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*Full Length Research Paper*

# Attitudes and views on same-sex sexual behavior in Ghana

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**There is little research in sub-Saharan Africa on same-sex and other non-normative sexual relationships. In the era of HIV and AIDS which is mostly sexually transmitted in sub-Saharan Africa, and given previous authors' findings regarding the HIV epidemic among black MSM across the African diaspora, we argue for focusing on the social implications of same-sex sexual behavior. Using evidence from Ghana and positioning our findings within recent scholarship on same-sex relationships in some parts of the world, particularly within African settings, we contribute to the body of knowledge on this issue. With 81 individual and group qualitative interviews from persons aged 10-80 years, we focused on the hostilities and prejudices directed against such non-normative sexual expressions. We also traced the historical and socio-geo-political trend influencing homophobic attitudes towards same-sex relationships from existing literature, pointing out that the current hostilities and branding of these behaviors may have been integrated into traditional views of sexuality in Ghana, with time. We concluded that there was a high level of stigma attached to same-sex sexual behavior by our respondents. We recommend further studies on the transitional histories of same-sex and persons who have sex with both males and females' relationships and the cultural and related social contexts in which these have evolved and thrive.**

**Keywords:** Sexual behavior, men who have sex with men (MSM), women who have sex with women, persons who have sex with both males and females, homophobia, Ghana.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examined views and attitudes about same-sex sexual relationships in Ghana. Sexual orientation encompasses sexual behavior, attraction, and identity

(American Psychological Association [APA], 2011; Floyd and Stein, 2002; Remafedi, Resnick, Blum, and Harris 1992). This study focused on sexual behavior. One's sexual orientation has implications for the society at large. The era of HIV and AIDS which is mostly transmitted sexually in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and a recent article by Millett, Jeffries, Peterson, Malebranche, Lane, Flores, Fenton, Wilson, Steiner and Heilig (2012) regarding the HIV epidemic among black MSM across

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the African diaspora inform our argument for focusing on the social implications of same-sex sexual behavior. Based on pooled estimates from across the African diaspora, Millett et al. (2012) showed that black men who have sex with men (MSM) in their study were 15 times more likely to be HIV positive compared with the general populations and 8.5 times more likely compared with black populations.

Ghana is a country in transition, although it is still largely traditional and religious. In the past, citizens of Ghana, like in some African countries, argued that there were no same-sex sexual relationships in the country, and that such practices and orientations are basically foreign (Dankwa, 2009; Epprecht, 2004, 2008; Essien and Aderinto 2009; Kapasula, 2009), or as documented elsewhere by other researchers (e.g., Brown, 1994; Herek, 2002; Sears, 1992), there is the view that it is persons who are sick and abnormal who engage in these practices. However, currently, non-conventional sexual tendencies (MSM, women who have sex with women [WSW] and persons who have sex with both males and females [PSWBMFs]) are reported in the country (Attipoe, 2004; Dankwa, 2009; *Gye Nyame Concord*, 2006), with clear negative views about them, and queries about what the legal framework is for non-normative sexual behavior. The increasing rates of such sexual practices and orientations has led to some level of social tension in the country, amid fears that such sexual minorities may be oppressed overtly or covertly by the rest of society.

Contrary to these popular ideas, some scholars have suggested that what is currently considered non-normative sexual behavior has in the past existed in both Ghana and other African countries (Arnfred, 2004; Epprecht, 2008; Hoad, 2007; Morgan and Wieringa, 2005; Rupp 1999). We, therefore, assume that definitions and attitudes towards these non-normative sexual intimacies may be changing over time (Arnfred, 2004; Dankwa, 2009; Epprecht, 2004, 2008; Hoad, 2007; Gaudio, 2009). Herek's work, for instance, challenges such current negative views on same-sex sexual behavior. Thus, we position our findings within historical views on same-sex sexual expressions in Ghana and Africa in general.

It is relevant that researchers in sub-Saharan Africa consider the discourse on sex, including the issue of same-sex sexual relationships and PSWBMFs (Rupp 1999; Epprecht 2004, 2008; Hoad 2007; Dankwa 2009; Essien and Aderinto 2009). This becomes even more relevant as any form of same-sex sexual expression and orientation are treated with indignation in present-day Ghanaian society (Bleek, 1976; Rupp, 1999; Dankwa, 2009; Anarfi and Owusu, 2011). Against this background, Bleek's (1976) study in the 1970s reported the lack of reference whatsoever to same-sex sexual and bisexual

relationships and a lack of a hint on its occurrence. More particularly, research on same-sex issues is rare (Dankwa, 2009; Epprecht, 2004, 2008; Hoad, 2007), and is more rarely undertaken by African scholars (Epprecht, 2008). This calls for finding out more about such views through research, as very little is known about how people in Ghana and Africa in general conceptualize and evaluate same-sex sexuality.

