



# **‘Rona Cyah Cancel Embodied Black Joy: An Emancipatory Inquiry and Experience Design Exploration of Positive Health and Wellbeing; Pleasure, Healing, and Liberation; and Equitable Change in Carnival in the Caribbean**

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This Doctoral Thesis, *'Rona Cyah Cancel Embodied Black Joy: An Emancipatory Inquiry and Experience Design Exploration of Positive Health and Wellbeing; Pleasure, Healing, and Liberation; and Equitable Change in Carnival in the Caribbean*, presented by *Sherine Andreine Powerful, MPH* and Submitted to the Faculty of The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of *Doctor of Public Health*, has been

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*Date: April 7, 2021*



'RONA CYAH CANCEL EMBODIED BLACK JOY: AN EMANCIPATORY INQUIRY AND  
EXPERIENCE DESIGN EXPLORATION OF POSITIVE HEALTH AND WELLBEING;  
PLEASURE, HEALING, AND LIBERATION; AND EQUITABLE CHANGE IN CARNIVAL IN  
THE CARIBBEAN

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A Doctoral Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health  
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‘Rona Cyah Cancel Embodied Black Joy: An Emancipatory Inquiry and Experience Design  
Exploration of Positive Health and Wellbeing; Pleasure, Healing, and Liberation; and Equitable  
Change in Carnival in the Caribbean

**Abstract**

As a spi(ritual) practice and experience rooted in celebrating the resistance, emancipation, and cultural traditions of enslaved Black Africans, Carnival in the Caribbean epitomizes a desire for happier, freer, and healthier existences. Accordingly, its contributions to people’s physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing render it a supportive environment and cultural health asset. Threatening the liberatory practice’s ability to benefit Caribbean people through those aspects, the current COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the cancellation of most Carnivals, drastically limiting opportunities for large-scale communal practices of joy and sociocultural support, and contributing to the unfolding mental health crises taking place around the world. Through an analytical approach encompassing emancipatory inquiry, experience design, and systems thinking, this DrPH doctoral project used Carnival as a site of analysis for: 1) understanding how the cultural practices Caribbean communities already employ positively impact health and wellbeing; 2) illuminating masqueraders’ experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation; and 3) exploring opportunities for increased sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility for a) greater access to and participation by Caribbean people and b) community-and-population level mental health impact.

From March to December 2020, masqueraders from the English-speaking Caribbean who have attended multiple regional Carnivals participated in 37 semi-structured interviews and submitted 78 posts for a Twitter analysis. Thematic and content analyses revealed 18 themes (e.g. “Mental Health Impact of No Carnival due to COVID-19,” “Facilitation of the Body-Mind-Spirit Connection,” “Creation and Celebration of Black Euphoria and Joy,” and “Exclusion/Discrimination as Antithetical to Carnival”) and 35 codes, respectively. Findings

illuminate that Carnival in the Caribbean serves as a 1) community care practice for improved physical and mental health by and for people dealing with oppressive systems and their resulting impacts on wellbeing and 2) cultural adaptation and intervention for Caribbean people and nations navigating and recovering from (neo)colonialism. Results contributed to the development of a desire-based framework to facilitate individual and community flourishing through celebrating culturally-affirming, health-giving practices. Recommendations for equitable change to further Carnival's potential public health impact and contributions to Caribbean people moving beyond surviving to get to flourishing highlight taking actions at the enabling environment level.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of Tables and Figures.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Centrality of the Caribbean in Counteracting Oppression.....	3
Doctoral Project Overview .....	4
Research Stance .....	6
Positionality Statement .....	8
Thesis Contents .....	10
<b>Background, Literature Review, and Framework for Change .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Background .....	12
Origins of Carnival in the Caribbean.....	12
Inclusion/Exclusion in Mas.....	13
Health and Wellbeing Connections.....	16
Carnival as Embodiment and Performance of Hopes and Desires .....	17
Current Existence of Carnival in the Caribbean.....	18
Opportunities for Change .....	20
Literature Review .....	22
Transdisciplinarity of Topics.....	22
Assets-Based Approaches and Desire-Based Frameworks .....	23
Social Capital and Flourishing .....	24
Positive Health and Health Assets .....	25
Cultural Health and Cultural Assets.....	27
Impact of Festivals and Celebrations on Health and Wellbeing.....	28
Attendee Participation Motivation.....	29
Event and Experience Design.....	30
Literature Implications and Gaps .....	32
Analytical Approach.....	32
Emancipatory Inquiry .....	34
Enabling Change.....	37
<b>Methods and Analyses .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Emancipatory Inquiry.....	43
Ethical Protocol .....	43
Overarching Guiding Questions .....	43

Community Advisory Board .....	44
Participants.....	45
In-Depth Interviews .....	47
Twitter Analysis.....	74
Enabling Change .....	79
Empathy Map .....	80
Experience Map.....	81
Actor/Stakeholder Map and Prioritization .....	82
Supporting Activities .....	86
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>88</b>
Overview.....	88
Interpretations.....	89
Implications.....	100
Strengths and Limitations .....	110
Recommendations.....	112
Independent Venture .....	116
Background.....	116
Guiding Concepts: Pleasure Activism and Healing Justice .....	118
Learnings and Evolving Approach .....	120
Looking Ahead and Next Steps.....	121
Reflection on Original Plan.....	123
Actual Timeline.....	123
Completed Deliverables.....	124
Project Goals.....	125
Framework for Change .....	126
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>149</b>



## **List of Tables and Figures**

Table 1. Twitter Analysis Excerpts and Categories

Table 2. Twitter Analysis Code Co-Occurrence

Figure 1. Analytical Approach

Figure 2. Framework for Change

Figure 3. Emancipatory Inquiry Methods

Figure 4. Breakdown of Methods

Figure 5. Twitter Analysis Code Frequency

Figure 6. Empathy Map

Figure 7. Experience Map

Figure 8. Actor/Stakeholder Map

Figure 9. Actor/Stakeholder Prioritization

Figure 10. Actual Project Timeline

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Idalee Mckenzie Campbell  
1922 — 1996

Ada Eugene Louise Gage  
1929 — 2020

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## **Introduction**

Globally, people of historically and currently oppressed backgrounds, including Black, Asian, Latine/x, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander individuals; persons of diverse a/genders and a/sexualities; and disabled and neurodivergent folks, are treated unjustly through ideological, interpersonal, individual, and institutional manifestations of power and oppression. As such, we are constantly denied our humanity and personhood that grant us the right to exist as our truest selves and access the hopes and desires we have for our lives. We are frustrated, burnt out, and crushed from being made to prove our worth in a white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchal world order, never achieving “full status” in societies that devalue us, by default, due to the reigning power structures. And because oppression takes harmful tolls on our communities, we have higher rates of adverse physical health outcomes and mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and others that are often our bodies’ valid trauma responses to kyriarchy<sup>1</sup> (Amala, 2012; Burnette et al., 2019). And now during the COVID-19 pandemic, we face greater excess burden of COVID-19 morbidity/mortality rates in Black, Latine/x, and Indigenous communities because of health inequities caused by structural racism (Cowger et al., 2020).

A counterbalance, that serves as a coping, resilience, or resistance mechanism (or a return to what many believe is the purpose of human existence or the essence of life), is, and can be, the active pursuit of pleasure, healing, and liberation through all the things that bring us joy and freedom, in spite of systemic exploitation. But regularly accessing these in meaningful and fulfilling ways can be difficult, given the various types of violence propagated by interlocking

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<sup>1</sup> Kyriarchy is defined as a sociocultural system of domination encompassing oppressive structures that are multiplicative and intersecting. The varying combinations of relations of dominations change throughout history and create different formations of oppressions in different cultures and times (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2001).

systems of oppression<sup>2</sup> that prevent us from deeply engaging with pleasure and healing on a continual, self-sustaining basis. For example, in the article “I Won’t Let Racism Rob My Black Child of Joy,” Dani McClain (2019) writes about the additional efforts Black american<sup>3</sup> parents have to take in order to 1) ensure their children can “embody the carefree, messy freedom of youth that should be [their] birthright” and 2) remove their children from the many environments and situations in which police murder Black people. In this regard, if oppressive systems like the police industrial complex did not exist, Black people could focus more on life’s different facets, beyond securing physiological survival needs,<sup>4</sup> in order to experience joy as the “most powerful signal of our thriving” (Lee, 2014).

Moreover, the pursuit of pleasure and healing are attained more frequently and consistently by those who have the resources and circumstances that allow them to do so, because they do not have to deal with daily manifestations of deeply entrenched systemic oppression. A somewhat related example is that of nordic countries frequently topping the World Happiness Index, partly because they have *comparatively* more structural care and their governments grant their denizens more autonomy and freedom (this is not absolute, as social inequities also occur in these places) than other economically similar countries (Martela et al., 2020). In turn, this means that the “model” of happy, thriving, resilient human beings tends to reflect cultures whose status in world power structures makes it easier to steadily experience self-determination and joy. Beyond this, resilience and thriving being frequently conceptualized

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<sup>2</sup> This concept of interlocking systems of oppression comes from the Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian socialist collective based in Boston, Massachusetts, u.s. that organized in the 1970s. The inextricable nature of multiple forms of oppression is key to understanding the framework of intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which highlights how the synthesis and simultaneity of these oppressions, and not their addition, create our life conditions (Combahee River Collective, 1986; Crenshaw, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> My decapitalization of european and american countries and affiliated entities follows the practice of Audre Lorde, who uses lowercase letters for “america” and “united states” as a political statement. This will be carried through the rest of the thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Not everyone is able to do this because of the myth of scarcity that fuels capitalism and fosters inequitable distribution of resources.

as aspirational individual traits undermines joy and pleasure as everyday possibilities for entire communities of historically and currently oppressed peoples, particularly Black people across ethnicities. So then, it is not enough to say that our lives matter. We know this, live this, and fight for this. What is paramount is that we deserve to live pleasurable, healing, liberated lives.

