guide for emulating an economy of pleasure (Paul, 2010) amidst a subculture of blocked opportunities (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2002); which many young Belizeans I encountered in Caye Caulker both idealized and incarnated.

Dancehall was the soundscape of choice in beach hustlers' lives, which they carried with them on (often) stolen cell phones with (very often) cracked screens. Trending anthems permeated every aspect of their existence, and were internalized as a gospel of sorts (Saunders, 2003). The genre's verses normalize toxic masculinity, absolving land sharks of rampant infidelity, the objectification of women and frequent use violence to 'resolve' conflicts (Gaye, 2011).

The male fragility I encountered among hustlers rendered them susceptible to impulsive behaviors (Bennett, 2014). One-upmanship, self-aggrandized boasting and disputes over women, money and drugs were frequent. I've witnessed firsthand an untold number of seemingly spontaneous eruptions of aggression, some of which degenerated into broken bottle fights and

gunplay. I have also, regrettably, attended more than one funeral stemming from altercations of this nature during my time in Belize, suggesting that indeed, there were many facets to 'paradise'.

Juxtapositions and Contradictions

Local men could be seen protesting and policing women's behaviors through jealousy, most notably by controlling whom they 'should' and 'could' speak to. Much of the outwardly expressed territoriality over tourists was shielded from the tourists themselves, as hustlers proficiently code-switched from "American English" to Kriol when talking amongst their in-group (Escure, 1982). They would also shift fluidly from stern (e.g. "Why you talking to that guy? I told you not to talk to him!"), to what some tourist women construed as intimate (e.g. "Meh' no want nobody lookin' at my girl") and endearing (e.g. "Your body is for *my* eyes only").

On the one hand, land sharks unanimously preferred tourist women they deemed "innocent" (i.e. having had few sexual partners), and who they viewed as naïve enough to be responsive to their unpolished approaches. Whereas on the other hand, they prized the sexual savviness judged requisite for enacting an assortment of pornography-inspired fantasies predicated upon pervasive racial myths. The order was tall. She would ideally exude a great deal of sex appeal so as to be the envy of his friends, but be accessible to him alone; yielding sexual scenarios for his exclusive pleasure. She must embrace traditionally male terrain when it came to providing financially and materially, but rescind to "act womanly" whenever the urge to exert authority over her person and control in relationship begot him.

When it came to tourist women, they unabashedly expressed wanting a "hot local guy", who was "always horny", and who could satisfy their sexual needs by being "dominant in bed".

Moreover, she would also expect him to be faithful to her (at minimum while she was visiting), be warm and tender (leastwise behind-the-scenes), and to oblige her fairytale of how a holiday romance should be. These findings are consistent with King's (2014) assertions:

“White women sex tourists want to have their stereotypes both ways. They want – all in the same person – both the aggressive, oversexed black man who is always ready for sex and the jovial, docile black man who will always obey them and always be pleasant, regardless of what may be happening in his life. They also want to have casual sex without its seeming casual, even, or especially, to themselves” (p. 176).

Navigating the multilayered expectations that hustlers have of tourist women – and vice versa – was dizzying at best. Successfully performing to the wants of the Other required continuous ebb and flow between divergent manners and forms, and as such, the juxtaposition of often contradictory roles.

Speaking with Western Women

“I'm on vacation, so why not?”

(Canadian female sex tourist, late twenties)

“To Party” and “Feel Free”

The tourists I met in the context of this research were generally quite relaxed and open to discussing the nature of the study. The younger women were typically recent university graduates on holiday from North America, the United Kingdom or Nordic European countries, but also from as far away as Israel and Australia. They'd come to Caye Caulker for some snorkeling and “to party”, often in the context of a longer trip beginning in nearby Cancùn, Mexico, before heading down the coast towards Nicaragua or Costa Rica. This was their “first real trip” without their parents, at least insofar as vacationing overseas was concerned. They traveled alone or with friends, were on a ‘shoestring’ budget, and were especially eager to connect with locals.

The women I'd met who were in their thirties and forties were almost exclusively from the U.S. and Canada. They'd also come to Belize to unwind, but traveled on their own; often when in-between jobs and/or relationships. Most were repeat visitors and already planning to return in the near future, with Caye Caulker as their destination and not a detour along the way. The postcard-worthy scenery and slow-paced "island vibe", provided a relaxing environment to help 'unplug' from the stressors and responsibilities back home. The use of English and abundance of expats eased visitors' integration, making them feel "safe" and "welcome", part of the larger "community". Some, such as 'Lisa', dreamed of falling in love with a local and of setting up a business, with moving permanently to Belize as the ultimate goal.

The hedonistic motivations for travel to Belize by these Western women were universal, regardless of age, country of origin, or socioeconomic profile. What distinguished twentysomethings from thirtysomethings, was the transience of the former versus the solo returnee and aspiring semi-permanence of the latter. Lisa and 'Melanie' – another woman who participated in the study – were repeat visitors in their thirties from the U.S. and Canada respectively.

A third woman, twentysomething 'Nyla' from Finland, also expressed keen interest in participating in an individual interview. Arranging a time and place, however, proved impossible in the long run. Nyla did not want to commit to any concrete plans, preferring instead to keep her schedule open to serendipitous possibilities. She'd remarked on how the American-captained sailboat parked in the harbor was taking "cute girls" out on day trips free of charge, and wanted to stay available lest she be invited aboard. Nyla nonetheless contributed to the study by way of informal discussion and anecdotal recollection, and by evoking fruitful observation opportunities when interacting with locals. Slender and nearly six feet tall with long, lustrous blonde hair and

faux-lashed, aqua-colored eyes; her thong-bikini presence at the beach caused quite a stir. A steady stream of land sharks gravitated towards her modelesque appearance.

Nyla's equally attractive friend, 'Vanessa', was also enthusiastic at the idea of participating in the study; but her time was in lieu monopolized by some of the male subjects. Indeed, the men were completely engrossed with this pair of Finnish belles during their stay on the island, and shamelessly competed for their attention. Fortunately, and dissimilar to what most women researchers investigating this phenomenon experience, a great deal of trust had already been established between myself and the male participants. The men did not feel threatened by my interest in speaking with the objects of their attention, and instead invited me to tag along when they went "hunting" (i.e. searching for new tourists). After all, these were opportunities to demonstrate and perhaps validate their prowess for a willing observer, and performing masculinity was both a leading strategy and key motivation for engaging with female sex tourists.

"From a 'Seven' to a 'Ten'"

Discussions with Lisa and Melanie revealed that both women felt insecure about their weight, lamenting how "gravity" had affected their appearance in the course of aging. While neither were particularly large, they may have been considered about twenty or so pounds overweight by Western beauty standards. Yet in Belize, they felt appreciated for their curves. Voluptuous body types had recently been popularized in dancehall, soca, reggaeton and hip hop cultures (Hope, 2016). Heavier women were enviably referred to as 'thick' in songs and videos (Gentles-Peart, 2020), denoting a far more flattering characterization than does being labeled 'fat' or 'overweight'.

This single dimension of feeling slimmer, and the increase in self-perceived sexiness that came with it, constituted perhaps the most significant status upgrade that the women described experiencing by way of partnering with locals. Melanie spoke to how this weighed considerably in the balance of the overall appeal of the women's forays into sex tourism:

“From the moment I arrive in Belize, I feel like a queen. It's like going from a 'seven' to a 'ten'. The guys treat you like you're a movie star! And you know what? That feels pretty damn good – especially when you're coming from winter [in Canada]! It's good for the morale. It's hard to go back [to Canada], actually...All of a sudden you're pretty much invisible again.”

Lisa and Melanie's newfound status as 'sexually desirable', in conjunction with the relative cloak of anonymity provided by travel abroad, emboldened the women to relinquish social constraints and to explore new behaviors and identities. Vacationing in Caye Caulker allowed them to reinvent themselves, at times assuming a hypersexualized demeanor which did not necessarily correspond to their lifestyle choices back home. Lisa demonstrated her ability to draw local men's eye:

“I've never gotten so much attention in my life. I can get any guy's attention I want here. It's like... 'ridiculous'...just like that song³ [gyrates as if to music]! See? Look at that guy! He's checking us out right now! All I have to do is make eye contact and he'll be on his way over here to chat us up! I don't really want to talk to him though [laughs loudly], but it's *that* easy. I love it.”

The liminal landscapes that hedonistic pursuits, accrued sexual status and the ephemerality of travel provided were catalysts in the women's motivations for pursuing fully-engrossing sex tourism experiences. Melanie shared her outlook:

“I feel free when I'm here. That's why I keep coming back. But obviously I don't expect [local male hustler] to wait for me while I'm gone. So if I come back and he's taken, then I'll just find somebody else – somebody better! He's got lots of hot friends...I'm sure one of them would be down to 'get down' [laughs candidly]! Might as well get it [sex] while I can!”

³ Kevin Du Bois' soca song, Ridiculous, was on heavy rotation in Caye Caulker since its 2015 release. Soca is a festive music genre originating in Trinidad that has become increasingly popular throughout the Caribbean and beyond (Frank, 2007).

The women described feeling empowered by independently-taken trips, and found flaunting their sex appeal and exercising agency to be utterly exhilarating, if not “addictive”. Indeed, they seemed more willing to throw caution to the wind, both in terms of fretting over reputational consequences as about using contraception and sexually transmitted infection prevention methods during sexual encounters.

‘Dating’ Locals

It was Melanie’s fourth time to Belize in three years. A mid-thirties Anglophone from Ontario, her French was not great but she would use it to communicate desultorily with me under the guise of privacy to limit eavesdropping by onlookers. Melanie relished in the layer of privilege that sidestepping locals’ language comprehension afforded her. “Two can play at that game!”, she’d teased, when her Belizean partner protested being excluded from the conversation. This was her way of evening the score for when he’d switch to Kriol with his friends, even when she was around. Speaking a language other than English separated her from the sea of tourists, adding a touch of her own ‘exoticness’ to the persona she sought to project.

An on-call nurse in the private sector, Melanie took full advantage of her contract-based work schedule to indulge in frequent travel. She’d wintered in littoral Mexico and Costa Rica in previous years, but since discovering Caye Caulker has vacationed exclusively in Belize. The simplicity of island life and ethnicity of locals appealed to her:

“I like coming here because I don’t have to use my brain too much [with Caye Caulker being predominantly English-speaking]. It’s beautiful, and, honestly, I’m just really attracted to black guys, especially ones with ‘dreads’ [dreadlocked hair]. I’m not even sure I find white guys attractive anymore...like...it doesn’t really compare, to be honest.”

Melanie expanded upon her motivations for repeat returns to Caye Caulker, and her involvement with local, racialized men:

“I mean, I would never date a guy like that [a black man with dreads] back home. They’re all either drug dealers or have random kids they don’t take care of...not exactly the kind of guy you bring home to meet the parents! But here, I’m on vacation dammit. I just wanna’ relax, drink a few piña coladas, and see if what they say [about black men’s sexuality] is true. And so far, let me tell you...it is!”