Three broad research questions were posed for the main study. First, in the era of HIV and AIDS which is mostly sexually transmitted in sub-Saharan Africa and among diasporan Africans (Millett et al., 2012), we sought to find out if, Ghanaians are more open about and discuss our sexual behaviors. Second, what are the patterns of sexual behaviors among Ghanaians—what is known and unknown in this respect about the expression of sexuality in Ghana? Third, what sexual behaviors are considered mainstream, and which are not, and with what implications? Gupta (2002) for instance noted that together with gender, sexuality is a significant factor in the sexual transmission of HIV. Furthermore, these variables are known to influence treatment, care, and support. Nevertheless, sexuality (together with gender), remains misunderstood and inappropriately used. Specific to Ghana, Dankwa (2009) emphasizes the contextual importance of culture in communication in relation to sexuality and understanding sexual behavior.

Thus, this study fills an important research gap by first examining the opinions and attitudes of Ghanaians towards same-sex relationships while opening up the discourse and academic debates in this area of scholarship in Ghana. Our study also reviews the most recent antithesis that such sexual behaviors have existed in the past and been fairly unquestioned. The results of the study may provide policy makers with a framework for protecting persons in Ghana who engage in same-sex sexual behavior.

### Same-sex relationships in sub-Saharan Africa

Recent scholarship on non-normative sexual practices postulate an antithesis to research and views on sexuality and sexual practices in Africa, and argue that contrary to popular belief, same-sex sexual intimacies in the sub-region date back to the distant past, and that views on them have been influenced by several compelling histories and recent social issues, leading to scenarios where such views have crystallized into current African sexual traditions. A review of Dankwa's (2009) and Epprecht's (2008) work on southern Ghana and northern Nigeria, respectively, suggest that the definitions of offense or inappropriateness about such behaviors and practices may be more recent. They contend that such sexual behaviors have always existed and still exist (also

see Epprecht, 2004; Hoad, 2007; Morgan and Wieringa, 2005; Rupp, 1999), amid complex cultural and linguistic appropriations which create room for these practices to thrive covertly without them being discussed (Dankwa, 2009; Epprecht, 2008). In fact, these authors argue that in the past, same-sex relationships have been managed with verbal indirections, silence, discretions, and culturally-induced contextual ways to better manage the existence of what is a well-known sub-culture (Dankwa, 2009; Epprecht, 2004, 2008; Hoad, 2007; Morgan and Wieringa, 2005).

Although not officially acknowledged, same-sex and bisexual behaviors are also believed to happen, situationally, 'induced' by the prevailing circumstances, especially in instances where people are kept together for a long time with very limited or restricted access to persons of the opposite sex. For example, same-sex sexual expressions are known to occur in single-sex settings in West Africa and other parts of Africa, such as in single-sex educational boarding-schools, prisons, the military and other uniformed personnel on assignments away from home and increasingly, in sex-tourism (Bleek, 1976; Dwomoh, 2007; Dankwa, 2009; Epprecht, 2008; Rupp, 1999). But as Dankwa vehemently argues, these 'situational' non-normative sexual intimacies pave the way, importantly, for future sexual behaviors and practices, and do not die off when the inducing situations cease.

In the past, Bleek's (1976) study mentioned that same-sex sexual expressions among boys were exceedingly rare. Even where MSM activities were practiced by boys, they were considered basically "pre-sexual" and were quickly abandoned as they mature. He, however, noted that the situation might have been different for sexual intercourse between WSW, having documented that it was practiced by a few students in girls' boarding schools "who want to release tension", but are either afraid of getting pregnant or have no access to male partners, given the strict rules regarding male visits to girls' schools. But here too, it was thought to be basically situational and not an alternative means of sexual expression, and was said to be quickly forgotten once the girls left school.

Bleek's (1976) argument has probably outlived the test of time, with current research pointing to increasing incidence and prevalence of adult same-sex sexual intercourse in SSA including Ghana (Attipoe, 2004; Dankwa, 2009; Gye Nyame Concord, 2006). Persons who engage in same-sex sexual relationships may also have sex with members of the same-sex and those of the opposite sex (PSWBMFs) because exclusive same-sex relationships are greatly frowned upon in SSA (Henson, 1993-1994; Frank and McEneaney, 1999; Dankwa, 2009; Epprecht, 2008).