### **Centrality of the Caribbean in Counteracting Oppression**

From the beginning of the development of Caribbean societies as syncretism between European, African, Asian, and Indigenous peoples, health for those who had been kidnapped, displaced, and violated through enslavement, indentureship, and genocide has been conceptualized as freedom from enslavement and oppression (Moodley & Bertrand, 2013). It follows, then, that the Caribbean provides a prime sociocultural and geopolitical vantage point to explore nurturing healthier, freer, more joyful futures for Black people and other historically and currently oppressed communities. Located at both a geographical and ideological crossroads, the region has played a critical part in today's world. Renowned Caribbean historian Dr. Lillian Guerra reminds us that “the legacies of [enslavement], imperialism, and historical responses to it are, in the Caribbean, immediately evident in all the ‘weightier’ concepts we associate with modernity: notions of citizenship, individual freedom, collective liberation, and nation” (2014).

This region is home to *the* original large-scale Black liberation movement, the Haitian Revolution, whose executants, such as Cécile Fatiman, led the charge to 1) reclaim freedom and the right to self-determination to actualize the first independent country and first Black republic west of the prime meridian and 2) hallmark Blackness as “a banner for unity and mobilization around a common project of freedom and equality that defied racial and economic injustice worldwide” (Guerra, 2014). Additional radicalized figures who have contributed to freedom efforts to secure a future in which Black Caribbean people both exist and flourish, include Nanny of the Maroons, Andaiye, Peggy Antrobus, Jamaica Kincaid, Claudia Jones, Elma Francois,

Latoya Nugent, Stephanie Leitch, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Marcus Garvey, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon, among others. Their efforts successfully challenge(d) the inequities and injustices inherent to the fallacy of euro-american dominance and exceptionalism and influenced others around the world to do the same (Guerra, 2014).

euro-american colonizers and imperialists built global empires and economies on the blood, sweat, and tears of Caribbean people. And to this day, the Caribbean is still treated as a playground, pawn piece, and plaything<sup>5</sup> for extractive/exploitative motives by corporations, international organizations, wealthier countries, and tourists. Still, this region is also where fortitude, resistance, and the fight for survival converge to assure futures that are not limited by traumatic pasts that continue to impact present existences. Building on the foresight and traditions of their enslaved and displaced ancestors, Caribbean people are actively engaging in efforts to cope, heal, and experience joy as they try to navigate humanity and livelihoods.

### **Doctoral Project Overview**

Carnival in the Caribbean is one example of the pursuit of pleasure, healing, and liberation by historically and currently oppressed peoples. This doctoral project explores the intersections between Carnival (as an emancipatory cultural practice, sociocultural phenomenon, and economic industry); public health (regarding individual and community-level positive physical and mental health and wellbeing); and pleasure, healing, and liberation (in relation to health equity and social justice possibilities). My primary subjects of inquiry are Carnival's positive health and wellbeing benefits; experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation; and possibilities for equitable change. Accordingly, this project uses Carnival in the

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<sup>5</sup> This is in vein with how colonizing european countries 1) abused enslaved Black Africans as "property" during the trans-Atlantic trade; 2) declared the illegality of the institution of enslavement once it was no longer economically viable; and 3) left islands and territories to their own devices under the guise of "benevolently" granting independence, in addition to current day manipulation of Caribbean countries by neoliberal euro-american and Asian counterparts.

Caribbean as a site of analysis for 1) understanding the cultural practices that communities are already employing that contribute to their health and wellbeing; 2) illuminating possibilities for how we can think about improved access to/participation in the many life-enhancing benefits and possibilities Carnival has to offer; and 3) imagining ideas for expanding this to more Caribbean people to achieve the happier, healthier, and freer futures of which we dream. These efforts are distinctly crucial in today's global capitalist context that forces historically and currently oppressed communities to deprioritize our wellbeing for increased productivity and extraction of labor.

This project does so by 1) conducting emancipatory inquiry on Carnival masqueraders'<sup>6</sup> experiences of positive health and wellbeing benefits; possibilities for pleasure, healing, and liberation; and imaginings of how the practice might evolve in the COVID-19 context and 2) applying experience design insights to the emancipatory inquiry evidence base in order to develop recommendations for equitable adaptations to the existing Carnival landscape. In turn, insights gained from this project will be used to inform the development of a creative social entity that will facilitate individual and community flourishing through centering culturally-affirming pleasure, healing, and liberation.

I posit that Carnival is an important cultural health asset in the Caribbean that counters damage-based research approaches that only underscore what communities are doing wrong and then try to "fix" them. This project upholds that Black, Asian, Latine/x, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities, broadly, and those located in the Caribbean, specifically, already hold goodness within, that instead of needing to be fixed, deserve to be uplifted. As such, I will be doing this project for and in community with other Caribbean people who have a stake in preserving, venerating, and improving Carnival and want to see it evolve for the better, especially for the inclusion of more Caribbean people, with an emphasis on those who

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<sup>6</sup> A person who dresses up in costume, uniform, or other designated outfits to take part in Carnival reenactments, performances, and festivities.

have been marginalized due to classism, anti-Queerness, colorism, ableism, etc. By explicitly framing Carnival's benefits as having health and wellbeing implications, in addition to already established economic and development impacts, I present an additional way of thinking about Carnival's assets that can potentially spur innovation and appeal to more entities for multisectoral partnerships and Carnival's continued viability. Reimagining equitable access can get us back to prioritizing Caribbean people, instead of primarily catering to non-Caribbean visitors whose spending fuels the capitalist tourism industry and Caribbean dependence on it.

### **Research Stance**

I ground this work by being explicit about my beliefs about the nature of knowledge, how meaning is made in the universe, who is at the center of my inquiry, and how I am honoring the epistemological stance of subjectivity in this work. Knowing and being explicit about the research paradigms that guide this project help me to hold myself accountable to my values; situate my work and be able to respond if/when this project is questioned; and informs what my questions are, which methods I use, whom I consult as resources; and what I do with my learnings (El-Amin, 2020). And altogether, my research stance helps to situate the fact that as a person of Caribbean heritage, a public health practitioner, and a masquerader/carnivalist<sup>7</sup>, I am intimately linked with what I am exploring. This inquiry is important to me because of my desire to counteract the negativity placed on Carnival as a meaningful practice and to contribute to the dismantling of the hegemony and inequities that have developed over the years.

Accordingly, I approach this work using the Constructivism/Interpretivism and Critical Theory research paradigms, which are compatible in that they share many ontological and epistemological assumptions. Constructivism/Interpretivism is grounded in the idea that realities are created, not discovered, based on multiple contexts and factors, and thus do not

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<sup>7</sup> Someone who actively participates in Carnival culture and travels to multiple Carnivals.



hegemonize or homogenize the experiences unearthed through study (Caton, 2014). As such, whatever findings this project produces are created through my interactions with my participants and the Carnival and positive health context. Being able to employ reflexivity and build meaningful relationships with participants are ethically paramount to this co-creation. Critical Theory is also grounded in the idea that realities are created, but it is explicit about the fact that these realities are situated in history and shaped by systems of oppression that are not natural (El-Amin, 2020). Its end result is meant to enable transformational social change, which resonates deeply with my goals for this work.

Through these paradigms, I intend for this project to lead to the enhancement of the health and wellbeing of Caribbean people who are invested in Carnival (a constructivist outcome). I also hope that the research produced will serve as a window into how participation in Carnival culture may or may not contribute to the exclusion and inequities that prevent others from accessing its positive health and wellbeing benefits (a critical theory outcome) (Caton, 2014). I also acknowledge the inherent tensions in wanting to show care by respecting participants' autonomy in how they perceive Carnival's impact on themselves (constructivist standpoint) versus sharing information about oppressive practices within Carnival's current manifestations so as to nurture growth (critical theory standpoint) (Caton, 2014). As such, my research stance and subsequent methods will enable me to foster dialogue with participants in the effort to honor multiple valid possibilities for interpretations. These methods will also challenge me to disabuse myself of the notions that 1) I have the answers or the truth; 2) I am even the person who should be nurturing education and growth, based on my connections to Caribbean culture and Carnival; and 3) I should always use research as an educational moment. This last point is something I have struggled with in the past as a research interviewer for public health studies in my own communities, where the institution did not provide participants with helpful resources, but I believed we had an ethical obligation to provide people with useful

knowledge and tools. And so, knowing my leanings, I will have to navigate this balance dexterously in my own project.