This type of overt casual racism, arguably uncharacteristic of educated Canadian women (Satzewich, 2018), was not uncommon in my interactions with tourists and expats in Caye Caulker. Melanie’s blatant stereotyping and perpetuation of racial myths gave her license to fetishize local men in the interest of serving her own libidinal needs.

Lisa on the other hand, was from Los Angeles (L.A.). Now pushing forty, she’d been coming to Belize for eight consecutive winters. Although Lisa would spend the bulk of her time on Ambergris Caye, every now and again she’d visit Caye Caulker to “get away” from the hustle and bustle of larger San Pedro Town. Lisa described herself as “a ‘trust fund baby’ gone wrong”, having inherited untold sums from late family members, which she used to indulge in bouts of ‘carefree’ travel.

No stranger to sexual adventurousness, Lisa would braggingly recount her exploits with an air befitting of Levy’s (2005) characterization of ‘female chauvinist pigs’. Discernibly comfortable in objectifying the men she’d been involved with, Lisa painted a picture of how she became what she qualified as “jaded” in the course of her sex tourism experiences:

“At first I used to care. But now I just accept it for what it is. These [local] guys are all players. You think you’re special until you find out you’re not. So what’s the point? Just deal with it and move on. It’s part of being here. You have to be realistic. My ‘paradise’ bubble was popped a long time ago.”

Lisa recounted her romantic experiences with local men as an arc which began with infatuation and concluded with resignation. Her disenchantment and chagrin rang loud and clear. Although she tells of once being very much in love with a local man some fifteen years her

junior, she'd come to learn that she was but one of many tourists he was involved with. Despite being only eighteen at the time they started seeing each other, Lisa's ex-partner, 'Nelson', already espoused the romance entrepreneurship skills of a 'middle ranking beach boy' (Phillips, 2008).

According to Lisa, Nelson would "manipulate" her into "feeling guilty" so that she would "pay for everything", even wiring him money⁴ after she'd returned home to L.A. This went on for three years, all the while during which Lisa believed they were in a long-term, committed and exclusive relationship. Meanwhile, Nelson would "hit on anything with a pulse", having unhindered sex with tourists during the high-season and with locals in the off-season. Her lips pursed in contemptuous resentment for how things ended, Lisa asserted her strategy for a different outcome moving forward:

"I gave that 'asshole' three years of my life. Never again. From now on, *I* call the shots. If a guy wants to be with me, he's going to have to prove himself, 'cause I ain't settling for shit. Fuck that!"

Lisa has since become involved with 'Sean', whom she planned to marry in order to acquire Belizean citizenship. A change of immigration status would allow her to open a boutique hotel and run it with his help:

"He's not the sharpest tool in the box, but he knows how to get things done around here – thank God. At least that way I won't have to go back and forth [to and from Belize] all the time. That way, I can keep an eye on him [by staying in Caye Caulker], and make sure he ain't up to no good! That's the plan."

Disillusionment and distrust were frequent features among the more practiced female sex tourists I encountered. Despite having had negative experiences with local men in the past, they nonetheless kept returning to Caye Caulker, albeit with evolving

⁴ The types of remittances reported by study participants typically included money transfers and gifts, such as American-style clothing (e.g. popular brand names) and electronics (e.g. cell phones, tablets) that are either harder to acquire on the island, or sold at inflated prices.

frames of mind. These ranged from lukewarm dispositions imbued with hesitant romantic aspirations, to cavalier demeanors set on executing premeditated plans paradigmatic of sex tourism behavior. Over time, the women became increasingly cognizant and accepting, at least in practice, of the economic dimensions implicit in relationships with romance entrepreneurs.

Speaking with Local Men

“I’m not attracted to local girls. They can’t give me the chance I need to actually do something with my life.”

(Local romance entrepreneur, early twenties)

Of the five local men interviewed, all sought to strategically position themselves to initiate tourist encounters by ‘hustling’ in the informal beach economy. Be it by offering-up unofficial tours to travelers they’d befriended, or while intermittently employed as guides or restaurant servers, each saw the potential to profit from networking with visitors. Doing so provided opportunities to ameliorate their economic standing through material and financial gains with which to supplement their relatively meager wages. Connecting with tourists also meant drawing the envy of their peers by benefitting from experiential privileges to which they normally would not have access.

“Sharing is Caring”

The men regularly smoked copious amounts of cannabis, but would rarely pay for it themselves if they could avoid it. Instead, they would acquire some on behalf of tourists, who would then share in its consumption. Going to “blaze some ganja”, as smoking cannabis was colloquially referred to on the island, thus proved to be an intimacy-building occasion. Doing so transcended cultural divides through partaking in a shared, ritualistic activity that although

decriminalized⁵, was still considered marginal. ‘Emmett’, a beach hustler in his early twenties, confided his experiences while trying to rolling a joint:

“We hook ‘dem [tourists] up with whatevah’ dey want. Then we get to have some too! Then we make *sure* they want to hang wit’ us...and if he’s got money, then he’s gonna’ be my good friend [laughs candidly]! And if it’s a cute girl, even bettah’! She can treat me to *a-n-y-‘ting* she wants... ‘weed’...food...alcohol...her body [laughs]...and then I’ll treat her to what *she* wants [his penis/sex]! ‘Sharing is caring’!”

Emmett described a familiar trajectory where “one ‘ting leads to anotha’”. Hustlers acted as go-to’s, preemptively attending to tourists foreseeable needs; and then, in turn, benefitting from their role in bridging the gap between foreign and local. Emmett theorized that much of the appeal in “chilling” with local hustlers was rooted in wanting to experience quintessential Afro-Caribbean practices, as imagined by ‘wet behind the ears’ travelers:

“If they [tourists] are from, like, Europe or something, and they never saw a black guy before, they think they is in Jamaica [laughs heartily]. Like I’m gonna’ bust out a drum and sing Bob Marley or some-thing’! I mean, yeah I like Bob Marley and all...but *nooo* [laughs]...it’s not like that.”

By sharing in culturally-hued consumption activities, hustlers invoked a sense of belonging to a marginal realm. This meaning-making was irresistibly enticing, particularly for younger and less-experienced tourists. “Hangin’ out” with locals granted newbies to the island the opportunity to symbolically transcend from out-group to in-group, in one swift cannabis-induced experience.

‘Serendipity’ as a Sexual Strategy

One local male participant, ‘Junior’, evinced much well-honed moxie in the realm of female sex tourism. His “specialty” was seducing young backpackers from affluent families who embodied the Western beauty ideals for which the hustlers of Caye Caulker strived. Junior

⁵ The possession of up to 10 grams of cannabis was decriminalized in Belize on November 2, 2017; although legal consumption is restricted to use by adults (i.e. aged 18 years or older) in private spaces (GOB passes law, 2017).

distinguished himself from the typical case by being relatively educated and from a prominent family. A smallish, light-skinned black man in his mid-thirties, he showed off having traveled to Europe to visit his now ex-fiancée's family:

“Not many guys from around here can say they've seen the Thames River. But I have! London, Manchestah', you name it! I been to all a 'deese places. Two or 'tree times even. I even saw a soccer game – how you call it? 'Footy'? It's 'ok', but it's a long-ass plane ride to get there...and it's *c-o-l-d!*”

Junior completed high school and vocational training to become a federally-licensed tour guide, registering a small company which he singlehandedly owned and operated. Although his business practices were somewhat questionable (e.g. routinely showed up to greet customers two to three hours late), when he did work as a guide, his tours usually sold out. He would round up young travelers from the local hostels and budget hotels, and then recreate the same party environment on his twelve passenger motorboat. There was in fact so much alcohol and cannabis on his tours, that customers often didn't seem to realize that they never quite reached the natural attractions they'd signed up to see. The fees that Junior saved on marine reserve entrance costs for his guests, were reinvested in supplying party favors for the trip:

“I make sure I have a lot of 'herb' and alcohol. We have to keep the drinks flowing! And some snacks. Whatever that group of people seems like they gonna' want, that's what I'm gonna' get...to keep the party going. That's why I'm always late, 'cause the stuff is never ready on time...and maybe I don't always order it on time [smirks knowingly]. But this is Belize! Everybody haffi' chill out and 'Go Slow'.”

Junior understood that backpacker and 'flashpacker'⁶ clientele were seeking, above all, an ethnocultural adventure (Wilson & Richards, 2008). His success hinged on generating memorable escapades into the experience economy (O'Dell, 2005), infused with the disinhibiting social lubricants of booze and “ganja”. He provided a venue for authentically encountering the

⁶ 'Flashpackers' can be distinguished from backpackers by “having more disposable income, and traveling as a 'backpacker' by choice rather than budgetary necessity” (Paris, 2012, p. 1095).

legendary reggae-Rasta cliché as imagined by Westerners (Daynes, 2004), which he reenacted superbly time and again when interacting with foreigners.

I'd accompanied Junior on many of his tours, and can personally attest to the appeal of disconnecting so completely from the fast-paced ways of life of the global North. Reality was blissfully suspended, thanks to a steady stream of shenanigans that went hand in hand with a day trip à la Junior. Cases in point included running out of gas while at sea, getting kicked off a private islet by security guards for trespassing, and watching inebriated Swedes slip off the boat while urinating from the side of the vessel. Junior's tours epitomized the novelty of the unknown, the tension of possibilities and the allure of potential repined-for by the audacious traveler (Cartier, 2005).

Over the years, I'd seen Junior "hook up with" a myriad of young adventure tourists whom he'd met in the course of his work. Spending a full day zipping across the cerulean sea, smoking "fontoh"⁷ and mixing drinks alongside young, bikini-clad tourist women swaying to blaring dancehall was enough to relax the social constraints of life back home or even on shore. Junior charted a perfectly curated setting through which to accelerate intimacy-building, placing him front and center as a gatekeeper to a highly sexualized ethnocultural experience. He remained enthusiastic about the longevity such an enterprise:

"I love my job! It's like 'Girls Gone Wild'⁸ every time I go to work. People pay *me* to have fun! I'm going to do this [lead tours] until I'm eighty years old! Maybe longer... Would *you* give this up [referring to the crowd 'partying' on the boat behind him]? I didn't think so."

⁷ 'Fontoh' is a Kriol term for naturally-dried tobacco leaves, predominantly used to roll cannabis. The resulting joint or blunt (Montgomery et al., 2019) is also referred to as fontoh. (J. Rameros, personal communication, July 13, 2020).

⁸ 'Girls Gone Wild' was a now defunct media entertainment franchise (Church & Pearson, 2013, February 28). It was popularized for featuring seemingly spontaneous, unscripted and gratuitous demonstrations of female nudity framed as women's agency (Pitcher, 2006), for which the backdrop was public 'party' environments (Navarro, 2004, April 4).