In another vein, much less research has been

conducted into societal attitudes toward having sex with both males and females (Herek, 2002). Studies that exist suggest that PSWBMFs experience a similar degree of hostility, discrimination, and violence due to their sexual orientation as do persons in same-sex relationships (Epprecht, 2008; Herek, 2000, 2002). Attipoe (2004) documented that MSM in Ghana cut across all social classes, religions, and ethnicities and married men are involved. Although recent media publications suggest that same-sex and PSWBMFs expressions are now in the open in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana (Attipoe, 2004; Gye Nyame Concord, 2006), public discourse surrounding same-sex relationships remains minimal (Anarfi and Owusu, 2011; Bleek, 1976).

Such popular views about same-sex relationships and PSWBMFs seem to have been influenced by several ideologies over time. It is argued by authors such as Arnfred (2004), Dankwa (2009), Epprecht (2004, 2008), Gaudio (2009), Morgan and Wieringa (2005), and Murray and Roscoe (1998), that, contrary to current ideologies about MSM, WSW, and PSWBMFs, such sexual orientations and practices are not new. Rather, these practices were redefined with the advent of colonialism, with its typically concomitant conversions to Christianity and Islam; faiths that have different bases and perceptions than those of traditional African religions. Alternatively, some research has established the idea that even such religious tenets may be misleading in their views about same-sex and PSWBMFs relationships (for example, Gaudio, [2009]). Guided by recent researchers such as Arnfred (2004), Dankwa (2009), Epprecht (2004, 2008), Morgan and Wieringa (2005) who have literally entered the worlds of same-sex persons in parts of Africa, we position our findings within the contrasting views in the literature about views on same-sex sexual relationships as well as expressions of sexual behavior. We also include some amount of historicity and culture specific discourse on same-sex and other non-normative sexual expressions from within the context of our findings.

## METHODS

The study organized 81 qualitative interviews comprising 33 individual in-depth interviews, 24 focus group discussions (FGDs) with nine people per group on average, and 24 lifeline stories from individual respondents. A lifeline story is a qualitative interviewing technique that enables a respondent to talk about his or her experiences over a lifetime on a topic of interest. Data collection took place in July 2007. Although this is a while back, we argue that given that the sexual behavior of a group of people is typically shaped by patterned social norms and does not change quickly, our data is not

outdated. The interviews were conducted in the local languages mostly, based on the preference of the respondents. The questions were translated into the English language during the training and back-translated into the local languages after the interviews. The responses were then translated into English. Acronyms such as MSM, WSW, and PSWBMFs were not words the respondents used, but the authors formed those words from the data primarily to shorten the length of the write-up. The two main investigators later agreed on the back-translations of the additional issues that emerged during the discussions, with the aim of improving the inter-rater reliability.

A mixed sampling approach was used, both convenient and simple random. The respondents consisted of both males and females, were purposively selected initially, in that they had to fit into the predetermined groups for the study, and ranged in age between 10 and 80 years. They were recruited variously through opinion leaders and local informants in the various study communities, through snowball sampling, and through visits to some schools and organized groups. They covered all socio-economic and demographic groups, such as in-and-out of school youth, people with disabilities, the aged, and community opinion leaders (religious leaders, politicians, chiefs and queens). Other specialized groups included commercial sex workers. Only one woman who has sex with women (WSW) was interviewed in Accra, the capital city, because people declined to identify themselves as such. Also, no one self identified as an MSM or a person who has sex with both males and females (PSWBMFs).

The study covered all three ecological zones in Ghana. In each zone, the study sites covered rural, urban and semi-urban localities in five regions: Eastern, Central, Ashanti, Greater Accra and Northern Regions. It was restricted to five of the ten administrative regions in Ghana for two key reasons. First, our funds were limited. Second and more critically, the three ecological zones selected coincide with the geographical distribution of the major ethnic groups in the country. This enabled us to include majority of the main ethnic groups in the country in our sample. Prior to the field entry, the respondents were broadly delineated and matched to specific community classifications in each ecological belt, with the communities randomly selected to fit the above-stated geographical sampling.

In-depth interviews were used for persons with disabilities in preselected communities for privacy reasons, given the largely negative views in Ghana about the sexuality of persons with disability (Anarfi and Owusu, 2011). Lifeline stories were found more appropriate for persons aged 65 years and above because of their longer life experiences, and for the sole WSW we were able to recruit, for purposes of privacy. Lifeline stories

will help us situate the study phenomenon—same-sex sexual behavior as to whether it is inborn or circumstantial. Although sexual behavior is mostly private, FGDs were used as part of the data collection approaches since the study was on societal views about the issue. As its name goes, in-depth interviews provide the opportunity to study the real reasons for a phenomenon and in great detail based also on the privacy they provide for an individual to share his/her views. The data collection methods were triangulated because we sought explanations, and triangulation is a way of bringing out almost everything about an issue. The drawback with this is that method triangulation is laborious and time consuming.