This emancipatory inquiry work, “[which] reject[s] approaches to inquiry ‘implicated in colonialist traditions of objectivity and treat[s] production of knowledge as a function of social privilege’” (Finley, 2008, p. 74), is anti-oppressive and justice-centered in that I will employ intentional recruitment of participants and ask carefully constructed questions to challenge the social inequities of:

- 1) patriarchy, sexism/genderism, and anti-Queerness: by prioritizing women and people of diverse a/genders and a/sexualities for interviews;
- 2) neocolonialism: by centering people of Caribbean heritage who are involved in Carnival, instead of focusing on or incorporating non-Caribbean tourists;
- 3) capitalism and classism: by rejecting Carnival’s economic benefits as a main priority and by seeking equitable access to Carnival that is not based on capital and ability to pay; and
- 4) ethnicism, colorism, ableism, and sizeism: by seeking perspectives from Carnival actors/stakeholders of a wide range of representations.

### **Positionality Statement**

I am from the Caribbean (Jamaica specifically) by birth and heritage, and everything I have done in life has been in relation to the region. I have lived (t)here as an adult (living here now) and return multiple times a year for personal and professional connections. Many of my friends, family, and colleagues are in the Caribbean, and it is home to my nomadic spirit. I am also a masquerader at heart and in practice, having experienced my first Carnival at the age of four; organized Carnival for 4,000+ people at my undergraduate institution; tried my hand at the creative mas-making<sup>8</sup> component of Carnival; taught the history of Carnival to middle

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<sup>8</sup> Mas-making refers to the creation of Carnival costumes.

school students; attended multiple Carnivals and related events; experienced the health and wellbeing benefits firsthand; and more. My personal and professional interests intersect at the juncture of the 1) implementation of culturally-affirming initiatives for improved health and wellbeing, and 2) actualization of pleasure, healing, and liberation for historically and currently oppressed people, particularly those of diverse a/genders and a/sexualities. My professional trajectory has included relationship and sexuality education, gender-based violence prevention, and health promotion and communication, and I want to further my engagements in these areas by combining anti-oppressive research with anti-oppressive action.

Additionally, I acknowledge my positionality as a part of the Caribbean's Diaspora, having lived most of my life in the u.s. I spent my childhood in the Williamsbridge section of the Bronx (a neighborhood of Caribbean immigrants in New York City), learning and embracing a pan-Caribbean (West Indian) identity that has influenced my academic studies and career. Caribbean feminist scholars Nixon and King (2013) talk about the role of the Diasporic researcher as being fraught because we spend most of our lives away from the Caribbean. They hold true that this physical distance does not mean we in the Diaspora know less about the region, but rather, that we know it *differently* and need to acknowledge these differences by being reflexive about the insights this can bring (Nixon & King, 2013). This notion of knowing differently and being self-aware about the implications of this certainly factors into my role as an actor/stakeholder in this project. It has motivated me to make and strengthen connections with other artists, scholars, and practitioners living in the region, as Nixon and King suggest. Accordingly, I approach this project with the intention to be transparent about the nature of my perspective and approach as a Diasporic Jamaican doing this work through an educational

institution located in the u.s., especially one that has benefitted from the enslavement of Black Africans<sup>9</sup> in the Caribbean.

All these components of my positionality render me both an insider and outsider: an insider/outsider. Throughout the project, my participants will likely have seen me as someone who looks like them, given my skin color, facial features, and dreadlocks, features commonly found on many other people from the Caribbean. Depending on my comfort with the person and what I perceived their positionality to be, I might have loosened my tongue to reduce my New York accent and injected inflections associated with the Jamaican Language. This possibly caused participants to either feel 1) more at ease with speaking freely with me or 2) discomfort at trying to ascertain authenticity and whether I should have felt so comfortable with them. I think the people with whom I interacted for this project may have also assumed, since I have spent most of my life in the Diaspora (an experience often viewed as “living the dream”), that I have more allegiance to the u.s. or that I identify as Black American (neither of which is true). This might have affected how candid they decided to be with me if they had comments to make about people who do not live in the Caribbean flying in to attend Carnival, for example. Regardless, being honest about how my positionality has affected this project is necessary.

## **Thesis Contents**

The next three chapters make up the bulk of this thesis. The Background, Literature Review, and Framework for Change chapter will divulge the context that undergirds this project, provide a review of relevant literature, and summarize my analytical approach. Then the Methods and Analyses chapter will provide insight into my two-phase approach to translate research into action: emancipatory inquiry and enabling change. It includes an explanation of

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<sup>9</sup> I will use “Black African” throughout this thesis to be explicit about which types of Africans and whose ancestors I am centering, given the efforts of non-Black people who live in the African continent to assert their own kind of African identity.

the research process involving interviews and social media, thematic and content analysis, and findings, as well as the application of specific design thinking tools to make sense of the research and the larger project context. In the subsequent Discussion chapter, I elucidate the interpretations, implications, and recommendations of my findings; impact on and future of the organization I am developing in conjunction with this project; and leadership lessons I gained along the thesis journey. These three chapters are rounded out by the conclusion, where I synthesize my primary takeaways and offer insights around further engaging with cultural practices and experience design for improved health outcomes and long-term public health impact.

## **Background, Literature Review, and Framework for Change**

### **Background**

#### ***Origins of Carnival in the Caribbean***

*Content note: This section mentions enslavement, rape, sexual abuse, and sexism, in addition to other types of harm and oppression. Please take care before, during, and after reading.*

The Caribbean-based Carnival practice comes from a centuries-long history of celebrating the emancipation and cultural traditions of enslaved Black Africans and serves as a liberatory jubilee that embodies agency, joie de vivre, and resistance to oppression (Henry & Plaza, 2019). Although it is most plausible that early Spanish colonizers introduced Carnival to the Caribbean, namely Trinidad (Gill, 2018), it is generally believed that in this locale, Carnival has its origins in the 1700-1800s when French colonizers hosted masquerade balls during which they dressed up as enslaved Black African men, who were brutalized in the sugarcane fields, or enslaved half Black/half white women,<sup>10</sup> who were raped by white colonizer men. The influence of the French on the genesis and development of Caribbean Carnivals is often overstated, especially given the French carnival's symbolic origins in Egyptian festivals thousands of years ago (Henry & Plaza, 2019; Liverpool, 1993). This overstatement is often at the expense of Black Africans in the Caribbean (both continent and island-born), whose cultural values, traditions, and principles 1) Africanized the French version of (the Egyptian version of) Carnival and 2) influenced its evolution into a practice with distinct African-Caribbean flavor (Liverpool, 1993), that then became a "celebration of deliverance" instead of just a European nature-festival (Henry & Plaza, 2019, p. 4).

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<sup>10</sup> These women's existence came from their white colonizer sperm-donors raping their enslaved Black African mothers. Other terms are used to describe them, but I will not be replicating them here, due to their harmful nature.

Before Emancipation, official Carnival activities in Trinidad had been solely reserved for white and Creole participants. Some Freed Black Africans participated by wearing masks in public, but enslaved Black Africans were prohibited from doing so (Gill, 2018). Upon observing the mas<sup>11</sup> and reenactments, enslaved Black Africans created their own private societies with activities that parodied the colonizers' mockery and exclusion of them (Gill, 2018; Henry & Plaza, 2019). Both before and after emancipation, many of the Black African traditions reenacted during Carnival were used to resist the European colonizers' oppression of them, as well as to survive the violent conditions of colonialism. Later, changing ethnic and class divisions in Carnival participation led to Black Africans on the island having to re-adapt their practices in order to recharacterize their freedom and establish their own social spaces (Liverpool, 1993).

A renowned Trinidadian Calypsonian, historian, and ethnomusicologist, Hollis "Chalkdust" Liverpool describes the syncretic existence of Carnival as an expression and demonstration of "all the historical features of the cultural identity of Caribbean people: violent struggle, racism, festivity, oppressive legislation, ethnicity, religious differences, discrimination in education and employment, cultural resilience and creativity, communal work habits and ritualization" (1993, p. 33). Beyond Trinidad, enslaved Black Africans and their emancipated descendants lived out their Carnival cultural practices in places currently known as Jamaica, Barbados, Haiti, Bahamas, St. Kitts and Nevis, Cuba, Bermuda, and Grenada, among other lands around the region (Liverpool, 1993).

### ***Inclusion/Exclusion in Mas***

Carnivals in the Caribbean play a social role—serving as a means for cultural promotion and social impact—and have inclusivity at their core (IADB, 2020). Even so, they have always

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<sup>11</sup> Short for masquerade.

occupied and produced very gendered spaces (Modeste, 2019), seemingly belying their original inclusive intentions. In these Carnivals' earliest forms, due to the cisheteropatriarchal nature of societies colonized by europeans, men performed characters symbolizing resistance and the fight for freedom, while women were relegated to the sidelines, expected to uphold acceptable societal values by staying out of the mas. Marginalized from the main costumed celebrations, many women participated in Carnival's early morning J'ouvert (i.e. dutty mas a.k.a. dirty mas) celebrations, in which participants cover themselves in paint, powder, mud, oil, etc., giving them anonymity and representing the important role they played in Carnival (Henry & Plaza, 2019). When they first began participating in main Carnival events, women mostly sang or danced as the opening or intermission acts between events enacted by men, such as stickfighting (also known as kalinda, calenda, etc.) and calypso performances.