All along the excursions, Junior guided female guests towards a foreordained game plan; a scenario so predictable, that any sober observer could easily recognize it as being well-rehearsed. At the end of the tour, he would ask guests to ‘friend’ him on Facebook (i.e. add him as a contact), under the premise that he would dutifully forward the pictures he’d taken that day. This way, Junior could reach out to his customers through social media later on that same night after dropping them back at their accommodations – thereby drawing a clear delineation between his formal functions as guide and newfound role of friend. When we discussed this practice, Junior confided that a previous, unspecified allegation by an intoxicated female customer led him to be more careful in distinguishing when he was “on duty or off duty”, so as not to jeopardize his business.

Guests would almost always respond to Junior’s messages, agreeing to meet up after the tour. If the tourists were offline due to limited Wi-Fi connection, he would actively go looking for them in likely places, such as along the sandy path between the hostels and popular tourist hotspots. Junior recognized that he had a short but window within which to cement his relationship with guests; that is to say, before they were intercepted by other land sharks:

“I’ve got to go find de gyal before de next guy tries to steal my reward [the possibility of sex with the female traveler]. Cho! ‘Dem guys [land sharks] be quick an’ wanna’ step right in when you’re not lookin’. ‘Specially when ‘dey see what you got an’ ‘dey jealous. *Simple* ‘ting ‘dem [they’re lowlifes]. So you gotta’ be there from start!”

When Junior did manage to meet up with tourist women, whether by agreed-upon rendezvous or by ‘coincidence’, he would continue to exude his carefully crafted persona of lodestar to an authentic Belizean emprise. Moving beyond the geographies of representation to those of embodied experience, Junior would shift into full-fledged seduction mode by inviting his customer(s)-turned-object(s) into the privacy of his home. According to him, this was usually

received as a coveted invitation from a now trusted pal, and a welcomed respite from the shared dorm-like spaces of hostels and non-air-conditioned, musty-smelling budget motel rooms. Junior struggled to persuade me that ultimately ending up at his place was pivotal to delivering “the complete package” experience for his guests. Bringing them home, he claimed, meant fulfilling tourists’ wishes:

“Deese pretty white gyals ‘dem, ya know ‘dey *love* for me to take ‘dem home ‘wit me. And I love it too [smiles wryly]! They get a chance to see something different...and that’s what they came [to Belize] for. So how can I deny ‘dem that [still smiling coyly]? I would be a bad Belizean if I didn’t take care of them. You have to give the tourists what they want!”

At any given time, Junior would have a collection of foreign women whom would visit him from North America or Europe, unknowingly on rotation with other tourists he was concurrently involved with. Should a tourist “girlfriend” already be waiting for his return home from work when another (new) customer/friend caught his eye, Junior had a ready alternative at his disposal:

“Sometimes I jus’ ‘bone’ ‘dem [have sex with tourists] on de boat. I don’ even take ‘dem *no-where* – gas is expensive! I spen’ e-nuff” money on gas already. I just give ‘dem what ‘dey want an’ wash my dick off before I go home, so she [woman waiting at his apartment] don’ smell it, ‘case she check [laughs boastingly]!”

The extension of Junior’s guided adventures into “‘off-duty’ tours”, frequently culminated in the climactic construction of seemingly unpredictable sexual escapades for consumption by the intrepid female traveler. His remarkable knack for encapsulating tourists’ imaginations of genuineness, by intertwining seductions of place, race and culture, brought young Western women along a thrilling adventure into the intimate world of the Other (Cartier, 2005).

Less Experienced Hustlers

While Junior's success rate with Western women outperformed that of any other hustler of the sample, not all were so efficacious. Later incomers to the practice of seducing tourists, who had less refined approaches and more meager resources (e.g. no boat), were often left to compete over 'end-market' remains (i.e. older and less economically mobile women). 'Donovan' was one such example.

Originally from a small village on the mainland, twenty-eight year old Donovan came from what he described as a "humble" (i.e. low-income) home. Raised by his great aunt among a large extended family where resources were scarce, Donovan was among the most disenfranchised of the study's participants. Having left school at an early age, he conversed in heavy Kriol and did not have ready command of "American English". Nonetheless, Donovan oozed with the charisma it took to get his message across.

Sporadically employed as a 'bait fisherman'⁹ by local guides, Donovan would sometimes join tours when the opportunity presented itself. This put him in direct contact with newly-arrived tourists who had money to spend, and thus with the Western women most coveted by land sharks. He would assist in menial tasks, such as tying and untying the boat, wiping down puddles when swimmers came aboard, and of course, by skillfully launching his fishing net from atop the deck. Standing some five foot six, Donovan was rather short for an Afro-Belizean; but his toned body, thick head of dreadlocks and mischievous grin drew the admiring gaze of tourist women of all ages.

Donovan had come to Caye Caulker for opportunity, but had weathered his share of 'hard knocks' along the way. When not put-up at visiting women's place of stay, he lived in a shaky,

⁹ 'Bait fishermen' catch smaller fish (e.g. sardines) using a net, which are then hooked as bait for rod-fishing larger species (e.g. snapper, jack, barracuda, etc.) (J. Rameros, personal communication, March 16, 2020).

one-room wooden structure with a dirt floor. With no plumbing or running water, he relied on the generosity of friends for access to a latrine and to bathe. Perhaps it was this precariousness that shaped his undying loyalty towards his peers:

“If it weren’t for ‘dese rastaman ‘dem, ‘dese girls would ‘nuh chat to me. So I make sure, ‘dat when me have some’ting, I save a *lickle* piece fe dem, me breddas [‘brothers’]. ‘Dey get some, ‘an we all get *rich!*”

Fully cognizant of his status among the local hustlers, Donovan accepted his place as ‘wingman’, as defined by Grazian (2007):

"the wingman serves multiple purposes: he provides validation of a leading man's trustworthiness, eases the interaction between a single male friend and a larger group of women, serves as a source of distraction for the friend or friends of a more desirable target of affection, can be called on confirm the wild (and frequently misleading) claims of his partner and, perhaps most important, helps motivate his friends by building up their confidence" (p. 234).

Donovan’s implicit role was to divert any reluctant, often less attractive (according to the men) female friends away from the more desirable targets of his peers’ desires; or as he put it:

“Meh’ take de fat gyals who always cock-block ‘dem guys. Meh no care she fat! More juice fi me! Meh like a fat, juicy ‘pussy’. Even if she old, meh no care! What’s different? Me a *still* do what I want wit’ ‘er, yes I! ‘An she *still* come back fe more, watch ‘dis! Di’ ole lady ‘dem a take betta’ care of me ‘dan dem pritty lickle young ones, you know. You haffi have a *open mind.*”

Indeed, Donovan demonstrated a proclivity for putting people at ease. He too would take visitors under his wing, replete with demonstrations of indigenous savoir faire; thereby inveigling the interest of culturally-curious and concupiscent guests. What Donovan lacked in material assets, he made up for in erotic capital (Green, Scrase, & Ganguly-Scrase, 2017). Women on tour often took his picture while he was doing something ‘exotic’, such as casting his net or scaling fish with a machete – usually shirtless. His dark-skinned and sculpted torso glistened under the relentless sun, to the delight of tourist spectators who cast their longing female gaze his way (Goddard, 2000):

“Dey [tourist women] like fe take me pic-cha, ‘an me no say ‘no’ to dat. Why? It’s like a mem’ry fi ‘dem. ‘Dem like a have a mem’ry of a *real* Belizean man, fe take home, ‘an keep ‘dem warm at night. *Yes* I! Ladies around de worl’ have my pic-cha – I is fa-mous! It even get me in trouble sometimes [when women he’s involved with see him in pictures with other women on Facebook]....”

Donovan effortlessly captured tourists’ imaginations, reifying fantasies of ‘tropical’ masculinity. In contrast with Emmett’s hypermasculine behavior and Junior’s cocky disposition, Donovan presented as “sweet and gentle” – a ‘safe’ choice for the more timid tourists in a given group. His warm and non-threatening demeanor offered an alternative to what some Westerners who may buy into negative racial stereotypes might expect from a black man (Herold et al., 2001).

Community Perspectives

Expatriate Impressions

“Belize is more ‘third world’ than a lot of folks realize before they get here. I can’t really blame them [local hustlers] for wanting to leave.”

(Female retired American expatriate, mid-sixties)

Now in his early fifties, ‘Kevin’ first came to Belize some fifteen years ago from Alberta. Over home-brewed iced tea at the higher-end restaurant that he owned, Kevin imparted his seasoned assessment of how things typically unfolded between tourist women and local men. Shaking his head with frustration and disbelief, he decried the women’s lack of accountability for their all too often ill-turned fate:

“They’re so desperate [tourist women]. It’s embarrassing, actually. You can spot them a mile away. They show up all naïve and excited, and it’s only a matter of time before they get burned by these guys [local hustlers]. They take *such* advantage of them, it’s really...just unbelievable. I mean...how can you not see it coming? It’s a very predictable disaster. I’ve seen it a *million* times.”

‘Joyce’ had a similar take. A retired expat divorcée from small-town Florida, Joyce was an alternative wellness practitioner in the community. For the past two decades she’d spent half the year in Caye Caulker, and the other half in her home state. She too was critical of tourists who became involved with local men, but also felt sorry for them:

“It’s a shame. Tsk. If my daughters – I mean they never would, but let’s just say...If one of my daughters *ever* gave *any* of these guys [local hustlers] the time of day, I’d have them on the first plane outta’ here. Sayonara! Can you imagine?”

Knowing that I am a sexuality educator, Joyce confided a long list of scenarios for which travelers had, often pleadingly, solicited her health advice:

“...the morning after pill, warts, scabies, you name it! They [tourist women] come to me crying sometimes...The worst is when they wait too long and actually get pregnant. I’ve seen more than a few who get ‘knocked up’ and bring home a ‘souvenir’. I’m sure their parents’ *loved* that!...And don’t get me started on the whole AIDS thing! Belize is one of the worst countries in the world [for AIDS], and they [local hustlers], like, *never* use condoms if they can get away with it...So it’s really fucked up. The situation is dire. Belize is more ‘third world’ than a lot of folks realize before they get here. I can’t really blame them [local hustlers] for wanting to leave.”

Both Kevin and Joyce’s perceptions of female sex tourists were highly judgmental, laden with dismay and disdain. This struck me as peculiarly disproportionate to the tangible impacts that the women’s presence had on their own lives, since both benefitted directly from tourism insofar as their livelihoods were concerned. Their complaints, be it of noisiness in the streets late at night, of public inebriation or of having sex on privately-owned docks; were not behaviors unique to female sex tourists and hustlers. Rather, local youth were guilty of these activities as well (local shopkeeper, personal communication, March 25, 2018).