In a given community, interviewers selected the specialized groups and the individuals that matched their pre-assigned tasks based on guidance from community informants and adhered to the specified interviewing approaches. Random sampling was used to select persons we interviewed in the general population within the specifications described above. All respondents were informed ahead of time of the sensitivity of the study, and sometimes, the need for them to narrate their views and experiences on sexuality and sexual expression. Respondents were told they were free to decline the interviews or to discontinue with it if they commenced, without any penalty. Same-sex interviewers were used due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. Study guides were prepared for the interviews. The study guides for this paper covered sexual socialization, societal norms on sexual partnerships and behavior, including what was considered normative and non-normative, views and attitudes about non-normative sexual behaviors and views about persons who engage in these behaviors.

The questions and themes in the guide were informed by an extensive review of literature in the area of sexuality, sexual behavior and expression in sub-Saharan Africa with particular focus on West Africa and Ghana. The initial questions and themes, and the finalized guides were reviewed first by a group of six in-country experts and researchers on sexuality. Next, the finalized guides were also reviewed by five researchers on sexuality from the academia and NGOs from three West African countries to ensure that the necessary protections would be provided for the respondents. The draft of the data collection instruments also received the full support of the Ford Foundation, the sponsors of the study, before they were finalized.

Thirty interviewers were used; ten per zone. The first and second authors of this study served as main supervisors. To ensure good quality data, all the interviewers were trained for six days, but the training was done separately for interviewers in the southern and

northern parts of the country. This was because the predominant languages spoken in northern Ghana are different from those spoken in the south. Strict quality controls were ensured for quality data. These included the careful recruitment and training of the interviewers, the revision of the data collection instruments based on the outcome of a pretesting, and on-field routine supervision of interviewers by experienced supervisors who were with the groups throughout the field work. The principal investigators also visited the teams on the field and provided additional supervision. Finally, daily end-of-day conferences to discuss the field experiences throughout the data collection were another form of quality control. The interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The themes and sub-themes for the results that are reported were chosen based on both the questions asked and the themes that emerged from the data.

The Nud.ist qualitative data analysis software version 6.0 (QSR International/Scolari, Sage Publications, 2002) was used to process the transcribed data. Researchers in qualitative methodologies such as Weitzman and Miles (1995), and Lewis (1999) have employed code-based qualitative data analysis for their work and demonstrated that developing codes as a basis for qualitative analysis aids researchers to associate codes or labels with chunks of text, search these codes for patterns, and to construct classifications from the codes as a basis for undertaking the data analysis conceptually. Lewis (1999) for example, demonstrated the use of such code-based theory building with the Nud.ist software version 4.

The two PIs coded the key themes in the data separately, and met several times to discuss the outcome and to ensure inter-rater reliability toward a more rigorous accuracy. Similar to Lewis (1999), we used the key themes as code classifications. Codes were assigned manually to the data by 'open coding,' in which we selected text passages and entered words or phrases to be associated with the passages. Codes were thus assigned to text chunks and applied to paragraphs as text units. This produced indexes which were used as bases for searching for key words (index search). These key words were then integrated into the interpretive fabric of the analysis to give descriptive header information for each data file. The Nud.ist software 6.0 makes it possible to delineate sections within a document by the use of subheadings. A search based on the codes yields results that are input into the interpretive fabric of an analysis (Lewis, 1999). The analysis was based on both the themes that were covered in the study guides and additional information that emerged spontaneously or from further probing. The study team met several times to discuss the findings and possible interpretations. As mentioned above, only the findings on attitudes towards and views on non-normative sexual behaviors, particularly same-sex sexual and PSWBMFs expressions are covered in this paper.

## RESULTS

*Social regulations regarding sexual involvement:* To begin with, we asked respondents whether there were some social norms regulating sexual partnerships in their communities. All the respondents replied in the affirmative:

In this our community the only sexual practices that are permitted involve the opposite sex, the man and the woman who are recognized as husbands and wives. All sexual practices within marriage are permitted [FGD, males 36-45, Kumbungu, peri-urban, Northern Region].

Sexual behaviors that were considered 'abominable' were specified as follows:

In this community the sexual partners that are not permitted is within the context of casual sex, commercial, homosexuality and, WSW and PSWBMFs. Sexual partners within the context of marriage (man and woman) is accepted or permitted [FGD, males 36-45, Kumbungu].

It was revealed that not only is same-sex relationships and PSWBMFs restricted, but are also socially punishable:

In this community no sexual practice within marriage is punishable but all sexual practices in casual sex, commercial, homosexuality, WSW and PSWBMFs are punishable because they are regarded as taboos [FGD, males, 25-35, Tamale, urban, Northern Region].