In addition to their fighter and freedom characters, men donned dresses or "pretty" costumes to perform feminine characters (Henry & Plaza, 2019), such as Dame Lorraine of Trinidad or Mother Sally of the Cropover festival<sup>12</sup> in Barbados (King, 2014), through exaggerated padding of the chest and butt areas (Gill, 2018). These gendered performances, rather than being progressive transcendence of colonizer-imposed gender norms, hinged on a mockery of lower/working-class Afro-Caribbean femininity, sexuality, and womanhood, as well as a buttressing of cisheteropatriarchal masculinity (King, 2014). Their portrayals reflected the caricature, derision, and absence of women, as well as gender non-conforming people, as welcomed and respected participants in earlier Carnivals.

This mockery and repression began to be contested between the 1830s and mid-1900s when Trinidad saw the rise and visibility of the Jamette, the term for an economically-deprived Afro-Trinidadian woman who rejected propriety, in Carnival (Gill, 2018). Jamettes contributed to the evolution of positive sexuality in Carnival by providing space for more open sexual

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<sup>12</sup> This event originally celebrated the end of the crop planting season during times of enslavement.



expression that challenged control of their bodies and subverting the colonial imposition that these Black bodies were grotesque. Jamettes “blur[red] the lines between male and female... to create the possibility for alternate, ‘unruly’ and ‘wild’ sexualities (i.e. those which are not monogamous, marital, heterosexual, or otherwise sanctioned)” (King, 1999 as cited in Scher, 2019, pp. 60-1). Today, women have become the “face” of the Carnival institution and industry, dominating challenges to euro-american gender roles and embodying political resistance and economic empowerment. Contemporary Carnivals provide space for the reclamation of bodily autonomy and sexual liberation that is oppositional to respectability politics and centers the pleasure and joy women experience (Hosein, 2017).

Even with plenty of gender-subversive performances, there is no explicit reference to or documentation of the participation of people outside and beyond the euro-american gender binary in earlier Carnival iterations. Still, even in its existence as a practice that upended and parodied existing social dynamics, that rejected the hegemony of colonizer-imposed hierarchies, Caribbean Carnival has tended to have an inherent Queerness to it (Mahoney, 2019). This reflects how the “Caribbean was ‘Queer’ long before Queer [theory or praxis] came about” because its societies did not fit the norms of european colonizers (Ghisyawan, 2015, p. 161; Persadie, 2020).<sup>13</sup> Even so, in modern versions of Carnival, disconcertingly there are still inequities and pushback against who can participate in the cultural celebrations, with dynamics of sexism, anti-Queerness, classism, sizeism, puritanism, healthism, misogyny, etc., that are counter to the essence of Carnival as an emancipatory cultural practice.

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<sup>13</sup> Here I note that contemporary use of the word “Queer” in the Caribbean is often a contested one, with dichotomizing debates on whether it is an imperialist imposition from euro-american societies or a sincere expression of liberation from societal norms. It is gaining widespread use around the region, especially among younger generations. But there are existing, Caribbean-created words, such as zami and mati, that reflect Caribbean notions of non-binary, non-heteronormative a/genders and a/sexualities (Ghisyawan, 2015). For the purposes of this proposal I will use Queer as shorthand, with the acknowledgment that the term does not fully encompass the depth and breadth of Caribbean thought and realities.

## ***Health and Wellbeing Connections***

In addition to the resistance and resilience that permeate the core of Carnival and hold symbolic, spiritual, cultural, and social worth, there are identifiable health and wellbeing connections that offer additional value to people and communities. These days, throughout the Caribbean's year-round Carnival season (Global Carnivalist, 2020), individuals, businesses, non-profits, and governments alike take the opportunity to engage in and encourage healthful behaviors, such as nutritious eating, physical activity, and disease prevention, to maximize ability to partake in the indulgent festivities (Caribbean Public Health Agency, 2016). Part of this messaging focus comes from the transition from more traditional costumes with plentiful cloth to lighter, contemporary "bikini-and-beads" costumes and the increase in the number of events during Carnival season. So, people's motivation to participate serves as a good foundation for health behavior communication campaigns that speak to masqueraders' desires to show off the physiques they have worked hard for while building up their endurance (Copeland, 2010). Additionally, increased messaging around "responsible" use of alcohol, prophylactics, or marijuana, as well as asking for consent to dance during the festivities, promote harm-reduction practices. Many groups, such as Lost Tribe, UN Women Caribbean, and #NotAskingForIt have used Carnival as a space for advocacy and activism campaigns in response to violence against people of diverse marginalized a/genders and a/sexualities, highlighting cis and Trans women in particular (UN Women Caribbean, 2019).

Soyini Grey (2017) describes Carnival as providing psychological release through the creation of an environment in which participants could momentarily forget the daily tribulations in their lives via the outlets of music and dance and reclaim empowerment taken away by societal powers. Art psychotherapist and masquerader Satori Hassanali asserts the possibility of Carnival as therapy to heal from trauma (Grey, 2017). Hassanali connects the modalities of the creative arts therapies (e.g., music therapy, drama therapy, art therapy, play therapy, and dance therapy) to the principles or elements present within Caribbean Carnivals (Grey, 2017) that

essentially render them group therapy to heal from long-standing oppression. In a similar vein, in her TED talk “Reclaiming sexual identity through Carnival,” clinical sexologist and theater artist Onika Henry shares her research findings that masqueraders use Carnival to heal from sexual violence and move towards achieving sexual wellness. Henry believes that “Carnival gives postcolonial societies tools to reclaim our ancestral wisdom in order to achieve sexual well-being” and sees it as a form for “healing, catharsis, and transformation,” especially as it relates to our ancestors’ much more expansive notions of a/genders and a/sexualities (Henry, 2019).

### ***Carnival as Embodiment and Performance of Hopes and Desires***

Certainly, the multifaceted yearly jamborees present ample opportunities for positive public health impact. Altogether, the aspiration for improved health and social relationships through these endeavors, in addition to the aforementioned survival, resistance, and resilience aspects, indicate that this cultural practice has profound implications for Caribbean people’s overall flourishing (i.e. optimal wellbeing). Surely, Carnival epitomizes a desire for a more pleasurable and liberated existence and is imbued with hope and vitality for more nurturing lived realities, which are particularly important for a region increasingly contending with the challenges of adverse weather events and geologic hazards,<sup>14</sup> advancing development, and public health threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Chase et al., 2014; Paul, 2018; Trebucq, 2020).

Carnival confers physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological benefits to participants and provides space to symbolically transcend oppressive mores regarding the existence of people from historically and currently marginalized backgrounds, rendering it both a supportive

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<sup>14</sup> Around the time of the final submission of this thesis, it will have been one week since La Soufrière volcano began erupting in St. Vincent and the Grenadines on April 9, 2021. The eruptions are ongoing, with pyroclastic flows and ashfall causing environmental degradation, adverse impacts to Vincentians’ respiratory and mental health, and infrastructural damage, resulting in over 20,000 people (of a total population of ~110,000) having to be evacuated (Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, 2021; British Broadcasting Company, 2021). This current situation is yet another example of the often precarious realities and setbacks that Caribbean people face while trying to move beyond survival mode.

environment and a cultural health asset. Overall, the exuberant spirit of Carnival in the Caribbean makes it a fluid site of analysis encompassing freedom and agency; celebrations of the embodied selves, a/sexualities, and a/gender expansiveness; moving beyond surviving to get to flourishing; and hope for current and future possibilities for pleasure, healing, and liberation. Although research on the health and wellbeing benefits that Carnivals in the Caribbean provide to both regional and Diasporic masqueraders is limited, there have been at least a few researchers exploring this in specific locations, such as Dr. Natalie Creary-Aninakwa, in the context of Notting Hill Carnival in the United Kingdom (Center for Culture and the Arts, 2017) and Dr. Raedene P. Copeland (2010) in the context of Trinidad's transition to bikini-and-beads mas. Overall, there is much we can learn from Carnival's enrapturing, enticing, and euphoric characteristics and individual and community benefits that we can utilize as we envision and reimagine worlds in which we are happier, healthier, and freer.

### ***Current Existence of Carnival in the Caribbean***

Carnivals around the region differ in their structure, but common elements include: street parades of Carnival bands/troupes; costumed sections populated by dancing masqueraders within those bands, with costumes often serving as artistic storytelling devices; music trucks, steelbands, and riddim sections driving the pace, tempo, and timbre of the celebrations; traditional and contemporary musical and cultural performances; pre-dawn J'ouvert/Jouvay (a.k.a. dutty mas) rituals of dancing and throwing paint, powder, water, mud, chocolate, etc.; and traditional arts practices such as stiltwalking (done by characters called moko jumbies in some countries), fire-breathing, and stick-fighting.

This emancipatory cultural practice has evolved into an economic industry (namely being part of the creative and cultural industries), a money-making entity tied closely with the tourism, media, retail, entertainment, and hospitality sectors (Association of Caribbean States, 2014), that often caters more to non-Caribbean people who want to partake in the festivities ,

(depending on the location). People who are unable to buy their inclusion into the priced elements of the experience are sometimes precluded from total participation by not having the financial resources to devote to Carnival. Undoubtedly, there is an increasing level of exclusivity to Carnival based on ability to pay and socioeconomic status, and even along the lines of a/gender, a/sexuality, and race/ethnicity, etc. that invisibilize and trivialize the plight of those who want to, but do not or cannot participate. Of course, this is country-specific. But many of the larger, more popular, more influential Carnival entities maintain this exclusivity, as it allows them to reap greater profits, while smaller entities, especially those that honor the anti-oppression roots of Carnival, are often strapped for resources. Carnival has now become more of a luxury, whereas in recent history a wider variety of people used to be able to participate (Strachan & Taylor, 2020). This inevitably means that people are being left out of the health and wellbeing benefits that Carnival provides.