Kevin and his wife were raising two young children in Caye Caulker, but planned on eventually moving back to Canada to protect their kids from what they viewed as an inevitable, slippery slope into delinquency were they to stay:

“Sure, I like living here – no, I *love* living here...but we’ll be going back before the kids start high school, so they can get a ‘decent’ education. The schools here are shit. And I really don’t want them hanging out here as teenagers. The mentality is too lazy. It’s *way* too easy to get up to no good. [...] I aspire for more for my children than to grow up and be beach bums, just *hangin’ around*, lookin’ for freebies...”

A common miserere among expats, was that backpacker-types – and the hustlers who kept them company – engaged in all too frequent and excessive “partying” around the island.

‘Ken’ and ‘Maria’, a retired couple from Houston, lamented:

“I’ve found dirty underwear, tons of beer cans, and just *loads* of used condoms. It’s disgusting. These people [young tourists and locals] are *nasty*. And, I’ve got it all on camera! We have surveillance [cameras] pointing right at the dock! But it doesn’t stop them...The cops don’t do anything, that’s for sure.”

The overflow of “ruckus” emanating from tourist hotspots was seen by expats as disruptive to the tranquility they’d sought in moving to Caye Caulker to begin with. This expectation that local young people and backpackers should adapt to them – instead of the other way around – substantiated the claim that an air of entitlement was normalized among the expat community (Belize Expats, n.d.). Some even successfully lobbied to change bylaws and force bars to close earlier (local bar owner, personal communication, April 4, 2016), and wielded political clout as business owners to influence the outcomes of local elections (expat hotel owner, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Rumors circulated that ‘under the table’ expat payouts were a frequent factor in determining who would be nominated for prestigious government-appointed positions (local resident, personal communication, March 28, 2017). These conditions invariably resulted in candidates developing divisive campaign platforms that catered to the expat demographic and drew criticism from locals.

Irrespective of any merit as to expats’ discontent, such practices illustrated the regime of power and privilege that Westerners exerted, above and beyond that of what the average resident

had access to. In a sense, the island continued to be recolonized by tourists through foreigner settlement (Smith, 2016). This all but thinly veiled posturing of superiority trickled over to expats' harsh attitudes towards female sex tourism in Caye Caulker.

Local Impressions

“Dey [tourist women] tink ‘dey is *‘all that’*, jus’ because they white ‘an have moneh’!”

(Female local hair braider, late thirties)

Although land sharks may be admired by their immediate peers, this positive regard did not necessarily extend to the general community. Having only a finite window into the carefree-seeming, party-going lifestyles of hustlers, locals tended to view them as “lazy” more than anything. One middle-aged street food vendor whom I frequently interacted with openly blasted the men for not sharing in his work ethic:

“None of ‘dem can actually hole’ down a job. They *l-a-z-y!* Smoke too much marijuana. They wait ‘fe hand-outs. You see me? I work *h-a-r-d*, every day. You ‘tink it’s easy? How else am I gonna’ pay my bills? Pay for me kids’ school? Nobody’s gonna’ give *me* money – nobody. I gots’ to work for it! ‘Dey rass [‘assholes’]... ‘dey is jus’ pure laziness, man.”

Although romance entrepreneurs’ beguiling ways were recognized as livelihood strategies with an end-goal of self-reliance, one local I chatted with felt that the hustlers usurped tourists’ time beyond their fair share. Hair-braider ‘Janelle’ elaborated on her views as to how men who ‘date’ foreigners did not make enough efforts to redistribute tourist spending within the community:

“Most of de time, ‘dem guys just take de wo-man away to ‘get busy’ [have sex]. You see ‘dem on Front Street [where tourist-attracting establishments are concentrated] one day, ‘den gone de next. Dey hole up inna de hotel, ‘an she nevah’ know what hit ‘er. ‘Den he come ‘round in summah’ time [the off-season, when few tourists remain], askin’ for a discount for we braid ‘is hair. But he nevah’ bring around ‘dem white gyalz for we braid ‘deir hair! What kind of naansens is ‘dat?!’”

While locals tended to consider the sexual-economic relationships between female sex tourists and local male sex workers to be mostly harmless, and in some instances even enviable; they nonetheless noticeably tried to distance themselves from the negative image they felt that land sharks conveyed. ‘Benson’, a local dive shop manager, was adamant:

“That’s the first thing tourists see when they come here. So they think that *all* Belizeans smoke ‘weed’ and sleep around. They [hustlers] chase de white gyal ‘dem, day in an’ day out! And on top of it, there’s plenty of *nice* Belizean ladies that they pay no mind to, none at all. It’s sad.”

According to Janelle, local women resented the influx of female sex tourists to the island. She felt that their arrival generated unwanted strife by placing local women on the losing end of a tug-of-war for men’s attention in the context of white tourist woman desirability:

“‘Dey [female sex tourists] come here lookin’ all fly...Come on, let’s be *real*; ‘dem have a *easy* life. Then ‘dey show up here, an’ ‘tink ‘dey is ‘*all that*’ jus’ because they white ‘an have moneh’! Act like ‘dey run de place! Nobody appreciate ‘dat!’”

‘Wayne’, a mid-twenties romance entrepreneur who claimed to “only date white girls”, agreed with Benson and Janelle’s assertions. He felt that although local women were easily overlooked when female sex tourists were in town, that this was, at least in part, of their own doing:

“They [local women] are just jealous. But ‘dem local gyals expect *us* to pay for *every-ting*...and want to give you a headache for *every* lickle ‘ting. I’m telling you... it’s crazy. So *of course* we gonna’ jus’ ignore ‘dem. White girls pay fe we, an’ life is jus’ easier ‘dat way.”

Benson also commented on how many of the more prolific romance entrepreneurs had local common-law wives and children at home – unbeknownst to the foreign women they pursued. Hustlers would purposely leave their families “unattended” (i.e. at home), in order to “wander around chasing tourists”. Most spouses, he’d said, were either suspicious that their

partners were sleeping with female travelers, or would turn a blind eye so long as the men continued to contribute to the household. In either case, Benson bemoaned, local women felt powerless to do anything about it:

“When the tourist season is over, that’s when they go back to their wives, as if like nothing. She gonna’ be pissed off the *whole* time he’s gone, but what can she do? That’s de man of de house. If she yell at him he might jus’ beat her ass. Or leave. ‘Den she have nutting’ [shrugged his shoulders and shook his head]...”

This finding brings to light an important, yet narrowly documented dimension of the phenomenon. The political economy of female sex tourism being as it may, harbors the potential to significantly impact not only direct participants, but a broad range of the wider communities where it takes place.

Blame and Shame

Locals’ attitudes towards infidelity were not unlike those of the hustlers themselves. The patriarchal subordination of women was, to an extent, normalized. Janelle, Benson and key informants each regarded maleness as the alpha position, be it relative to local women or female travelers alike. They also recognized the fundamentally instrumental nature of tourist-local exchanges, and the potential for socioeconomic advancement such encounters represented.

Sex, affect and power were deeply intertwined with romance entrepreneurs’ goals for attaining the material comforts which female sex tourists could supply (Cole, 2009). The parallel finance system whereby Western women sometimes provided for local men who, in turn, supported local women (Cole, 2009); broadened the scope of tangible impacts that sexual-economic relationships had on local communities. Perhaps part of the reason that some local women who partnered with hustlers tolerated extramarital affairs, was to access the proceeds of female sex tourism themselves.

These perspectives differed from that of Kevin, Joyce and other expats, who openly condemned tourist women for being so easily swindled by hustlers' blatant schemes. They expected the women to be more savvy, responsible and accountable for their role in this "nonsense", and to not blindly succumb to the empty promises made by local men. Discussions with Westerners, whether it be expats, tourists or sex tourists, felt tainted by white supremacy (Pailey, 2020).

On the one hand, expats saw themselves as the sort of 'cool', easygoing white person who 'fit in' and mingled with locals. The longer-term residents felt they'd pioneered expat enclaves on a remote island 'paradise' in a developing country, and resented sharing that space with newcomers. They rallied around a strong sense of group identity and belongingness, which anchored their audacity to try and dictate local affairs.

On the other hand, established expats ascribed and projected power, entitlement and status unto themselves, and in so doing, looked down upon the very locals they sought acceptance from. This stance made the seemingly foolhardy comportment of female sex tourists that much more 'unacceptable' to expats. Distinguishing themselves from the women, notably by way of criticism and rejection, was thus deemed fair game.

Most expats probably didn't know all that much about romance entrepreneurs' personal lives. They rarely, if ever, ventured into the more impoverished neighborhoods where lower-rung hustlers resided once their foreign lovers departed. This lack of familiarity with the full range of circumstances surrounding female sex tourism in Caye Caulker, likely contributed to expats overlooking the potential ramifications for local families.

All in all, locals perceived romance entrepreneurs as the dominant party in tourist-local relationships, both as pursuers and by virtue their gender. Whereas expats felt the same was true

of female sex tourists, owing to their race and advantaged economic positions. Interestingly, while expats were most critical of female sex tourists, locals found greater fault in romance entrepreneurs. Each group sought to distance themselves from the phenomena they observed, and especially from the FST actors whom they outwardly and demographically ‘resembled’ most.

Troubles Arising: When Relationships Unravel

“They [female sex tourists] like ‘Rastas’ because we give ‘dem what ‘dey want [‘good’ sex].”

(Local romance entrepreneur, mid-thirties)

Perceptions and Experiences of ‘Paradise’

For the female sex tourist, expectations can begin even prior to arrival at the destination. Goossens’ (2000) research on trip choice revealed that “mental imagery is an anticipating and motivating force that mediates emotional experiences, evaluations, and behavioral intentions” (p. 301). Likewise, O’Dell’s (2005) work on ‘experiencescapes’ found that “experiences are *anticipated, dreamed about, and longed for* (sic)”, and how upon return, “experiences are *reflected upon* (sic), and can be converted into nostalgia, and once again longed after” (p. 132). This ‘anticipation-experience-nostalgia’ cycle rang true in discussions with Western women throughout the course of this research.

Indeed, allegoric interpretations of hustlers’ staged authenticity were prevalent among the romantically and/or sexually motivated tourists with whom I spoke. For Nyla and Vanessa, still new to the island and only passing through on a short trip, their emplaced experiences had the “capacity to effect memory and nostalgic desire for lost people and places” (Cartier, 2005; p. 10). After just a few days, both planned to return to Caye Caulker in the near future, and Nyla even entertained the idea of having the Belizean motto “Go Slow” tattooed around her ankle to enshrine the carefree ‘release’ she’d experienced there.

These women's perceptions were likely influenced by the sense of agency that comes with independent travel for the first time (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2007). An ideology of modernity, whereby social codes such as monogamy may be lapsed in lieu of the exciting potential of casual encounters, granted the women the latitude to 'choose their own adventures' (Tepanon, 2006). How they then perceived their trips in hindsight, was located squarely within the situated subjectivities and constructed memories of their experiences (Cartier, 2005).