Some of the respondents expressed the view that MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs practices are not native to Ghana but happen in foreign countries. Female FGD participants aged 26-34 years in Busuo in rural Northern Region shared the following views:

R 2: I heard it happens in the foreign world but I have never heard of such an event in this community. I have heard of men and men having sex and women and women having sex [in foreign countries]. They announce it on the radio for us to hear.

R4: In fact, it has never happened in this community.

R 1 and 3 (in unison): It is true [it has never happened here].

*Views about persons who have sex with members of the same sex or have sex with both males and females:* With specific reference to their views on same-sex relationships and other forms of sexual diversity such as PSWBMFs the respondents placed these in the spiritual realm, and beyond that, the unthinkable, deviant behavior, and mentally sick or abnormal. With respect to

the question 'what do you think about same-sex relationships—MSM WSW, and people who have sex with both males and females?' the following were some of the responses: R 1: "As for that, there is a higher spirit tormenting you." R8: "It is a kind of spirit that is moving through people" [FGD, males 16-25, Asamama, rural, Eastern Region].

Additional responses pertaining to this were:

They will tell you that you are mad (if you engaged in same-sex sexual relationship) [FGD, males, 16-25 years old, Nyakrom, peri-urban, Central Region].

R1: I don't even know what to say, such a thing is very bad. Nobody should be involved in such a practice.

R2: Are the women finished in this community? Why would a man decide to fuck another man? They might be a crazy lot. The women don't know what they are missing. Sex is a nice experience and should be enjoyed by a man and a woman. It is bad and they have to stop that.

R3: To me it is only those who are crazy who will get involved in such an animal behavior. Those who will be caught in such an act should be sent to a mental home.

R4: The world is coming to an end. This is what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah which made God annoyed. It is a bad practice and it is not good at all. This practice must not go on. I don't think any member of our community will ever get involved in such a behavior. Look, it is going to bring a bad omen on this community. Should any members commit themselves to such an ungodly act, he will be sacked from the community for life [FGD, females, 26-34 years, Busuo].

Whoever does this is certainly mad [FGD, males, 23-52 years, Winneba, urban, Central Region].

R1: Yes people shun their company and they are often treated with contempt.

R2: Yes, people shun their company and nobody respects homosexuals [FGD, males, 36-45 years, Kumbugu, peri-urban, Northern Region].

R2: They should be jailed.

R6: He/she is bringing disease to the community and that can be murder. So jail sentence is what must be done [FGD, males, 25-36 years, Asamama].

Similar sentiments were expressed in all the other study communities and across different modes of data collection, supporting the view that the disdain for same-sex sexual expression is nationwide. To our surprise, the sole WSW we interviewed also had a negative attitude about same-sex relationships. To a question to her about whether there are sexual taboos in her community, she replied in the affirmative, specifying "homosexuality." When it was further probed why "homosexuality" is a taboo in her community, she replied: "[Because] God created man and a woman and not man and a man, or lesbians" [Lifeline story, WSW, 27 years old, Osu, Accra, urban, Greater Accra Region]. When she was further asked whether she was aware of documentation on the pervasiveness of same-sex sexual relationships in Ghana, she replied in the negative, explaining that:

... because society does not accept that. They don't find anything good about it. They talk bitterly against it', and that 'they say you are inviting evil spirits...They say things like how can you date a fellow girl? They say demons have taken over us [Lifeline story, WSW, 27 years old, Osu, Accra].

A respondent said that there were some WSW in his community who happened to be involved in heterosexual relationships as well. He described them as "witches who are possessed by a marine spirit." According to him, some of them have become pregnant [in-depth interview, male, 24 years old, Winneba].

*Attitude towards MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs:* It was important to probe further the views the respondents held about non-conventional sexual practices, given their general social condemnation. The probing scenarios revolved around what they would do generally if they knew someone involved in such relationships, and what they would do if the person were their sister, wife, father, son, mother and/or their tenant. Regarding a wife, all the male respondents who were asked this question said without hesitation, that if their wives were a WSW, they would end their relationships with them. Similar feelings were expressed about a girlfriend. There was, however, a measured caution regarding how they would react to a father who was in a same-sex sexual relationship. One respondent remarked, "He looks after me so I would let someone talk to him" [in-depth interview, male, 25 years, Asamama]. Specifically, many said that they would ask the head of their family to talk to a father who is an MSM or PSWBMFs to desist from the practice. Only one person said he would talk to him personally.

