

Understanding the Intersecting effects of gender, class, race, and culture on the sexual practices and HIV risks of young Asian Canadian Women in Toronto

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CHANGING THE COURSE OF THE
HIV PREVENTION, ENGAGEMENT AND
TREATMENT CASCADE



AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON GROWING UP EXPERIENCES, RELATIONSHIPS &
SEXUAL HEALTH OF ASIAN YOUNG WOMEN IN TORONTO

- Heartfelt appreciation to the 14 young women who took part in this study.
- Funded by a seed grant from the Faculty of Community Services, Ryerson University
- **Team members:**
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Why this study?

- Scarcity of research on sexual health of Asian women.
- Existing but ‘limited’ literature tends to:
 - portray Asian women as less sexually active
 - perpetuate stereotypes of Asian women as “*model minority*” or embodiment of “*sexual conservatism*”
 - offers a **dichotomous** view that:
 - “*mainstream acculturation*” is associated with sexual permissiveness
 - “*heritage acculturation*” is associated with sexual conservatism.

Study Purpose

The aim of the *Cultures, Identities, and Voices (CIV) Study* was to explore:

- (a) the participants' growing up / acculturation experiences;
- (b) how they made sense of and responded to the dominant and racialized discourses on femininities and sexualities;
- (c) conditions that put them at risk of HIV and other negative sexual health outcomes
- (d) their resiliencies as a protective factor of their emotional and sexual health.

Methods

- Drew on the *intersectionality* framework
- Used *three sequential participatory* group interview and individual interviews
- Used an arts-based participatory approach – **resonant texts** to promote critical reflection and dialogue.
 - Resonant texts are **objects of expression** created by the participants, in a format of their choice, to represent their perspectives on gender, cultural identities, and sexualities, or what resonated with their lived experiences.

[Please visit our resonant texts installation in Richmond West room on the 3rd Floor]

Peer Engagement

- Five undergraduate female nursing students of Asian backgrounds were engaged and trained as peer research associates.

Study participation criteria

- self-identified as a young woman of Asian background;
- between the ages of 18-23;
- born in Canada or have lived in Canada for at least 7 years;
- were in a romantic or sexual relationship(s) with (a) guy(s).

Data Collection

1

- **Session #1:** demographic survey + Self identity acculturation scale + resonant texts + dialogue on growing up experiences specific to gender

2

- **Session #2:** sexual health survey + hyper-femininity scale + resonant texts + dialogue on sexuality and sexual practices

3

- **Session #3:** individual resonant texts + dialogue on social transformation + collective resonant texts

Individual Interviews

Preliminary Results

A total of 14 young Asian women (aged 18-23) took part in the study:

- East Asian (n=5); Southeast Asian (n=3); South Asian (n=6)

Group Interview #1	Group Interview #2	Group Interview #3	Individual Interviews
n=14	n=12	n=10	n=9

- Two participant from Peel Region dropped out after first group interview due to school demand and travel time.
- One participant who was not able to join Group Interview #3 took part in a follow-up individual interview.
- Twelve participants expressed interest in staying connected to the CIV Study.

Sexual practices

Age of first time I fell in love (n=11) Range 11-20; Median: 17	Not applicable (n=1)
Age of first time I made out (n=11) Range: 13 -19; Median: 16	Never made out (n=1)
Age of first time I had sex (n=10) Range: 16-20; Median: 18	Never had sex (n=2)