As Carr and Poria (2010) noted, "One of the primary motivations for taking a holiday has been identified as 'escape'; the chance to break free of the socio-cultural bounds that govern their behaviour in their home environment" (p. 5). The transient and relatively surreptitious nature of travel (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015), characterized by the "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" catchphrase evoked by two key informants, effectively freed tourists to explore Caye Caulker in an unconstrained way. Whereas gender norm asymmetry and sexual double-standards ordinarily confer upon men greater leeway (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015), the politics of enjoyment liberated Lisa and Melanie from the social pressures to conform to the expected norms of their home societies (Kingsbury, 2005).

Power and Privilege

Agency in the sexual realm denotes a series of maneuvers which lay claim to one's own self-determined pleasure (King, 2014). Women who cannot live up to conventional Western beauty ideals easily transgress these limitations when traveling in the global south (Spencer & Bean, 2017). Their foreignness increases their mate value, as exoticism, whiteness, and presumed wealth are exceedingly sought-after features (Richards & Reid, 2015). These advantages are enhanced by the sexually adventurous ethos of traveling (Berdychevsky, Poria &

Uriely, 2010), granting Lisa and Melanie unparalleled access to the realm of willing admirers and casual sex they'd come to expect as 'part and parcel' with travel to Caye Caulker.

For the female sex tourist who may have felt overlooked in her home dating market, drawing male enthrallment abroad could be experienced as a means through which to heal old wounds. Melanie explained how increased self-confidence helped her to consolidate past rejection:

"The first time I came to Belize was right after I found out that my 'ex' was cheating on me. I was *so* upset. I mean, really, *really* upset. So I just said 'Fuck it!', and went on vacation. And wow...What a good decision *that* was. Nothing helps you get over an ex faster than traveling to a little island and sleeping with a *way* hotter guy [laughs unabashedly]! And these guys know what they're doing [in bed], that's for sure!"

Geographies of difference, whereby the women were bound by their structured lives back home and liberated by unrestrained indulgences in Belize (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001), allowed Lisa and Melanie to "affirm their own privilege as Westerners" (Smith, 2015; p. 49). This privilege granted them license to breach societal codes, wherein they were judged differentially than would be local women. Lisa drew a sense of control from her relationships with hustlers, in part due to the imagined geo-political and racial superiority she ascribed to:

"These guys barely finished elementary school – and that's *Belizean* school. Obviously, I'm going to be doing all the work [of running a business in Belize]. As long as he [local partner] does what I say, it should be alright. But that's the problem, they're [local men] strong-headed...and I don't always have the patience to deal with that. That's why we fight."

Female sex tourists' share of power relative to romance entrepreneurs was evidenced by how the parameters of their relationships were determined (Smith, 2015). Most notably, the women's ability to enter and/or exit the country at whim set the tone for how things unfolded, and ultimately, for how they concluded. For example, Lisa's economic mobility and U.S. citizenship endowed her with the option to leave the island whenever she chose to, whereas the

same was untrue for her local partner. She was fully cognizant of this wherewithal in the relationship, and would unambiguously use it to threaten his means of sufficiency in times of conflict:

“He knows that if he pisses me off too much, I’ll just take off for a while and then he’ll have to fend for himself. Let’s see how well he does then! *Then* we’ll see ‘*who’s de boss*’ [mimicking her Belizean partner]! I pay the bills and he’s barely working...So whether he likes to admit it or not, he needs me more than I need him. You’d think I’d get more respect...”

For Belizeans who do travel, migration patterns are complex and include a diversity of mobility. Save for relatively affluent applicants, access to non-work or study related international trips (beyond neighboring countries) is relatively limited due to immigration restrictions imposed by destination countries (Babcock & Conway, 2000). Between circulation, emigration and sojourning abroad, returnees may inadvertently magnify existing social tensions. Tourist-facilitated travel exacerbates stratification between those who are able to cross borders freely, and those who are not (Babcock & Conway, 2000).

Touristic travel to the U.S. typically requires family or fiancée/spousal sponsorship, and runs a high risk of refusal in cases where the sponsor is unable to demonstrate sufficient available funds (Miller, 2017). Word of mouth around the island suggested that obtaining a visitor visa to other Commonwealth countries, such as Canada for example, was relatively straightforward. By comparison, several of the hustlers I’d met in Caye Caulker had applied for – and been denied – both tourist and fiancée visas for the U.S. ‘Marlon’ described the fallout of a past relationship, after failing to secure the necessary paperwork:

“I was with my girlfriend for two years before she finally applied for a tourist visa [to the U.S.]. She has a good job and everything, so I didn’t think it would be this hard. But they wanted her to have more money saved up, so it was impossible. After that, it made no sense to keep going [in the relationship] because she didn’t want to leave her job to come here. So it was pretty much over after that. She never really trusted me again anyways after she found out I cheated on her.”

While each of the romance entrepreneurs and female sex tourists who participated in this study reported immigration constraints as being one of the primary issues which ultimately lead to failed tourist-local relationships, it was not the most significant.

Unmet Expectations

Western women who visit Caye Caulker were viewed by hustlers, locals and expats alike as sexually willing. Be that as it may, the women were nonetheless presumed to idealize long-term outcomes, even for what may have started out as a fling or one-night stand. Romance entrepreneurs like Wayne, strategically strived to convey authenticity in ways which they believed played into female travelers' fantasies of long-term commitment:

“You got to give de gyal de attention she wants. When she here, I hug ‘dem up so nice an’ make ‘er feel special. That way, she treat me nice. *Real* nice. ‘An when she go back home, same ‘ting [she sends remittances]. My phone blow up sometimes [beeps a lot], so many girls be texting me! Me is a worl’ wide conquerah’, yes I!”

The success of pseudo-romantic tourist-local relationships was thus predicated upon proper reenactment of the hustlers' seductive mores. Sustaining such performances often proved difficult, as initial behaviors tended to erode over time to reveal what could be considered as 'shadier' sides to their character. For instance, hustlers portrayed immense cultural acumen and breadwinnerhood at the onset of relationships, then gradationally morphed into mooches over time. This progression was deliberate, even formulaic of the behaviors and dynamics observed. Marlon's experiences with a 'romantic returnee' (Herold et al., 2001) exemplified how the economic dimensions of tourist-local relationships became increasingly concrete over time:

“The whole point was for me to go to the U.S. So I couldn't waste my money on anything else, *nooo* other girls – *serious*[ly]! I kept every-ting she give me. I even asked her for *more* money when we were get-ting' along, in case she fight me an' ‘den I have nutting. And she give it to me. How can I work if I'm spending *all* my time with her? If she has a job [in the U.S.], and I don't have a job [in Belize]; *of course* she have to pay for me. That's wassup. Don't you think so?”

Investigators have found that tourist women are generally unaware of just how destitute hustlers usually are (Sánchez Taylor, 2001a). Both Melanie and Lisa expressed worry around whether their partners' were opportunists, taking advantage of them "paying for everything". Whereas the men constructed narratives of themselves as being the dominant party in the relationship, regardless of who paid for what. "I penetrate she, so I am 'di boss'", exclaimed Lloyd bluntly. "She can't talk wit' a mouth fulla' 'cock'!"

Even so, money – or lack thereof – was not the central element which led to the downfall of most relationships between female sex tourists and local male sex workers.

"I Done 'Fuck up' Again"

The challenges of westward migration, impracticality of relocating to Belize, or needing to go back to work and save up enough money to return to Caye Caulker were ubiquitously cited rationales for desisting tourist-local relationships. Yet a deeper examination of the island's sexual ecology revealed that infidelity was the most common of all impetuses for rupture.

Melanie and Lisa had felt duped by previous partners, as had other romance and/or sexually motivated tourists with whom I spoke. Junior, Donovan, Lloyd, Emmett, Wayne, Marlon and others also reported infidelity as the "straw that broke the camel's back" when it came to prior encounters that veered tumultuous. "I done 'fuck up' again!", would say Lloyd time and again, when his relationships with Western women fell through as a result of him 'cheating'.

Even so, the men postured an astounding double-standard around the notion of infidelity. Each expected their 'girlfriends' to remain loyal and invested, in spite of finding out they'd gotten "carried away" with other women. Hustlers considered the urge to "bone all de ladies", or of having sex with as many women as possible, as constitutive of manhood in Caye Caulker.

They credited ethnic identity with endowing them of the ‘insatiable’ sex drives they professed, thereby justifying straying as a cultural norm that female sex tourists should come to accept.

Lloyd expanded upon his own sexuality narrative, and the expectations he had of Western women when it came to infidelity tolerance:

“I is a *Belizean* man. A *black* man. Me blood run *h-o-t!* I need to ketch me some woo-man or I get *real ir-rit-able*. She haffi’ understand ‘dat if she wan’ be wit’ somebody who like sex, an’ give it to ‘er all ‘di time, *every* time, *every* way, ‘den she haffi’ be *r-e-a-sonable*.”

The romance entrepreneurs interviewed further equated ‘liking sex’ with asserting their heterosexuality, whereby not actively pursuing women (at every opportunity) might imply a ‘questionable’ orientation. When asked, Lloyd explained how by “reasonable”, he’d meant that his indiscretions should at once be somewhat anticipated and ultimately overlooked by his foreign partners.

These expectations of leniency were not a ‘two-way street’. Each of the men foresaw the possibility that their ‘girlfriends’ might lie about whether or not they’d been sexually active with others while in-between visits. Yet the hustlers remained adamant that they must not “wander off” and “hook up wit’ some otha’ ‘nigga’” on the island. Indeed, the camaraderie amongst land sharks ended where territoriality over ‘their’ female sex tourists began.

Summary

Ongoing observation revealed important cultural cues around the gender dynamics and social norms which influenced the attitudes and behaviors of romance entrepreneurs in Caye Caulker. Invaluable input from nearly four dozen key informants from representative yet diverse backgrounds gave meaning to the insights contemplated under their tutelage. The individual interviews conducted remotely with local male sex workers (5), female sex tourists (2), local

Belizeans (2) and expats (2) revealed rich accounts of the sample's lived experiences of FST phenomena.

From amateur approaches to highly-proficient techniques, hustlers found convincing ways to elicit intrigue. Western women, who'd come to Caye Caulker to "let loose" and have a "good time", were met with an abundance of willing suitors ready to perform to their every want and need. The men flaunted native knowledge and hypermasculine behaviors to present know-how narratives that beckoned women's racialized fantasies for an erotic, ethnocultural holiday experience.

In turn, female sex tourists left the unattainability of Western beauty ideals behind them, and ecstatically welcomed the elevated sex appeal bestowed upon them by hustlers on arrival. This repositioning gave the women the confidence to exercise agency, thereby indulging in 'risk' and carnal desires in pursuit of the 'exotic' Other. The loosened social norms inherent in hedonistic travel abroad epitomized this island destination as a longed-for liminal landscape in the imaginations and memories of returnees.