Peoples' views concerning a WSW or a sister who has sex with both males and females were different. All said if their sister was a WSW or has sex with both males and females, they would advise her to quit the behavior and/or give her corporal punishment. In a similar vein, there were those who would advise a son to quit a MSM or PSWBMFs behavior, while others said they would report him to the police. No respondent specified what they would do to someone else in general who is an MSM, WSW or has sex with both males and females. If it were their tenant, a consensus was reached by all the respondents that they would either counsel the individual to quit the practice or eject him or her from their house.

Furthermore, they did not think that persons who engaged in same-sex or PSWBMFs sexual relationships should have any human rights protection accorded them:

R1: No, we do not think that same-sex female partners are entitled to any rights to be lesbians.

R2: No, we do not think same-sex male partners are entitled to any rights.

R4: No, there are no law/norms protecting/concerning same-sex couples, [FGD, males, 36-45 years, Kumbungu].

*Reasons why people engage in same-sex relationships:* Only three of the respondents explained why they thought some persons would be involved in same-sex relationships. For WSW the explanation was: "Some women naturally hate men so they prefer women to men" [FGD, Asamama, males aged 25-36 years].

With specific reference to MSM, they also explained as follows: "It is due to money. I have a friend who had a male sex partner. The boy is now rich" [FGD, males 23-52 years, Winneba].

Some people do it as a condition for "juju" money [contacting a magical source or fetish deity to assist an individual to make a lot of money than is usually possible with him or her. In such instances, it is believed that one has to perform what is considered a 'weird' act as a condition to achieving what one desires] [FGD, males 23-52, Winneba].

It is important to mention that these respondents' views were more speculative than factual as that FGD group mostly said that they were unaware of such same-sex tendencies in their community.

#### Sexual socialization of MSM and WSW

Interestingly, all the respondents who expressed an opinion (most of them said they could not tell) about how they thought MSM and WSW acquire their sexual habits

specified that contrary to heterosexual relationships which they thought are acquired spontaneously, same-sex sexual expressions are learned:

No, we do not think all sexual orientations are learned. Some are learnt and others are natural. Sexual relationships between the opposite sexes is a natural one whilst those involving persons who have sex with members of the same-sex and PSWBMFs are not natural. We are saying this because sexual practices or relationships between the opposite sexes are not taught or learned by anyone. But for the same-sex and PSWBMFs relationships, one has to be taught and socialized into their fraternity [FGD, males, 36-45, Kumbungu].

No, some are learnt, others are natural and I think that opposite sex, that is, sex between a man and a woman is not learnt. But orientations like MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs are learnt [in-depth interview, male, 35 years, Tamale].

#### DISCUSSION

We discuss our findings with a focus on the hostilities expressed against MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs' sexual behaviors. We also incorporate the literature on stigma to further clarify our findings. A key finding in our research is the hostility and prejudices from our respondents directed towards persons who express non-heteronormative sexual behaviors. Specifically with regard to same-sex practices, all our respondents did not approve of it and expressed very negative sentiments toward it. In this direction, our paper confirmed the findings of Essien and Aderinto (2009), that there is a very high sense of "unnaturalness" of same-sex sexual romances, and a high level of homophobia among our respondents. This showed in words such as "mad", "witch", "juju", "marine spirit" (the equivalent of a sea monster in the local Ghanaian parlance or Leviathan as used in the Bible or mermaid in fairy tales) used to describe persons with same-sex sexual tendencies. In societies like Ghana which still has considerable levels of illiteracy, poverty and traditionalism, what seems "unusual" and "unexplainable", is typically attributed to the spiritual realm. The response from the sole WSW we interviewed reveals much in support of the general feelings about such non-normative sexual behaviors.

Dankwa (2009) and Epprecht (2008) observed high levels of social and religious pressures against same-sex sexual behavior in southern Ghana and northern Nigeria, respectively. Other literature confirms the branding of persons who have sex with members of the same-sex as spiritually dangerous. Rupp (1999) for instance quotes

historical material dating as far back as the seventeenth century in which MSM were branded as “wizards.” Rupp (1999, p. 25) documented that a “...history of Angola in 1681 recorded much sodomy among men dressed as women...and those men were considered to be wizards...” Aina’s (1991) study mentions ritual sexual activity with both males and females which he explained as a whole class of sexual relations related to the gaining of mystical powers and witchcraft. The main one involved sexual intercourse with someone who is perceived to be socially undesirable, such as a destitute or a seriously disabled person. “The rationale behind this is that, through this interaction, the normal dominant partner draws from his less fortunate partner the predestined store or essence of good fortunes and fate that all human beings are supposed to possess spiritually” (Aina, 1999, p. 83). In fact, Aina (1999, p. 83) observed among the Yoruba and Hausa of Nigeria the practice of anal intercourse by which the dominant partner is believed to “augment and/or charge like battery his own store of such quality or essence”, thereby contributing to his increased success in whatever endeavor he undertakes.