Current analyses of Carnivals' benefits focus on the amount of jobs and revenue they create for the country, territory, or region's economy. A 2020 report by the Inter-american Development Bank discusses how Carnival is seen as having great social impact through an economic expansion lens. It also mentions innovative ways to increase the accessibility and safety of Carnival through technologies such as augmented reality, facial recognition, and real-time translation (IADB, 2020). As Carnival scholar Dr. Jo-Anne Tull (2017) asserts, there is a "growing preference in the region for economic impact assessments, which... have also resulted in heavy emphasis on the business of festivals as the only critical concern for national societies" (p. 298). This is vastly different from this project's upliftment and exploration of Carnival's health and wellbeing impact and possibilities for equitable change (prioritizing sustainability, accessibility, and inclusivity) as worthy of study, praxis, and national and regional interest.

## ***Opportunities for Change***

In what I have seen thus far, there is little research on the positive health and wellbeing benefits of Carnival in the Caribbean. Most of the research on Carnival explores its performance, festival, sociocultural, traditional, aesthetic, and (now) economic viability aspects (Tull, 2009). And while there are texts that explore Carnival as an emancipatory practice which speak to its pleasure, healing, and liberation possibilities, there is no discussion yet on how to expand these prospects. Additionally, our current reality of experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in the postponement/cancellation of most 2020 and 2021 Carnivals, has spurred many of us in the community to take the opportunity to reimagine what Carnival looks like and how it needs to evolve beyond the narrow consideration of the impact on economies and tourism. This absence of physical Carnivals is critical, as even in the middle of global blockades, social tumult, political emergencies, and economic threats, Carnival tends to continue (Nixon, 2015), save for rare cases, like the polio outbreak in 1972 that caused Trinidad to postpone Carnival from February to May (Khan, 2014). Indeed, throughout history, many of the major changes to Carnival have been facilitated by events that changed economic, political, and social landscapes (Liverpool, 1993). Given that we now find ourselves in the midst of a global disease outbreak, we are due for changes in Carnival that will lead to increased equity and improved health impacts.

People in the Caribbean Carnival community are speculating about the future of our Carnivals and how they are going to change after COVID-19 because of the multifaceted meanings these practices hold. In digital discourse spaces like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Clubhouse, people are posing questions such as: is Carnival going to get cheaper? Are entities involved going to shift to making Carnival more locally-focused, like it used to be? Will people, from the Diaspora, as well as those not of Caribbean heritage, still want to participate in and/or travel for Carnival given concerns about how rapidly COVID-19 has been spreading? Will people even be able to afford Carnival since many have lost their main sources of income? What will happen to large-scale costume-making and distribution, since the majority of the materials

now come from outside the region (particularly from China)? In what ways will the different Caribbean countries and territories have to rely on each other to ensure Carnival's long-term viability? Will people have the option to recycle past costumes? Will the occurrence of stormers<sup>15</sup> decrease if Carnivals become more affordable and accessible? Is this an opportunity for the decommercialization of Carnival that so many of us have been seeking? (Strachan & Taylor, 2020). What can be done to adapt Caribbean Carnivals to our changing world and make them more accessible so that the cultural practices can continue and include more people? And is COVID-19 an opportunity to bring us back to the essence of Carnival, what it represents, and how it makes people feel?

At the heart of all of these questions is the deep love and care many Caribbean people have for this practice/ritual/tradition. At its core, Carnival speaks to our desires to live liberated, joyful lives in community with one another. It provides us with social and cultural connections and contributes to more positive states of mind and being, as people feel more beautiful, more accepted, more themselves after taking part in Carnival events. This leads to masqueraders' euphoric highs, which linger for a while before spiraling into *tabanca*, an intense depression or sadness that elicits "deeply rooted longing and insatiable desire" (LargeUp Crew, 2014), because of Carnival's absence. This is no trivial matter. The beauty and appeal of Carnival is more about what it does for us socially, emotionally, and spiritually as people, more than what it does economically for our countries/territories. As a communal practice of joy (Henry & Sorzano, 2020), creativity, and subversion, Carnival arose out of a time when our ancestors had little autonomy or economic power. In this world that has been forever altered by COVID-19 and is increasingly recognizing the importance of health, wellbeing, and community care, Carnivals will have to continue evolving and innovating in sustainable and accessible ways, especially

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<sup>15</sup> People who do not pay for the priced portions of Carnivals but show up at the celebrations anyway.

around ensuring masqueraders' physical and mental health and providing them access to the feelings and experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation that keep them returning.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Transdisciplinarity of Topics***

Transdisciplinary research focuses on the topic being researched rather than trying to fit it into one discipline-specific domain. As an approach, it seeks holistic collaboration between multiple fields for intensive integration between them. Given its responsive nature and social justice foundation, transdisciplinary research tends to be iterative, necessitating participatory methods that employ creativity, innovation, and flexibility. And in addition to transcending disciplinary borders, it also transcends geographical borders through coalitions and partnerships (Leavy, 2016). All of these are qualities that align with the values of this project.

The literature and theories employed in this thesis come from multiple disciplines (e.g. public health, social justice, psychology, Indigenous studies, Caribbean feminism, cultural analysis, etc.) and interact with and build upon one another. Operating from the lens of transdisciplinarity in this project ensures that I am able to address the connections between Carnival in the Caribbean; positive health and wellbeing; and pleasure, healing, and liberation in a more synergistic and comprehensive manner than would be possible through the lens of a single field. As such, transdisciplinarity is appropriate and necessary, especially given that Carnival itself is transdisciplinary, spanning the domains of arts and performance, heritage and culture, environment and infrastructure, economics, tourism, health, community development, politics, etc. This section will explore the select research areas of assets-based approaches and desire-based frameworks; social capital and flourishing; positive health and health assets; cultural health and cultural assets; the impact of festivals and celebrations on health and



wellbeing; attendee participation motivation; and event and experience design. Although there are many others relevant areas, these are the most salient to this project.

### ***Assets-Based Approaches and Desire-Based Frameworks***

Assets-based approaches center the positive skills, capacity, and knowledge of people and their communities, treating these as infrastructure upon which positive futures can be built. They also promote communities as co-creators of health and concentrate on investing in their development. The social contexts of people's lives hold many of the pivotal factors required to enable health, which therefore means that they are appropriate sites of analysis for the reduction of health inequities (Ewen, 2011). Given the increase in crises and challenges of all sorts that have implications for health and wellbeing, there needs to be a transformational shift in approaches to health that employ innovative ways of supporting and engaging with people and communities to prevent inequities from expanding. And being able to assess and strengthen communities' assets can foster innovative ways of approaching public health that can provide such shifts (Ewen, 2011).

Dr. Eve Tuck, who is Unangax̂, is a scholar of Critical Race and Indigenous studies. She offers the concept of a desire-based framework as a way to intentionally conduct research that will bring about justice for Indigenous peoples without treating their communities as broken. A desire-based framework is one that creates holistic representation by centering communities' stories about themselves rather than relying on stereotypes about those communities. It honors complexity and lived experiences and makes space for contradiction and self-determination. Such frameworks also focus on the present reality that has been enriched by the past and will be enhanced by the future (Tuck, 2009). This is important because a desire-based framework pushes back against and offers a counterpart to the damage-centered/ deficits-focused language and framing that dominate social change initiatives (which further dehumanizes the people such efforts seek to help), in order to hold accountable those in power to the harm they have

benefited from and/or caused. But desire-based frameworks are not in complete opposition to damage-based frameworks, as they also acknowledge traumatic, painful, and tragic experiences. Their approach is to respect, as wise, the knowing that comes from these experiences (Tuck, 2016). While Dr. Tuck's conceptualization prioritizes Indigenous peoples, desire-based approaches can be expanded to research and work done in/with/by various historically and currently oppressed communities.

### ***Social Capital and Flourishing***

There are many definitions of social capital, but essentially it is an individual characteristic defined as the resources available to all the members of a social group (Villalonga-Olives et al., 2018). It focuses on social networks, the reciprocal exchanges within them, and the meaning and importance of said exchanges for accomplishing goals (Eriksson, 2011). Social capital can be organized into various domains. Structural social capital is in the domain of networks and institutions and concerns what people do in social relations. Cognitive social capital is in the domain of solidarity, trust, and reciprocity, and refers to what people feel. Social capital can also be broken down into types: linking (vertical ties among people in different power hierarchies, bridging (weaker ties between people of different networks), and bonding (strong ties within a network) (Eriksson, 2011).

Existing literature show significant associations between health and social capital, particularly in relation to cognitive social capital and self-rated health. On an individual level, being involved in social networks provides social participation opportunities which can foster a feeling of belonging to a community. Social capital through such involvement impacts health and wellbeing by bestowing meaningfulness and a sense of solidarity to individuals (Eriksson, 2011). On a community level, social capital can impact health by spreading healthful norms, leading to the adequate sharing of health knowledge and information, and shaping health-enabling environments. In order to promote health via a community development approach for

collective social capital, health promotion programs can enhance the infrastructure of a flourishing community by nurturing environments in which both communities and individuals can be empowered (Eriksson, 2011).