Whether inviting tourists along to smoke cannabis, or leading impromptu tours around town or out on the reef, hustlers were up to the task – so long as the women footed the bill. The men wanted to have it both ways; on the one hand striving for gendered dominance by fulfilling the sexual and affective needs of tourists, but expecting material and financial compensation in return. As the onus of implacable economic responsibility borne by the women became clearer, so too did the impracticality of "importing" a Belizean overseas; and thus, the limited longevity of the affair.

Nonetheless, it was invariably the romance entrepreneurs' infidelity, once revealed, that eventually provoked the dissolution of tourist-local relationships. While the men aimed for both

economic support and adultery tolerance from their partners, they rarely found it. The women typically moved on from early romance-motivated encounters by consolidating expectations, and ultimately sought-out more clearly delineated sexual-economic exchanges instead. They leveraged hierarchies of race, class, citizenship and mobility to maintain the upper hand (Berg, Molin & Nanavati, 2020). Doing so helped to erase past disappointment and safeguard emotions from future heartache.

Structural inequalities granted Westerners political and social privileges which aggravated local and expatriate residents' perspectives of female sex tourism in Caye Caulker. Neither group approved of the activities they associated with FST, and were critical of how such representations negatively reflected upon their respective communities. Expat and local residents thus sought to distance themselves from both female sex tourists and hustlers alike – especially from those whom they outwardly resembled most.

Chapter 5 – Discussion, Limitations and Implications

Sexual-Economic Relationships

“What am I supposed to do? Work hard inna de sun like ‘dem guys [gestures towards Guatemalan construction laborers]? That’s not for me. They’re stuck because they ‘dunno how to talk to tourists.”

(Local romance entrepreneur, early twenties)

Contextual Circumstances and Economic Landscape

The influx of tourists to Caye Caulker can be likened to a gold rush of sorts. Enterprising locals devote serious sustained efforts in preparation, toiling away in anticipation of their en masse arrival by readying goods and services for trade in the micro-local economy. The same is true of romance entrepreneurs.

Given that the Belizean dollar’s valuation is pegged to U.S. currency at a rate of 2:1 (Central Bank of Belize, n.d.), Belizeans are particularly susceptible to economic downturn beyond their borders (Panizza, Stein & Talvi, 2003). The overreliance that island destinations have on foreign capital further predisposes locals to the uncertainties of market fluctuations (Pattullo, 2005), thereby rendering the attractions and adventures on offer particularly important to their survival. Sex tourism is an integral part of tourism dependence in Caye Caulker, and impacts the local culture and economy in a variety of ways.

Rampant expansion of tourism has entwined visitor and host in the repeated production and consumption of ‘paradise’, whereby intimate interdependencies are continuously finessed and exchanged (Cabezas, 2009). The requiring of compensation is a relational process, one which attaches meaning and significance to the negotiation of boundaries as to what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate behavior within the relationship (Zelizer, 2005). As posited by Cabezas (2009) and supported by the present study’s findings, “the exchange of goods and

money for sexual services is not an unambiguous commercial endeavor but a discursive construction that is contested and in motion, changing across time and space” (p. 6).

Dependency vs. Autonomy

It could be argued that sexual transactions are not divorced from other interpersonal exchanges (Bruvik Heinskou, 2019). Inasmuch as there may not be any direct compensation for specific acts, as in the case of male sex tourism (Ryan & Hall, 2001); female sex tourists’ socioeconomic makeups thrust them into tacit provider roles that were obligingly understood. Those who did not impart gifts or remittances nonetheless bankrolled much of the expenses accrued during the course of the relationship. Everyday things that Western women took for granted, such as sleeping in a clean bed or taking a hot shower, availed local men of a standard of living which they did not necessarily have ready access to otherwise.

Despite the power imbalances that economic disparities infused into tourist-local relationships, hustlers presented as outwardly confident and assertive. The level of entitlement conveyed by the romance entrepreneurs who participated in this study was palpable to say the least. As a case in point, Emmett had plainly stated, “They [women tourists] have money, so they should share it with us”. Much as Njeri (2017) found when researching female sex tourism in coastal Kenya, the men of the present sample viewed these relationships as “a means to reclaiming resources and opportunities that they have been denied through unequal structures in both the national and global economies” (p. 76).

Being financially and materially dependent upon foreigners was not only considered a strategic means to an end, but was also altogether normalized by the romance entrepreneurs. Yet a stark dissonance was revealed between the attitudes and practices of reliance upon tourist women, versus the shame and emasculation otherwise associated with being indebted to women

outside of that category. The men's stated intent for engaging in sex work was to ultimately achieve independence and autonomy, thereby eclipsing their benefactors to fully realize the upper-handed positions to which they aspired through the relationships. The hustlers exhibited brazen demeanors, such as haughtily brandishing stolen electronics, for example. Such behaviors further illustrated the generalized, conciliatory posturing of subversive tendencies in their recusant quests for status.

Overwhelmingly, the members of both the local and the expatriate communities with whom I explored the topic of female sex tourism in Caye Caulker, characterized tourist-local relationships as benignant endeavors. Both partners were viewed as excising benefits relative to their needs – lifestyle upgrades for the men, and emotional and sexual gratification for the women (Spencer & Bean, 2017).

Notwithstanding, Lisa's expectations of her current relationship with Sean went beyond that of affective and sexual labor alone. Her plan to eventually marry him was instrumental in realizing her hopes of acquiring citizenship – the status change requisite to her opening a business through which to sustain a permanent move to Belize. Lisa's disparaging characterization of Sean as dim-witted, but also as an essential component of the grander scheme for achieving the life she envisioned for herself, challenges how FST exchanges are most often framed in the literature.

The findings explored here bring into question who stands to gain the most from relationships between female sex tourists and local male sex workers. Or, framed differently, begs asking who is exploiting whom. At minimum, it can be argued that the embodied FST experience benefits both partners, albeit to varying degrees and dependent upon which aspects are weighed. This study's novel methodology highlights the importance of integrating

multidimensional perspectives and case-by-case analysis when formulating conceptualizations of FST phenomena.

Intimate Exchanges

In the backdrop of compensated immersion and instantiation of eroticized racial stereotypes, the negotiation of tropical desires between female travelers and local land sharks can be convoluted. Successful hustlers set their sights on ‘prime’ opportunities; scouting the younger, wealthier, and thus more conventionally desirable women who turn up. Over time and with experience, the ‘middle-ranking beach boys’ (Phillips, 2008) learned to maximize their positions as hosts, refining the seduction strategies they’d found to be most effective. The men attuned their behaviors to measure up to Western women’s constructions of the ideal sexual-romantic performance, which inevitably made for some generic features to arise.

As Mullings’ (2000) work on female sex tourism in the Caribbean uncovered, “To successfully sell one’s sexual labor to tourists, a person must engage in a particular type of performance, one that conforms as much as possible to pre-existing stereotypes” (p. 239). Investments in outward appearances thereby functioned as the men’s venture capital through which the marketing of their trade was fashioned (Mullings, 2000). Sex tourists, fantasizing that they could satisfy the emotional, material and economic needs of their local partners (Clarke, 2007; Cruey, 2007), ironically unknowingly sponsored the very implements used to seduce other women. The land sharks pridefully gloated on getting “good use out of” their wares, ostentatiously sporting gifts of clothing and jewelry to “look ‘fresh’” for new waves of tourists time and time again.

The aestheticization and objectification of the Other was mutual. While the men were not in a position to commodify their partners, having a white ‘girlfriend’ nonetheless represented the

ultimate token of occupational mobility for local male sex workers. Striving to embody stereotypical representations of Afro-Caribbean virility, as imagined by Western women; inadvertently generated constricted scripts for young men coming of age in Caye Caulker. As romance entrepreneurs with various degrees of experience and success modeled the imagery and behaviors believed to elicit the attention and investments of female sex tourists, the next generation may have perceived ways of being which were fundamentally geared towards sex work.

Whether by smoking cannabis together, going out for dinner and drinks, or by providing a ‘tour’ of local neighborhoods and customs; romance entrepreneurs, by definition, actively sought-out ways to deepen their connections with female travelers (Nyanzi & Bah, 2009). In so doing, they stood to benefit from short-term gains while improving their odds of forging romantic/sexual relationships through which to sustain themselves over time. The parallel pursuit of financially-motivated ‘friendships’ with tourist men, signaled that the sexual liaisons between local men and female tourists were first and foremost survivalist strategies (Njeri, 2017). Still, hustlers’ motivations for seducing Western women extended beyond profiteering alone (Herold et al., 2001).

Male infidelity is not categorically considered transgressive in Caribbean sexuality (Kempadoo, 2003), and is glorified in dancehall music (Gaye, 2011) and among hustlers (Weichselbaumer, 2012). The practice of engaging in affairs, and even of fathering children outside of the primary relationship, is generally perceived to be a “deeply engrained cultural practice” (Figuroa, 2006, p. 3) in Afro-Caribbean masculinity (Chevannes, 2001). Indeed, accruing a diverse constellation of sexual partners brought with it a certain level of recognition – and a corresponding rise in status – among the romance entrepreneurs who participated in this

study. The add-on avails of sexual consummation and associated prestige were thus tangential to the material and economic advantages expected of tourist-local relationships.

Sex Tourists and Sex Workers

“I’m worth every penny she spend’ on me an’ give to me.
*I is lucky, but she is de *real* lucky one!”*

(Local romance entrepreneur, early thirties)

Territoriality and Possessiveness

The vernacular used by romance entrepreneurs when describing pursuing newly-arrived tourist women did not go unnoticed. The metaphor of “hunting”, especially, insinuated that they approached such encounters from a toplofty position. Such anthropomorphic ‘predator’ allegorical narratives were a stark comparison with the ‘prey’-like portrayals attributed to female travelers. The men’s conveyance of hegemonic self-representations was a recurrent theme in the data collected.

Further, flirtation or perceived lasciviousness by female sex tourists threatened the romance entrepreneurs’ sense of ‘ownership’ over their person. Imparting attention on other local men was viewed as problematic to attaining exclusive access to the resources the women represented – be it economic, material, sexual, affective or otherwise. One expat, remarking on how land sharks would ‘fight’ over tourists, equated the territorial subculture of hustlers to that of incarcerated inmates; a comparative which, in my view, was not without merit.

Romance entrepreneurs relayed how it could be challenging to find tourist women who were at once sexually experienced, but not ‘promiscuous’ – or as Lloyd put it, “a sexy girl who’s not a whore”. Indeed this double-standard around the differentially gendered, socially-acceptable behaviors and number of sexual partners for either men or women transcended expectations for tourists alone. Prudishness was incumbent of Belizean women as well (Lewis, 2003). Ideologies

of ‘machismo’ and ‘marianismo’, whereby an “exaggerated masculinity associated with hypersexuality and violence [...and...] the notion that women should be pure, spiritual, subordinate, and self-effacing” (Gibbons & Luna, 2015, p. 307), were consistently aired by the men.