The wave of high level of anti-MSM and WSW could lead to situations of abuse for persons with such romantic behaviors, as reflected in some of what the interviewees said they would do to persons with such sexual behaviors, if they found them. Words like “I will cane her”, and “I would eject them from my house” could be tantamount to abuse. However, it needs to be explained that given the fact that Ghana is still a very “closed” society, there is little awareness, in general, of human rights issues, and the latter has not assumed huge dimensions, although a few individuals, mostly lawyers and some NGOs, have been pushing for respecting the human rights of others.

More specifically, MSM, WSW and other non-conventional sexual preferences in Ghana have not assumed huge human rights dimensions yet. In fact, the responses stated above largely support the findings from the literature that Ghanaian MSM find it safer to hide their behavior and identity (Attipoe, 2004; Dankwa, 2009). For instance, as noted earlier, 58 percent of MSM Attipoe (2004) interviewed in Accra and its environs kept their behavior hidden from their families, friends and immediate neighbors so as to protect themselves from negative outlash from them but also from the law. In the US, Herek (2000) documented that a wave of discrimination and hate crimes, including murder, were committed against MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs due to their stigmatized sexual behavior. More importantly, to the extent that some of the interviewees thought that MSM and WSW expressions could bring bad omen to communities in which people practice these non-mainstream sexual lifestyles, any unexplainable mishap in such communities could be blamed on such persons, if they were identified,

leading to their possible abuse. Another disturbing finding we need to highlight is that the respondents expressed varying attitudes toward the hypothetical MSM and WSW if they were their blood relation than if they were their spouses or romantic heterosexual partners such as a girlfriend/boyfriend, and/or females in general. They would generally be harsher towards them if they were the latter—romantic partners rather than blood relations, and females, compared to males. Reactions like “I would divorce her if she were my wife” or “...separate from her if she were my girlfriend” or “...cane her if she were my sister” versus “I would have someone talk to him” or “I would advise him against it if he were my father or brother”, respectively, underscore issues in general Ghanaian social relations. First, within the general Ghanaian society, people seem to be less gentle towards females, than is the case with males, particularly younger females. This depicts a situation of gender inequality, greater sexual control of women, compared to men, and lesser social protection for females. Furthermore, our findings affirm the closer ties and bonds between families of origin compared to relationships established through romance and marriage, probably due to the prevalent extended family, and descent systems in Ghana. Dodoo (1998) shared similar views regarding relationships between extended family members *vis-à-vis* that between couples.

Moreover, the feeling by some of the respondents that MSM and WSW practices are foreign confirms Essien and Aderinto (2009, p. 121), that the “homophobic expression is partly a product of the new globalization and also a manifestation of the clash between what is considered “African” and “un-African” social and sexual behavior. Others such as Arnfred (2004), Dankwa (2009), Epprecht (2004, 2008), Gaudio (2009) and Morgan and Wiering (2005) document similar sense of “un-Africanness” about same-sex sexual and PSWBMFs behaviors. The literature provides an antithesis to the argument that such behaviors are foreign and mostly of Western origin. Thus, we argue that the homophobic attitudes as found among our respondents have been acquired over the years based primarily on historical transitions from the pre-colonial to post-colonial times. The literature in the pre-colonial era suggests that such practices were known to exist in the open (see, e.g., Rupp [1999]) and not condemned.

In the colonial times, however, they might have been branded as wrong but in post-colonial times, they have been imbued as contrary to mainstream Ghanaian culture. The colonial era particularly with its antecedents of Christianity, and Islam to an extent, largely metamorphosed Ghanaian and other African societies, and inundated these societies with mostly Judeo-Christian senses of decency and profanity. Dankwa (2009) for instance traces the influence of Christianity

and the more current waves of Pentecostalism and Charismatism as being responsible for such post colonial views about sexual behaviors and sexual expressions in Ghana. The influence of the more private and liberal media in Ghana since the 1990s and particularly of the local and sub-regional cinema industry in positioning such non-normative sexual behaviors as sinful cannot be overemphasized (Dankwa, 2009).