Flourishing is defined as complete wellbeing, or the sustained state of being filled with positive emotion and functioning well socially and psychologically (Keyes, 2002). It encompasses five domains: 1) physical and mental health, 2) close social relationships, 3) character and virtue, 4) happiness and life satisfaction, and 5) meaning and purpose (VanderWeele, 2017). Presently, most public health research is limited to narrow definitions of health outcomes instead of overall wellbeing and flourishing. Seligman (2011) argues that wellbeing is a construct, and as such, it is not directly operationalized, but has several measurable elements. Existing measurements of wellbeing (which have typically come from the psychology field) inquire about life satisfaction, autonomy, self-determination, hedonic happiness, self-acceptance, engagement, vitality, and resilience, among other attributes. The current work of public health practitioners and researchers is contributing to more expansive, comprehensive, and methodologically sound ways of measuring flourishing.

### ***Positive Health and Health Assets***

Positive health is defined as wellbeing beyond the lack of disease, and it identifies functional health assets (such as participation in a social community); biological health assets, (such as fitness); and subjective health assets (such as positive emotions) (Seligman et al., 2013). Optimal wellbeing (a.k.a. flourishing) is characterized as feeling good and functioning well (Prendergast, 2016). Positive health developed out of positive psychology, which pushes back against the limited definition of mental health as the absence of mental illness (Seligman et al., 2013). Similarly, public health, by definition, is about health, but in practice, it focuses more on disease and risk factors than it does on health and health assets. This gives an incomplete

picture of the forces that shape health, and alone they do not provide explanations for the variation in resilience and people's abilities to thrive (VanderWeele et al., 2020).

It is important to note that both positive health and positive psychology do not deny harm, suffering, and illness; rather, they endorse the idea that one of the most optimal ways to improve health and wellbeing is by leveraging strengths (Seligman et al., 2013). Research is increasingly showing that positive behavioral, environmental, and social health assets contribute to health and may even mitigate the adverse effects of past and current harm (VanderWeele et al., 2020). This notion that people and communities can tap into already existing health assets to prevent, navigate, or overcome the negative impacts of various harms ties closely with assets-based approaches to public health. And as a budding discipline, positive health is closely related to the fields of health promotion, disease prevention, and wellness. By paying attention to positive health assets, people can be attuned to good health in a way that exclusively focusing on negative health aspects does not (Seligman et al., 2013).

Neglecting to examine positive health assets, such as communal and relational factors and psychological states, undermines understanding of population-level health and wellbeing. However, these are not important only because of their impact on physical health and the potential to reduce disease; they are worthwhile in their own right. Consideration and inclusion of positive health assets, in conjunction with existing disease risk factor approaches, can help public health practitioners and researchers get closer to the World Health Organization's definition of health (VanderWeele et al., 2020). Positive health also speaks to the fact that there are things people care about, and that they have reasons and motivations for doing the things they do, other than disease prevention, which, in turn, leads them to make tradeoffs between physical health and these other things (VanderWeele, 2020). Utilizing a positive health approach provides a fitting alternative to the deficits and damage-based approaches common to public health systems and interventions.

## ***Cultural Health and Cultural Assets***

Cultural health is defined as 1) having an intimate awareness of one’s culture and experiences so that there is an understanding of how these influence personal worldviews, value systems, and habits and practices; and 2) acknowledging and honoring the culture and experiences of other people and being able to understand and empathize with different perspectives. Persons build cultural health through learning more about and engaging with their own and others’ cultures and when they are able to have experiences and engage with other people to strengthen community and individual wellbeing in culturally-affirming ways (Project School Wellness, 2021).

A cultural asset is “something that has value because of its contribution to a community’s creativity, knowledge, traditions, culture, meaning, and vitality” (City of Austin, 2021). Cultural assets can be physical locations, such as places to visit that provide a sense of cultural identity, or resources one uses to engage and honor their creative practices (City of Austin, 2021). They can be tangible resources for natural heritage and arts, such as cultural events and festivals, artist networks, urban design, organizations, occupations (Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2021), physical art, buildings and facilities, etc. (City of Austin, 2021). Or they can be intangible, like cultural relationships, narratives, rituals that help to define a community (Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2021), or icons or landmarks no longer in existence (City of Austin, 2021).

Combining cultural health and cultural assets together leads to the notion of cultural health assets, which are described by Lightfoot et al. (2016) as assets that are 1) related to the unique ways of living employed by members of a culture and 2) influence the health of those persons and their community. In their research on Somali and Oromo refugees in Minnesota, Lightfoot et al. (2016) used a community-based participatory research approach to describe the cultural health assets present in both groups. Among those that emerged were religious and cultural practices, interconnectedness and social gathering, traditional healthful eating and

healthful lifestyles, valuing health, culture of sharing, prominence of oral traditions, religion and religious beliefs, and traditional foods and medicines (Lightfoot et al., 2016). The naming of these cultural health assets grants space to use them in other applicable settings for the creation of culturally appropriate community initiatives for the purpose of reducing health inequities.

### ***Impact of Festivals and Celebrations on Health and Wellbeing***

Festivals and other community events provide opportunities to enhance relationships and social interactions, which can contribute positively to people's wellbeing. These large-scale celebrations also facilitate opportunities for meaning-making for both residents and visitors and have the potential for positive socio-cultural benefits such as cultural recovery (Yolal et al., 2016). Accordingly, positive experiences at festivals can increase individual subjective wellbeing and overall happiness. Curious about these potential effects, researchers have assessed the relationships between community members' perceptions of their subjective wellbeing, community benefits' sociocultural impacts, concerns around quality of life, cultural/educational benefits, and community resource considerations. The relationship they found between cultural/educational benefits and subjective wellbeing and between community benefits and subjective wellbeing were significant and positive (Yolal et al., 2016).

Community-based cultural activities have a role to play in addressing the social determinants of mental health and wellbeing through social connectedness, social inclusion, and social capital, more broadly, and community-building, more locally. Some of the existing studies that explore the health impact of cultural activities and festivities have shortcomings that highlight the need for more methodologically sound research exploring both short and long-term impacts (Mulligan et al., 2006). A study done by Carson et al. (2007) found that community arts had the potential to both deliver health-promotion messages and provide

benefits to upstream<sup>16</sup> health determinants. However, research in this area tends to be limited in methodology and scope, focusing mostly on specific places, events, or activities (Mulligan et al., 2006). Additional studies that have linked cultural participation to individual wellbeing described such engagement as a means of self-presentation, and those that assessed the impact of cultural activities on wellbeing have found that engaging in cultural activities plays key roles in life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing (Ateca-Amestoy et al., 2016).

### ***Attendee Participation Motivation***

Research on participants of large-gathering events have identified various motivations, such as cultural exploration, curiosity, excitement, togetherness, personal and professional development, location, health and wellbeing, networking opportunities, self-esteem, positive experiences, entertainment, and aesthetics (Sharples et al., 2014). Hutton et al. (2018) identified motivations such as seeking an escape from everyday life, displaying religiosity and faith, and being part of a community. Insights into these motivations can be used to impact health and wellbeing in numerous ways (Hutton et al., 2018). Most of the research on event attendee/participant motivation has been quantitative in nature, lacking theoretical conceptualization that would provide deeper, interdisciplinary understanding in order to create more impactful events. As such, there is a need for a holistic approach that connects motivations, expectations, identity, and environment to attend to psychological, social, cognitive, environmental, and emotional factors and needs, which are considered the five factors of the attendee (Sharples et al., 2014).

Hutton et al. (2018) also noted that participants at festivals and celebrations do not always prioritize their health and wellbeing over other motivations, sometimes engaging in activities such as alcohol and food overconsumption, long journeys resulting in exhaustion and

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<sup>16</sup> That is, systems-level factors that affect health.

sunburn, condomless sex, etc. Some people may ignore injuries or illness in order to keep participating, and others (knowingly and unknowingly) spread infectious diseases at such gatherings (Hutton et al., 2018). Since events are generally meant to be positive experiences for participants, organizers have a vested interest in ensuring public health efficacy and efficiency. To date, many of them have done so with interventions like water, shade/sunblock, condoms, etc., but there is an increased need to take participants' attendance motivations into consideration in order to develop initiatives and strategies that support their health. Events and experiences can be enhanced to improve the health and wellbeing of participants, especially around increased safety and harm reduction (Hutton et al., 2018).

### ***Event and Experience Design***

Jim Gilmore, co-author of “The Experience Economy” with B. Joseph Pine II, describes an experience as “a memorable event that engages a guest in an inherently personal way, but unlike a service that is rendered on demand, an experience unfolds over time” (Solaris & Hurt, 2019). Rossman and Duerden (2019) define an experience as “a unique interactional phenomenon resulting from conscious awareness and reflective interpretation of experience elements that is sustained by a participant, culminating in personally perceived results and memories” (p. 10). Additionally, they describe experiences as having the capacity to be deeply intimate and impactful. This necessitates intentional design to achieve these results, particularly through the microexperiences (also known as touchpoints or encounters) that make up the larger macroexperience—comprised of the anticipation (before), participation (during), and reflection (after) phases—to create a cohesive experiencescape (all of the elements that constitute the structured environment of an experience) (Rossman & Duerden, 2019).