Hustlers spoke lackadaisically of how sex was ‘owed’ them as compensation for providing an ‘insider’ experience of Belize, using terminology such as “prize” and “reward”. Employing the use of objectifying locutions when referring to tourist women, and the flagrant sexism inherent in doing so; was omnipresent in the ways in which romance entrepreneurs spoke about female sex tourists. It signaled that even in the face of marked economic disparity whereby the women held advantaged positions, “gender attitudes and stereotypes that foster, maintain, and legitimize gender inequality” (Gibbons & Luna, 2015, p. 307) persisted.

Romance entrepreneurs prided themselves on self-conceptualizations of prowess and dominance, whereas the perceived victimhood of women as objects in their pursuits was clear. The combination of these influences adjoined with an unrelenting tendency for one-upmanship to foster a climate of competition between and among the men. Capitalizing upon their cultural and erotic currencies to acquiesce sexual conquests, they affirmed their virility and took their place amid the hustler hierarchy. By way of illustration, Emmett frequently griped about his lesser resources, but made his claim to victory all the same:

“Not everyone has a boat to get the prettiest girls...my daddy not rich [referring to Junior]! But I give dem [tourist women] *a-l-l* dey want an’ more, and I have *a lot* to give, believe me [implying large penis size]! That’s why they like me!”

Hypermasculinity was a foremost accoutrement among an arsenal of tools, which hustlers leveraged strategically when engaging in sex work activities geared towards Western women clientele.

‘Predators’ and ‘Prey’

Spencer and Bean’s (2017) research on female sex tourism in Jamaica explicitly sought to “challenge the notion that male and female’s search for sexual partners while on vacation are dissimilar” (p. 13). Indeed, the present study’s findings also suggest that anteriorly predominant assumptions around dichromatic categorizations be rebuked.

The very idea of distinguishing romance tourism from female sex tourism denotes an essentialist approach, whereby women’s sex tourism behaviors sit adjacent to men’s within a binary stereotype (Spencer & Bean, 2017). This conceptualization rests within the assumption that men always want sex, and can’t possibly be sexually exploited by women – tourist or otherwise (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). It perpetuates the belief that women cannot, in and of themselves, be viewed as predatory; and are instead presumed solely as preyed-upon (Sánchez Taylor, 2001b). This highly gendered understanding of human sexual behavior, and the corresponding value judgements implicit in it, is exceedingly limiting (Kingston, Hammond & Redman, 2020). It is also inconsistent with the self-proclaimed and observed libidinousness of the Western women who participated in this research.

The female travelers who participated in this study did not perceive themselves as conforming to sex tourist stereotypes. Yet they nonetheless partook in relationships which could only be sustained through the commodification of emotions, bodies, currencies and desires. It was these very contributions that inextricably linked the romantic and sexual aspects, with the economic and transactional nature of their relationships. The semblance of ongoing mutualism and symbiotic connections with locals, enabled the women to self-distinguish from mass-tourists. Doing so fed a narrative of intimacy and belonging, thereby serving to distance themselves further from commercial framings of their experiences with hustlers in Caye Caulker.

By contributing to sex workers' sustenance, tourist women's providership became an important symbol of care for the men's welfare, and of their commitment to the partnership and its continuance. However, such contributions were not without 'strings attached'. Both Lisa and Melanie were rather nonchalant as to their want for control in relationships with romance entrepreneurs. Local men were to be an outlet for their racialized sexual fantasies, to provide unwavering adoration for their 'imperfect' bodies, and to inculcate them into the 'mysterious' world of an 'authentic' Belizean experience. The women exerted their authority through the threat of retreat and cutoff of care, leveraging their privileged positions to offload blame for conflicts onto the men's non-compliance.

Non-Recognition and Risk

Each of the romance entrepreneurs interviewed were surprisingly outspoken as to the material, economic, and overall lifestyle advantages that "hooking up" with Western women provided. They were equally strident around the objectification of female sex tourists, and unremorseful around how their deceptive behaviors impacted the foreign and local women they became involved with. Yet none self-identified as gigolos, hustlers, or even land sharks, and most certainly not as sex workers. Some interpretation, based on observation and discussion, was therefore necessary for discerning the nature and extent of subjects' involvement with the phenomenon (Johnson, 2012).

Similarly, the women travelers I spoke with did not perceive themselves as sex tourists. Instead, the narrative they weaved for themselves and for their local partners chronicled exciting tales of passion in 'paradise', albeit fraught with the heartache of romance gone wrong. Self-storying (Philaretou, 2004) in this way unburdened the women from engaging in a critical

analysis of their role in the commodification of bodies within a larger context of the globalization of the production and consumption of the erotic Other.

This non-recognition as to participation in the transnational sexual economy could, conceivably, beget curtailed health-seeking behaviors by both parties; thereby exacerbating negative wellness outcomes for themselves and for their respective communities (Graham, 2009). While riskier sexual practices are pervasive in tourist-local relationships (Ragsdale, 2002), educational campaigns and interventions are nonetheless not directed at men involved with FST, nor at female sex tourists (Graham, 2009). Particularly when considering the global rise in romance/sexually-motivated travel by Western women (Tami, 2008), this lacunae underscores the need for further investigation into the many facets of this complex phenomenon.

Conclusion

Clichés, Stereotypes and Performances

In Caye Caulker and beyond, local hustlers act as ambassadors (Taylor, 2001a). They assist travelers in navigating consumer ventures (e.g. purchasing at domestic prices), offer up ideas of things to do together (e.g. “less touristy” activities), and satisfy a hankering to explore native culture (e.g. “chilling” with local friends).

Hustlers seize the opportunity to chaperone visitors during their stays by commodifying cultural acumen to abet Western women’s fantasies of ‘authentic’ tourism adventures. Assuming the role of host inevitably shifts postcolonial racialized power hierarchies, by fostering reliance upon locals’ indigenous knowledge. Romance entrepreneurs thus acquire a relative level of guardianship, which proves influential in shaping tourists’ perceptions and experiences; particularly when executed with an air of oversight and control. Although replicating traditional gender dynamics, doing so also helps to equalize the economic imbalances between them.

In turn, Western women embody the cliché of the carefree, sexually liberated, culturally curious visitor. They are, comparatively, endowed with the material assets and economic mobility deified by land sharks; and truly, by all manner of locals alike (Mullings, 2000). Most commonly at a crossroads in their lives, travel abroad “facilitates the fluidity of identity” (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001; p. 8), providing female sex tourists with the opportunity to reinvent themselves. The women can reestablish their sense of desirableness through being the target of courtship by local men, and negotiate ‘tropical’ desires on their own terms. This augmented status positions Westerners at the head of the table of a metaphorical buffet of local ‘products’ from which to sample ways of being, bodies and experiences (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001).

Sex tourists actively condition the services retained in a relational fashion by rewarding desirable attributes with interest and attention (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). Local men’s success is thus correlated with how closely they attain, or at least aspire to, the stereotypical imagined object of Western women’s fantasies (King, 2014). Likewise, the prevalence and consistency of ubiquitous features among both female sex tourists and romance entrepreneurs alike, suggest that the conditioning is reciprocal (Belliveau, 2006).

This mutual feedback loop exacerbates existing stereotypes through the continuous editing and revision of identities and performances to suit the schemas envisaged by the ‘exotic’ Other (Smith, 2015). As a result of the circular nature of this process, women travelers come to expect certain dispositions and behaviors of local men, and vice versa. Troubles arise when these expectations go unfulfilled.

From Infatuation to Resignation

The Western women who participated in this study began their journeys into sex tourism much as Herold et al.'s (2001) 'romantic returnees'; that is, optimistic about rekindling relationships with local men with whom they'd entertained a previous fling.

When things did not go as planned, however, the women shifted their expectations and practices away from fantasy reenactment and idealized romantic possibilities. Whether due to precursory disappointment or pragmatic adaptation, their behaviors transitioned towards exchanges that were increasingly transactional in nature; or be it, typical of 'committed sex tourists' (Herold et al., 2001). Curiously, incremental shifts in expanded provisioning borne by the women (Richards & Reid, 2015) coincided with a net decrease of trust in the men with whom they were involved (Ryan & Hall, 2001). Assuming the economic burden, whether willingly or reluctantly, effectually functioned as a final grasp for authority through which to try and steer the fate of the relationship.

The more 'seasoned' the women became and as their experiences with hustlers in Caye Caulker wore on, their attitudes grew more and more jaded – tinged with bitter recollections of unmet expectations and dashed hopes. They eventually dropped the single, long-term partner dynamic they'd initially envisioned altogether, and engaged in increasingly short-lived affairs with a growing number of locals. In so doing, the women reinstated a sense of control over relationship outcomes, albeit by conceding a series of feelings, aspirations, and investments. This graduated concatenation of attitudes and experiences culminated in the onset of behaviors reminiscent of 'adventurer sex tourists' (Herold et al., 2001). Yet in spite of these discernible patterns, any hustler freeloading that did become too overt for the women's liking, or inklings that they were perhaps clients and not just lovers, threatened to sabotage the relationships.

Hustler success hinged on convincing Western women that they were somehow ‘different’ from the steady stream of female sex tourists who’d preceded them. Romance entrepreneurs were sharply attuned to the necessity of concealing their foremost intents, and cunningly capitalized upon conveying that they valued the women for who they were, and not for what they could provide (Gorry, 1999). However, once the relationships were over, the men were ultimately left to reconcile with bruised egos and let downs all their own. They’d felt taken advantage of and resentful of the fact that their increase in overall status was not enduring (Njeri, 2017). This may be in part why older and more experienced hustlers seek-out relationships with longer-lasting potential over short-term flings, much as Phillips (2008) ‘middle ranking’ and ‘old veteran’ typologies suggested.

Strategies and Scale

The functionality of the tourist-local relationship dynamics examined in the course of this study transcended several dimensions. Local men wielded their race, gender, and cultural advantages to seduce and manipulate Western women. They employed sexual and affective labor to acquire economic gains, sexual gratification and status (Aitchison, 2001; Bauer, 2008). The women, in turn, coercively leveraged their privileged positions in service of their own desires for intimacy, sex and adventure. They derived augmented self-perceptions of beauty and corresponding self-confidence from their interactions with local men, and exerted financial power and uneven mobility to drive relationship outcomes. The above-mentioned strategies, respectively, challenge assumptions about women’s agency and male invulnerability (Falconer, 2020; Stemple & Meyer, 2014).