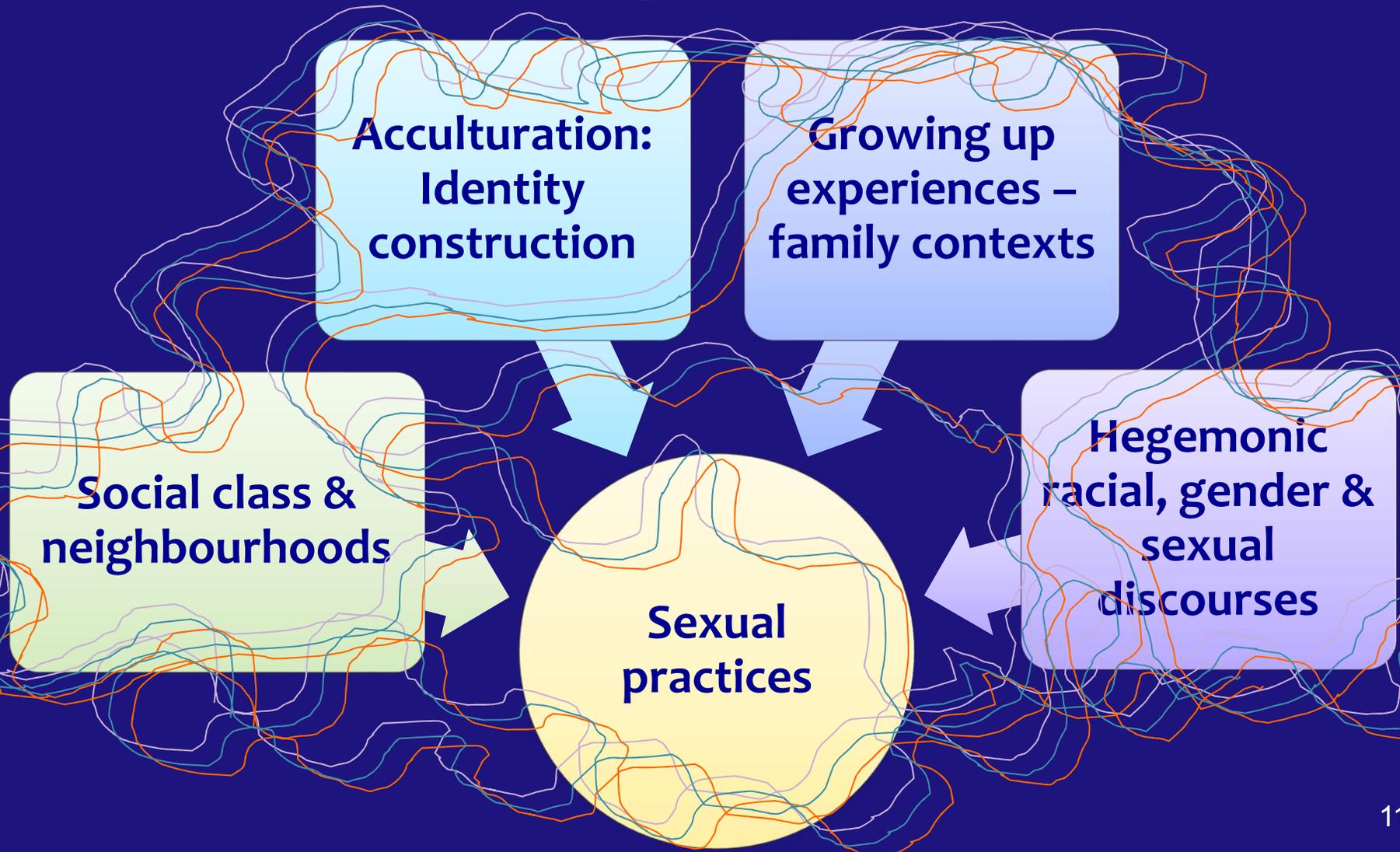
Ethno-racial backgrounds of romantic/sexual partner(s)	N=12
White only	n=4
White & non-White	n=2
Asian, different ethnicity	n=3
Asian, same ethnicity	n=3

Sexual practices

# of sexual partners in past 12 months	N=12	Comfortable talking with partner
>5	n=0	n/a
2 to 4	n=4	n=1
1	n=5	n=5
0	n=1	n=0
Never had sex	n=2	n=0

I suspected / was told by SP that I had a sexually transmitted infection in the past	Yes n=2 (17%)
I suspected that I had a sexually transmitted infection in the past *both participants reported never had sex	I don't know n=2 (17%)*