Given the latitude of meanings of “experience”, it follows then, that there are multiple definitions of experience design. Aarts and Marzano (2003) describe experience design as approaches that center the quality of a person's experience in order to achieve more culturally



relevant solutions. Maritz Global Design (2021) defines experience design as the holistic, people-centered combination of human behavior research and event strategy to create event experiences. Solaris and Hurt (2019) think of experience design as being about bringing people together into a similar-minded state of being via a shared experience's transformational power. And Rossman and Duerden (2019) characterize experience design as "the process of intentionally orchestrating experience elements to provide opportunities for participants to co-create and sustain interactions that lead to results desired by the participant and the designer" (p. 14). In vein with so many definitions, experience design can be considered a wicked problem because of the complexity of human behavior and producing desirable outcomes without clear solutions and multiple stakeholders whose priorities contrast (Rossman & Duerden, 2019).

With multiple denotations come multiple experience design approaches, such as service design, interaction design, customer experience design, communication design, visual design, and user experience design (Rossman & Duerden, 2019; Design for Health, n.d.-b). Event experience design, in particular, is an approach that focuses on the motivations, preferences, needs, and interests of the primary attendees in order to create meaningful events that align with or exceed participants' expectations and planners/organizers' goals (Wong, 2018). The six elements of event experiences are: 1) "engaging attendees," 2) "creating memories," 3) "fostering change," 4) "involving the five senses," 5) creating "a cohesive event story," and 6) "having a shared purpose" (Solaris & Hurt, 2019). Producing these elements must be done holistically by incorporating the five requirements of participants' satisfaction with their experiences: psychological, social, emotional, cognitive, and environmental, as indicated in the earlier section on attendee participation motivation (Sharples et al., 2014).

It follows that mapping is critical for the creation of wholly interconnected events and/or experiences for all actors/stakeholders (Mirzaie, 2017). Given that experiences are generally thought of as intangible, even though they have very tangible components, techniques such as graphs, maps, and frameworks help to visualize experiences in ways that make them feel more

concrete for comprehension. The main mapping typologies for experience design are systems maps (e.g. stakeholder maps), customer journey maps, experience maps, and blueprints. One of the most important parts of mapping experiences is empathy, i.e. keeping people and their values, needs, attitudes, knowledge, motivations, and beliefs at the center, to enhance connections and elicit emotions for a positive experience (Mirzaie, 2017).

### ***Literature Implications and Gaps***

The literature provides the foundation for my approach of collecting masqueraders' self-perceptions of how Carnival impacts health and wellbeing and offers possibilities for pleasure, healing, and liberation in order to inform recommendations for equitable changes to the cultural practice. However, in my preliminary literature review, so far I have found that the research on assets-based and desire-based approaches, social capital and flourishing, positive health and health assets, cultural health and cultural assets, celebrations' and festivals' health impact, attendee participant motivation, and event and experience design have mostly been done in non-Caribbean contexts, primarily with quantitative studies and measures that were unable to elicit rich details and personal accounts. The success of the existing scholarship in revealing significant relationships between cultural festivals and individual and community health and wellbeing provides me additional impetus for taking on this project through a Caribbean lens and affords me a stronger rationale for why this work is so important. The gaps in the literature motivate me to add to the body of Caribbean-specific cultural and public health research and experience design approaches through a desire-based, positive health framing.

### **Analytical Approach**

My analytical approach includes the concepts of emancipatory inquiry (learned in a research methods course titled "Emancipatory Inquiry: Listening, Learning, Acting for Social Change," taught by Dr. Aaliyah El-Amin at the Harvard Graduate School of Education); design

thinking, which was explored in the “Innovation and Global Health Systems” course taught by Dr. Rifat Atun at the Harvard School of Public Health; and systems thinking, as explored in multiple courses in the DrPH program’s “Enabling Change” component.

In developing my analytical approach, I adapted the Double Diamond Framework for Innovation, a model that combines research, systems thinking, and design thinking to navigate complex social, environmental, and economic dilemmas through the discover, define, develop, and deliver process (Conway & Masters, 2017; Costa, 2018). It is typically useful for product design, but I found it to be an apt foundation for illustrating my exploration of event and experience design. The diamond shape represents the phases in which many possible ideas are created (divergent thinking, left sides of the diamond moving away from each other) and then are condensed into those most relevant (convergent thinking, right sides of the diamond moving towards each other). The first diamond, “Understanding the Issue,” is about identifying and contextualizing the focus of this project by talking with people to whom the issue relates, gathering data using a desire-based approach, filtering the information, and elaborating on the issues using research insights. The second diamond, “Developing a Solution,” focuses on the creation of responses to the issues previously identified by using experience design and systems thinking tools to map and make sense of inquiry insights. This thesis discusses the first two diamonds. The third diamond under “Achieving Impact” will occur after the doctoral project is complete.

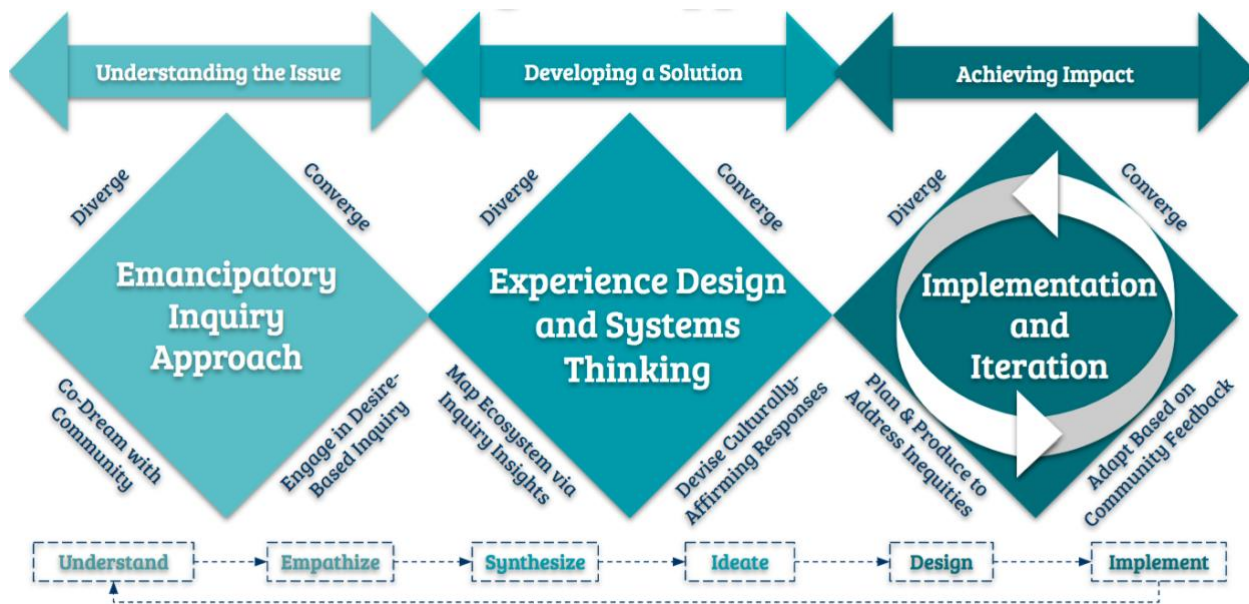
It should be noted that I expanded the framework from two to three diamonds to account for my inclusion of my community members as an explicit part of the project, as this topic came from our conversations about dreams of better futures with Carnival as a guide. I also felt it was important to parse my approach into three diamonds because of the overlap between the traditional define and develop stages that I felt needed to be deconstructed in my project. As such, I did not use the strict “discover, define, develop, and deliver” process to label my framework. I found it more useful to adapt and remix the Stanford d school’s five-step model

of “empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test” to develop my own process for experience design for Carnival in the Caribbean: empathize, research, synthesize, ideate, design, and implement.

Figure 1 shows my overall approach for translating research into action.

**Figure 1**

*Analytical Approach*



***Emancipatory Inquiry***

In alignment with my personal values around furthering equity and justice, as mentioned earlier, this project is grounded in emancipatory inquiry approaches. Although they are not a part of the DrPH program’s teachings on research that gets translated into action, I wanted to incorporate elements of emancipatory inquiry specifically because they aligned with my own values that are grounded in social justice and often feel at odds with the capitalist values that appear in the DrPH core curriculum. Emancipatory inquiry also supports my exploration of positive health and wellbeing through deep cultural and historical contextual knowledge that

centers communities' perceptions of themselves. Additionally, this type of research aligns neatly with the design-thinking concept of empathy, through which research is conducted to better understand the experiencers' perspectives in order to meet their needs (Abookire et al., 2020).