These findings call into question the dominant discourse which posits binary conceptualizations of tourist women as either ‘exploited’ (romance tourism) or ‘exploiters’

(female sex tourism), thereby advancing the idea that these categorizations are not mutually exclusive. Instead, this study suggests that the notions of romance tourism and female sex tourism be revisited, reconsidered and possibly reframed as progressive stages along a continuum in a developmental process. This conceptualization of the phenomenon, be it as a range of potentially evolving sets of motivations and practices, has heretofore been but scantily explored in the literature (Garcia et al., 2001; Spencer & Bean, 2017).

In destinations where female sex tourism is well-established and evident on a much larger scale, such as in Jamaica for example (Meszaros & Bazzaroni, 2014); solicitation strategies tend to be far more insistent (Johnson, 2012). ‘Rent-a-rastas’ are known to impart excessive amounts of attention on guests, employing a series of practiced methods to incite interest (Seyfert et al., 2006). The men strategically direct their efforts towards older, perhaps less conventionally desirable women; believing that overweight, middle-aged and senior tourists will be grateful for the attention and endow them with superior compensation (Stončikaitė, 2020). In contrast, younger, ‘more attractive’ women are thought to have their choice among suitors, and thus considered less likely to invest in supporting sex workers over time and across distances (Smith, 2015). The situation is not so different in Caye Caulker, Belize. While the breadth and degree to which the phenomenon is expressed may vary, the motives, strategies and outcomes are essentially the same.

An insatiable appetite for new sights and experiences has left few places untouched by the global tourism industry (Michel, 2014). Along with visitors and their dollars, come “ideas, behaviors, and market demands” (Anderson-Fye, 2003, p. 64) that inevitably shape the destination environment. For locals, envy of Western levels of material comfort is often met with the realities of limited income opportunities symptomatic of uneven development (Cole, 2009).

Sex workers, however, are uniquely situated to straddle class boundaries thanks to foreign interest in fetishized ethnosexual encounters. Wholesale demand for the commoditized production of global intimacies unlocks a gateway to a wide range of resources and possibilities, granting romance entrepreneurs access to luxuries, capital and mobility that might otherwise remain out-of-reach.

Transactional pleasure practices in the context of North-South tourism are predicated upon gross inequalities (Berg, Molin & Nanavati, 2020). Whether wittingly or unwittingly, exploiting these massive disparities and the precarity and uncertainty they entail (Bear, 2019) reproduces the neocolonization of bodies and places. Without a paradigmatic shift in the global political economy and corresponding imperialistic structures, the drive to consume the erotic Other will surely continue unabated, as it has for centuries.

The adventure-seeking and ethnocultural elements of female sex tourism, along with a reluctance to recognize the commerciality of such relationships, will likely drive women travelers away from saturated markets towards locations further and further off-the-beaten-trail. This foreseeable eventuality underscores the importance of closely monitoring how this phenomenon develops over time, particularly in emerging and small-scale destinations such as Caye Caulker, Belize, and elsewhere.

Limitations

Recruitment Strategy

The aim of this study was to explore female sex tourism phenomena in Caye Caulker, Belize. In-depth individual interviews were conducting to collect the experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of four distinct populations. These were local male sex workers (5), female sex tourists (2), local residents (2) and expatriates (2); totaling eleven core subjects. This

relatively small sample limits the generalizability of findings, but nonetheless offers important insights into varied viewpoints of the phenomenon. Forty-two (42) key informants also contributed to the study, several of whom were profiled to add depth and perspective to the findings.

A passive snowballing technique was used for recruitment, whereby key informants invited potential subjects to participate. Since the researcher did not conduct direct, population-wide outreach, the sample was limited to participants who were known to informants. While informants were carefully instructed to not assert undue influence when recruiting, this method may nonetheless have incited a sense of incumbency on behalf of would-be subjects. Although flawed, this strategy was deemed imperative to preserving participant integrity by avoiding the stigma and confusion that could otherwise ensue from being directly approached by a researcher – in a public space and within a small community – to participate in a study on sex tourism.

Remote Interviewing Methods

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, interviews were conducted remotely. While remote interviewing does pose certain challenges, it also offers some notable advantages. For instance, Walker (2013) found that online research methods are not only considered an “efficient, safe and practical resource”, but that they are also “especially useful when the topic is sensitive and anonymity is desired” (p.33). Hewson (2014) also argued that “There is some evidence that computer-mediated communication contexts can lead to higher levels of self-disclosure than [face-to-face] contexts” (p. 430). Subjects may therefore have been especially motivated to participate in the study, thanks to the added convenience and confidentiality that remote methods provided (Joinson, Reips, Buchanan & Schofield, 2010).

While some traditionalists may argue that rapport-building suffers when remote methods are used, contemporary wisdom suggests that this may not be the case (Farooq, 2015). Glogowska, Young, & Lockyer's (2011) comparative study found that remote methods did not negatively impact the investigator's ability to develop rapport. Likewise, Holt's (2010) research affirmed that participants related even more easily to the researcher, as they likened the experience to chatting with friends on the phone. Further, Vogl (2013) contended that remote interviewing narrows the power-distance between researcher and subjects, by conferring greater control upon participants to direct the conversation towards the areas they deem most important. Particularly in the case of the present study whereby rapport was preliminarily established, internet-mediated methods were found to support "fairly fluid and fluent levels of interaction" (Hewson, 2014, p. 430).

Whether due to convenience (Trier-Bieniek, 2012), privacy (Vogl, 2013), or simply as a result of being less comfortable with face-to-face interactions (Tucker & Parker, 2014), remote methods are increasingly the preferred interview method for many participants. The merits of remote methodologies should thus be regarded as an effective, participant-centered approach (Farooq, 2015). Nonetheless, in this case the sample was, inadvertently by design, limited to those who were technologically aware and who had access to devices which supported the Facebook/Messenger applications used to collect data (Ahern, 2005).

Formal interview data was supplemented by informal discussion and observation, which combined to provide a more complete picture of how tourist-local relationships in Caye Caulker unfolded. Opportunities for observation were enriched by frequently being within the immediate vicinity of such relationships. Spending copious amounts of time with local hustlers, often accompanied by the female sex tourists with whom they were involved, proved to be a most

propitious data-gathering activity. Not only could I behold the phenomenon up-close, but observations could be debriefed directly with the actors involved – both in-person as they occurred, as well as over time and across continents.

Self-Reporting by Participants

Similar to conventional in-person methods, virtual ‘real-time’ interviews engender spontaneous, two-way exchange (Sellers, 2014), leaving little room for contemplating the social desirability of responses (O'Connor & Madge, 2017). As such, subject sharing may have been measured when discussing marginal activities, for fear of reprisal or judgement. Adept at interacting with Western women, hustlers could have tailored responses by curating self-portrayals reflective of a narrative believed to be more socially acceptable to their audience (Johnson, 2012). However, the established rapport likely served to mitigate this possibility, and to promote more representative sharing.

In order to respect the confidentiality of participants, self-reported data could not be independently verified. Selective memory, telescoping, false attribution and exaggeration are all possibilities inherent in data collected in this way (Koriat, Goldsmith & Pansky, 2000). Engaging in ongoing dialogue and member-checking throughout the study was thus a conscientiously integrated measure undertaken to bolster the validity of findings (Grbich, 2007). Participant responses were analyzed within a located context that considered historical, political, social, economic, racial, and gendered analyses, so as to avoid reproducing existing stereotypes (Sánchez Taylor, 2001a).

White women are generally viewed by the local population as being sexually liberal (Bruvik Heinskou, 2019; Gorry, 1999). In light of this presupposition, it is possible that the very nature of this study and line of questioning substantiated such assumptions, thereby contributing

to perpetuating the aforementioned belief. Further, acknowledging female sex tourism as a topic of investigation may have, in a sense, legitimized its very existence; and thus inadvertently contributed to the phenomenon. Romance entrepreneurs could have assumed that the researcher was already accustomed to having these types of discussions – although this may have facilitated revealing intimate details about their experiences.

Researcher Positionality

At the very onset of my presence in Caye Caulker, my identity was externally defined by locals in various and sometimes far-fetched ways. Examples ranged from that of tourist to sex tourist, teacher to anthropologist; and even undercover cop, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) informant or Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent. The latter speculations, in particular, were revealing; exposing the general distrust that many locals may have of foreigners who are interested in more than just a brief, run-of-the-mill tourism encounter. It also indicated that locals may lump Canadians and Americans into a single homogenous category, given that my country of origin and citizenship were overlooked when CIA/FBI affiliations were suspected.

Fortunately, I did not have to try and ‘fit in’ to be ‘let in’, as participants were accustomed to interacting with Western women who outwardly presented as tourists, but who ultimately lingered for extended stays. The time that I spent in the community was therefore essential to legitimating my investigative interest, and for developing the rapport necessary for successfully conducting this ethnographic study. It also allowed for a longitudinal view of the phenomenon, and for a certain level of enculturation with which to interpret the language and cultural nuance employed by the population. Frequent travel back and forth to the island over time, provided both continuity and distance in the research process.

My familiarity with members of the community and intimate understanding as to the complex realities of Caye Caulker, granted me access to a wealth of insight; both facilitating the data collection, and nourishing its analysis. Observation allowed me to garner a deeper appreciation of the events, expectations and values of the population (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), and to partake in the daily lives of participants and key informants.

This work documents the voices of local men and tourist women who make strategic choices with which to navigate complex circumstances and ever-evolving dynamics. The participants have both informed and influenced my understanding of transnational romantic and sexual relationships. I am grateful for the challenges, connections, insights and heartache they've confided, and am forever indebted to their contributions.

Implications for Future Research

The exponential growth of tourism to Belize and striking demographic patterns of the people who visit, make this location a fascinating site for study. It being a popular choice for young solo female travelers, the nation's potential to emerge as a key female sex tourism destination seems evident. Yet there has been very little investigative interest in FST phenomena in Belize, save for Gorry's (1999) and Van Wijk's (2006) studies, as discussed in section Field Site: Tourism in Caye Caulker, Belize (p. 38) of this dissertation.

Further, there is an obvious gap in the literature when it comes to considering varied perspectives. Those of the actors involved (i.e. female sex tourists and local male sex workers) are rarely included alongside those well-positioned to observe them (i.e. locals and expats). It is the convergence of these diverse voices that render this study's design and its findings so unique, thereby making an important contribution to the

research on female sex tourism. This work found remarkable distinctions in the perceptions of locals when compared with those of expatriates, suggesting that there is much more work to be done if these perspectives are to be understood.

The principal vantage point for this study was that of the couples themselves. It would be worthwhile to examine further how FST impacts local women who compete with Western women for local men's attention within an already limited dating market. Additionally, the dynamics between same-sex couples – particularly those of female sex tourists involved with local women – is an area of study worthy of exploration. Perhaps most importantly, the very real possibility of minors being exploited in the context of tourist-local romantic/sexual relationships, be it as tourists or as locals, should be investigated.

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