Cultures, Identities & Sexualities: Complexities



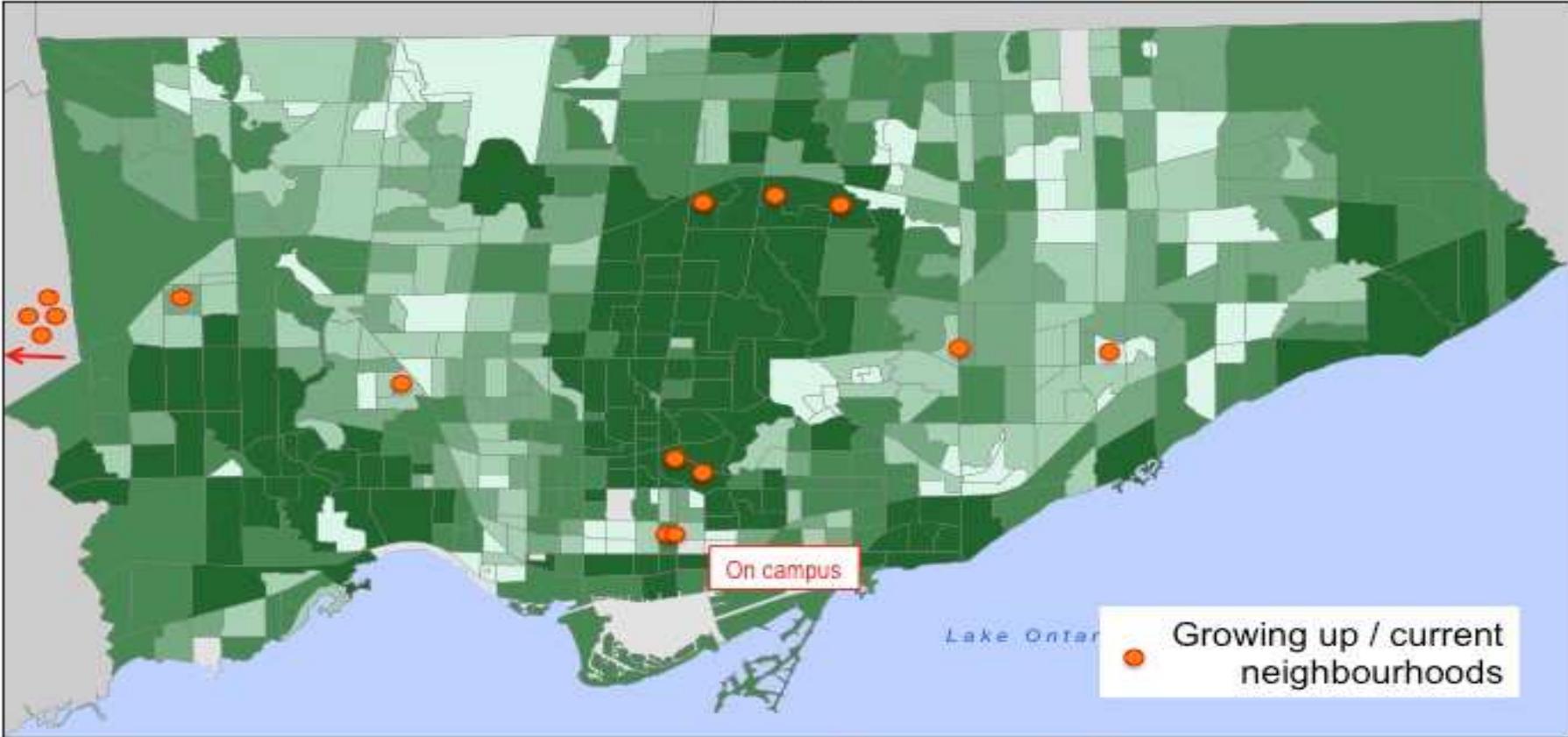
Cultures, Identities, & Sexualities



“... when you're born, your personality and your goals in life are not necessarily solidified just yet... The tree represents the cultural roots. You can see the people who help shape and start to solidify and ground the person. In that sense you're kind of tied to that, not necessarily by choice. They might be friends or family. You can see that they're like less, fluid than this person.” (21, Chinese Canadian)

Growing up experiences: Place Matters

Median Household Income Couple Families, 2006
by Census Tract



Legend

Income \$

- Lightest Green: \$26,631.00 - \$53,129.00
- Light Green: \$53,129.01 - \$63,286.00
- Medium Green: \$63,286.01 - \$72,994.00
- Dark Green: \$72,994.01 - \$95,006.00
- Darkest Green: \$95,006.01 - \$110,843.00

No data or data suppression

Notes: Rate is for Total Persons Less Than 6 Years of Age. Rate is Before Tax.