Thus, the dominant effect of religion on the sexual socialization of the Ghanaian as previously documented by Awusabo-Asare, Abane, and Kumi-Kyereme (2004), Owusu and Anarfi (2010) and Anarfi and Owusu (2011) came to the fore in our research as well. It was quite common for the stance of the Bible to be stated to support the respondents' view about same-sex and PSWBMFs relationships, and also to brand MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs as immoral and sinful. Previous researchers such as Bop (2005), Epprecht (2004, 2008), Herek (2000, 2002), and Kapasula (2009) documented such societal views about persons who have sex with members of the same-sex in other parts of Africa and the world. Similarly, the most prevalent view among our respondents was that MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs' behaviors are socially unacceptable: such behaviors constitute a "spiritual" problem, persons involved are demonized, and they bring curses and bad omen to their societies. One male respondent from Kumbungu summed it up as "murder" that requires "a jail sentence."

From the foregoing, we incorporate the literature on stigma--how it is formed, maintained, and managed, to help with interpretation and clarification of our results. Goffman (1968) defines stigma as a disqualification from full social acceptance and listed those who practice "homosexuality" among groups of persons who are stigmatized. In this respect, our findings indicate that our respondents viewed practicing such non-normative sexual behaviors as leading to stigma of a group identity, as specified by Goffman.

In this wise, the sexual behavior of Ghanaians, by the time of our study, was perceived by our respondents as a duality: a "we" or the "normal" and a "they"—the behaviors of those who practiced non-normative sexual expressions. Swim, Ferguson, and Hyers (1999) observed that social distancing by expressing beliefs that are dissimilar to another person's is one way of forming and maintaining stigma related to sexuality and sexual behaviors perceived to be non-normative. Swim et al. (1999) documented that this leads to prejudice and fear of association with persons who exhibit non-normative sexual behaviors. They further noted that dissenting beliefs of stigmatized sexual behavior may be more heightened than is the case—as when our respondents associated same-sex sexual and PSWBMFs with witchcraft, "juju", mental sickness and other misdemeanors and abominations.

While the study produced interesting findings, some limitations are worth mentioning. We partly used convenient, purposive samples, and restricted the study to a half of the administrative regions of the country; making our findings ungeneralizable to all persons in Ghana. Although there is general pervasive antipathy towards same-sex sexual orientations judged by recent media reports, our study does not capture the possibly more contradictory set of attitudes towards same-sex sexual and PSWBMFs relationships. In part, this was because we were unable to recruit and interview practitioners of same-sex and PSWBMFs behaviors as part of this study. Furthermore, the study partly used group discussions. This has implications for possible social desirability bias, and may have inadvertently portrayed an overly normative picture of heterosexual Ghanaians. On sensitive topics as discussed in this paper, people tend to make much more normative statements that mirror the perceived social consensus, while personally, they may have different attitudes (Babbie, 1998). Focus groups are particularly notorious for this. However, the interviewers were trained to probe for other information, particularly, alternative view points.

More importantly, our study lacks adequate information on actual same-sex behavior, as Ghanaians typically consider discourse on sex as taboo (Anarfi and Owusu 2011). Yankah (2004, p. 181) documented 'cultural anxieties about the open discussion of sexuality' in Ghana. Thus, we exercise a great deal of caution with the interpretation of our findings. Despite these limitations, our study did not increase the stigma against minority sexualities and did not expose such persons to any known risks involved, to the best of our knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to contribute to the discourse on non-conventional sexual behavior in Ghana. Specifically, we sought to study the attitudes and notions on MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs behaviors in Ghana. We conclude that our respondents exhibited very strong negative views about same-sex relationships in Ghana. MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs were generally regarded as sinful, immoral, and influenced by evil spirits to engage in such sexual behaviors; are mentally sick, and also are a danger to society because their behaviors bring bad omen to society. Based on these views Goffman would conclude that same-sex sexual and PSWBMFs behaviors in Ghana are stigmatized since our respondents did not find them to be 'normal' and to have full social acceptance. It should also be noted that although same-sex sexual behaviors may have been the norm in pre-colonial Ghana, this does not change the current reality and the social implications of such highly-stigmatized sexual behaviors.

Our findings confirmed other social tensions such as hostility towards sexual minorities in Ghana; as well, people think they are immoral or undeserving of human rights. Importantly, our findings suggest that such strong hatred for MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs by our respondents could lead to abuse of persons with such sexual orientations and behavior, as is known to happen in other societies. Our study thus contributes to a framework which could help protect sexual minorities in the country.

In our view, this study did not necessarily increase the disfavored sentiments towards persons with non-normative sexual orientations in Ghana, neither do we think that it posed risks to such persons. Subsequent research on this topic should use representative samples to get the extent of the generalizability of the views and related information among a section of Ghanaians concerning non-normative sexual behaviors, particularly those of MSM, WSW and PSWBMFs. Such studies should also probe more into the transitional histories of same-sex sexual and PSWBMFs relationships and the cultural and related social contexts in which these have evolved and thrive.

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