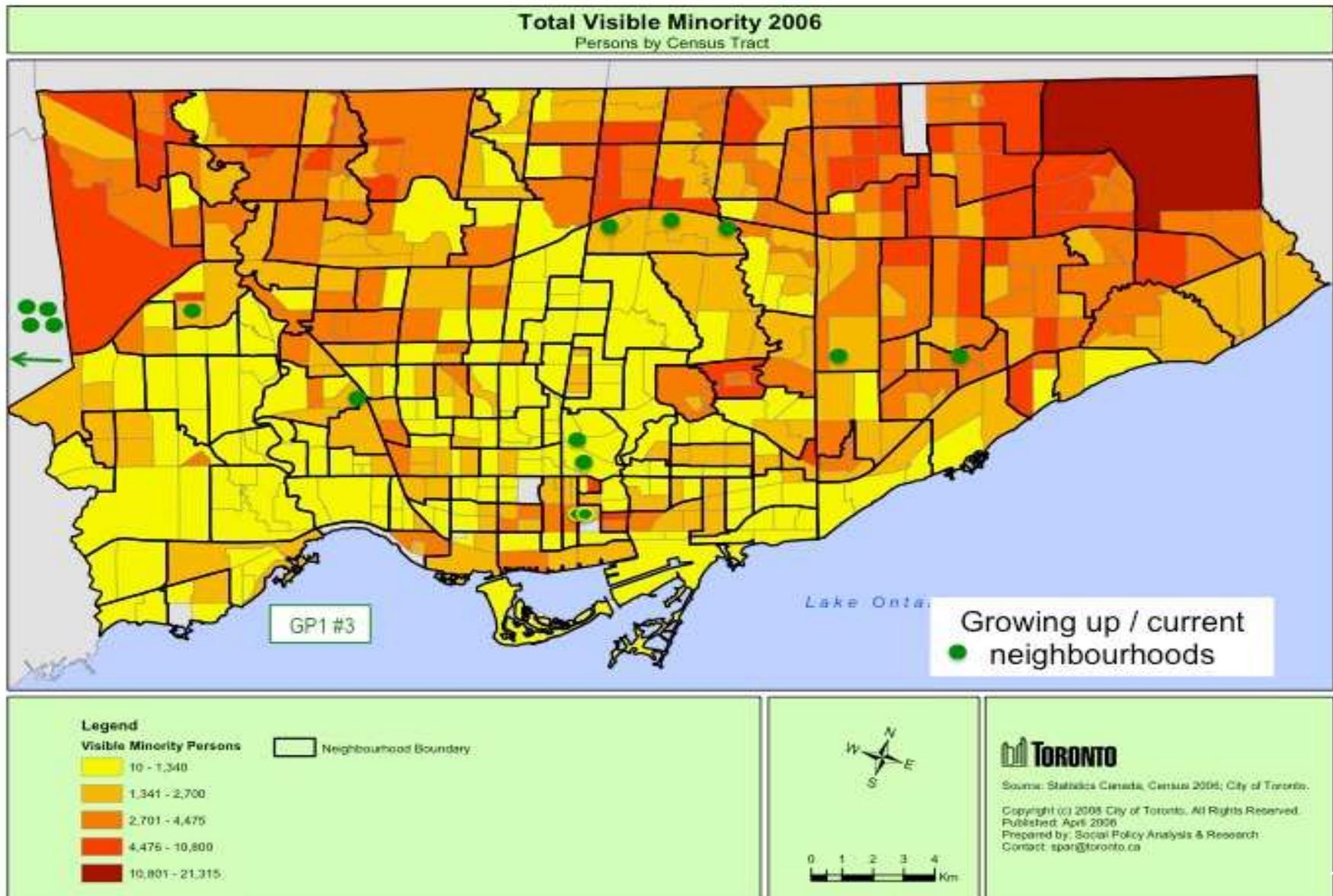
A compass rose showing cardinal directions (N, S, E, W) and a scale bar indicating distances from 0 to 4 kilometers.

TORONTO

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006; City of Toronto.

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Romantic/sexual relationship: Place matters



Growing Up Messages on Sexualities

- The dominant messages our participants received at home were:
 - “Close your eyes” to sexual scenes on TV.
 - “Don’t do it until you finish university.”
 - “Be careful. Don’t get exploited [by guys].”
 - “Now that you have your period, you need to act like a young lady and be home early.”
 - MOST have straight curfew rules.
 - Only one of the participants received a book from parents on puberty and sexuality.

Risk conditions for HIV/STI & negative sexual health outcomes

1. Hegemonic *norms* and sexual stigma that limit choices and impede open communication
2. Lack of *safe space* to learn and discuss sexuality and relationship issues (beyond biomedical 'factual' information)
3. *Unresolved* childhood trauma and ongoing everyday trauma
4. Subtle *interlocking power relations* contextual to age, race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Unresolved Childhood & Everyday Trauma



(21, Filipino)

Reflexivity & Resistance



(22, Korean)

Resiliencies

- Faith and spirituality
- Family support
- Resisting hegemonic norms
- Situational identities
- Strong identities
- Community participation



(23, Sri Lankan)

Recommendations

- Young people-centre empowerment interventions
- Broad based sexual health education that address power relations and social inequities
- Safe space for learning and dialogue about sexuality
- Opportunities for meaningful engagement in Asian and other communities
- A more in-depth study with a larger group of young Asian women.