As it specifically relates to this project, emancipatory inquiry (also known as critical research) draws from Afrocentrism and critical theory, both of which bolster ways of knowing and understanding the world for the purpose of positively changing society. This type of inquiry uplifts the fact that different types of knowledge are aligned with specific societal groups or interests and acknowledges that knowledge is never neutral (Okeke & van Wyk, 2015). What makes this project emancipatory inquiry is that its goals are grounded in critical theory-based research frameworks, such as desire-based frameworks (mentioned earlier) and Caribbean feminist theory (discussed below), and the method of community research. By doing this doctoral project with/in/for a community to which I belong, I am 1) helping shift who and what gets researched; 2) adding the knowledge and experiences of Caribbean people to the body of research on positive health and wellbeing, emancipatory cultural practices, and experience design; 3) attending to power dynamics between myself and project participants, especially as I am doing this project through an institution that has benefited directly from enslaving my family's, participants', and friends' ancestors; and 4) calling for a more equitable Carnival that contributes to Caribbean people's health and wellbeing in the face of continued oppression. This project is also emancipatory in that I continually practice self-awareness and introspection to interrogate myself and my positionality in order to be as intentional and responsible as possible as both a researcher and public health practitioner.

**Caribbean Feminist Theory.** There are many critical theoretical frameworks grounded in social justice that guide emancipatory inquiry, such as feminist theory, Indigenous/decolonial theory, disability theory, and Queer theory (El-Amin, 2020). Caribbean feminist theory guides this project, having its origins in the anticolonial and independence

movements around the region, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, through which radical women reflected the prioritization of liberation and self-determination, given the Caribbean's political context at that time (Sanatan, 2016). Caribbean feminist theory developed out of the cultural, sociohistorical, and political realities of life in the region, and though it has interacted with other global feminisms transnationally, it cannot be classified as a derivative or an import of other feminisms such as Black (american) feminism, Soviet women's movements, or euro-american liberal feminism (DeShong, 2013; Sanatan, 2016). This is the rationale for the "homegrown" descriptor many Caribbean feminist scholars have been advocating for and utilizing.

Halimah DeShong (2013) conceptualizes Caribbean feminist research as 1) stemming from Caribbean conflicts with forms of oppression, including colonialism, heteropatriarchy, classism, neoliberalism, sexism, and racism; 2) focusing on creating more equitable and just Caribbean societies; 3) centering Caribbean women and their empowerment as the main inquiry subject; and 4) interrogating gendered power relations (Kempadoo & DeShong, 2013). Notably, Caribbean feminist research centers relationships and transnational network building with feminisms from other (neo)colonized contexts (Sanatan, 2016). It also incorporates the Diaspora and Diasporic researchers, given the region's long history of migration and transcendence of physical borders (Nixon & King, 2013) and inherently integrates insider/outsider analyses. Caribbean feminist theory additionally values reflexivity (DeShong, 2013) and co-creation in research. An example of this is the participatory action research conducted by the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), which aimed to bridge the gap between theory and enabling change (Deare, 1995; Kempadoo & DeShong, 2013).

This critical theoretical frame informs how I intend to carry out this project as a Black Diasporic Caribbean feminist researcher and practitioner. My work and values are deeply anti-colonial; focus on self-actualization and self-determination; act in solidarity and co-conspiration

with the global community of people from historically and currently oppressed backgrounds; and exist in community and conversation with regional and Diasporic Caribbean feminists.

### ***Enabling Change***

Needing to build upon emancipatory inquiry as the first phase of this project in order to contribute to equitable change, this project also employs design thinking and systems thinking approaches to further sensemaking and meaning-making. The DrPH core curriculum introduced these approaches, and I have decided to further explore how they might apply to Carnival and considerations of positive health and wellbeing and pleasure, healing, and liberation through research and applicable tools.

**Design Thinking.** Design thinking is a methodology and problem-solving approach to the design mindset, process, and suite of skills/tools (Design for Health, n.d.-a) used in any field for innovative solutions and responses that are quickly prototyped and refined through an iterative process. It is used by multiple fields that focus on human values and needs in order to understand people as users, consumers, participants, attendees, experiencers, etc. of products, services, messages, processes, environments, and experiences for the purpose of improving them (Abookire et al., 2020; Design for Health, n.d.-a; Design for Health, n.d.-b). The design thinking process typically consists of five steps: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Choudhary, 2019), although the steps of this process may be described in other ways (such as the aforementioned Double Diamond framework), and some iterations include implement as an additional step (Gibbons, 2018). These steps are often pictorially depicted in a line, but in reality, the process is closer to being cyclical (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). Empathy and centering humans are at the core of design thinking, and as such they serve the aim to innovate processes involving human interactions (Avila, 2020). Other key design-thinking concepts include creative agency, co-designing, low-fidelity prototyping, failing fast, iterative design, and

bias towards action (e.g. questioning, drawing, discussion, prototyping, soliciting feedback, or creating (Abookire et al., 2020).

Through its inherent creativity, flexibility, applicability, and problem-solving capacity, design thinking provides a complementary approach to other multifaceted pathways. So given the transdisciplinary nature of this project, design thinking might provide meaningful insights by collaboratively bringing together multiple disciplines (Design for Health, n.d.-b). Public health practice applies research learnings to the implementation of initiatives, interventions, programs, etc. intended to improve health outcomes. Applying design thinking to public health is advantageous because it elicits nuanced understandings of people's behaviors and needs, highlights novel perspectives on existing issues, and offers diverse ways to visualize and represent insights (Design for Health, n.d.-b). In addition, it brings to light critical questions to inform change efforts around the following possible actions: prioritizing opportunities, defining the issue and context, researching and designing, piloting and testing, introducing and scaling, and sustaining learning (Design for Health, n.d.-b).

So why use design thinking to explore Carnival, which is a practice that has existed for centuries and thus did not have design thinking built into it? Why use design thinking tools when considering positive health and wellbeing and equitable change? In thinking through how to apply learnings from the research in order to translate them into recommendations for action, I realized that, in a sense, the emancipatory inquiry served as a type of attitudinal experience research because it centers masqueraders' perspectives as participants of the Carnival experience. Design research systematically studies people's needs and motivations to design better products or improve existing products for one's intended audience (Interaction Design Foundation, n.d.; Johnson et al., 2019). Yet, because this project prioritizes Carnival as an experience rather than a service or product, it is beneficial to employ design thinking methods specific to events and/or experiences.



As apparent in the event and experience design of the literature review, I selected experience design as the best design thinking method that would help me do sensemaking around my Carnival and public health research. I landed on wanting to explore what it would be like to take an experience design approach to Carnival when thinking about how to make equitable changes so that more people can access its health and wellbeing benefits and experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation. Experience design will be explored further in the “Methods and Analyses” and “Discussion” chapters.

**Systems Thinking.** Systems thinking is closely linked with design thinking (Conway & Masters, 2017). In public health, practitioners and researchers often use systems thinking to decode the complexity of health systems and then apply their analysis to create and evaluate programs and interventions that will contribute to improved health outcomes and greater health equity. In its most basic form, systems thinking enables us to see how the various components of a system influence each other, with root causes, patterns, and relationships being of prime interest (Ecochallenge.org, 2021).

On the whole, systems thinking is an extensive suite of approaches and tools that help in the mapping, measurement, and comprehension of the complex dynamics in any given system (De Savigny et al., 2009). Tools and approaches for systems thinking include: actor/stakeholder mapping and/or analysis, the iceberg model, the Cynefin framework, cause and effect mapping, PESTLE analysis, political economy analysis, and others (Powerful et al., 2020). Although this project does not explicitly concern health systems, Carnival itself is situated within a complex ecosystem. So, using systems thinking is appropriate because it considers how to support the entrance and role of innovations in the complex systems that make it challenging to tackle social issues. This thesis will use systems thinking tools in conjunction with experience design tools to identify promising opportunities to enable change, after first understanding the Carnival landscape (through the literature review) and its health and wellbeing impacts and possibilities

for pleasure, healing, and liberation (through emancipatory inquiry). This is crucial, as any actions recommended by and resulting from this project must holistically consider possibilities for change, context, and potential consequences, instead of taking a narrow approach.

**Framework for Change.** Currently, there is little documentation of the positive health and wellbeing benefits of Carnival and masqueraders' experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation through a public health lens. And while Carnival is meant to be for everyone, there remain barriers to equitable participation by Caribbean people of various nationalities, skin color, body size, class status, etc., that preclude people from having the aforementioned benefits and experiences for greater health impact. My vision for this project is to contribute to a world in which participation in the emancipatory cultural practice of Carnival is equitable so that more Caribbean people can experience all that it has to offer. As such, I need a framework for change that will illustrate the path from project activities to anticipated outcomes and impact. A framework for change (also known as a theory of change, conceptual map, logic model, mental map, among other names) serves as an imagining of how change will happen and what that change might look like in the future (Center for Community Health and Development, n.d.).

Figure 2 is my visual depiction of the framework, which directly builds upon the earlier analytical approach.

**Figure 2**

*Framework for Change*

IF	THEN	IN TURN
<p>unearth perceptions of health/wellbeing benefits; pleasure, healing, liberation; and equitable change in Carnival</p> <hr/> <p>use experience design to develop culturally-affirming responses to address inequities</p>	<p>documented effects on positive health and wellbeing</p> <hr/> <p>evidence base to leverage Carnival as health asset</p> <hr/> <p>identified linkages to address inequities</p> <hr/> <p>improved actor accountability</p>	<p><i>Short-Term</i></p> <p>improved marketing, distribution, increase in diversity of Caribbean participation, increased positive health and wellbeing experiences</p>
		<p><i>Intermediate/Long-Term</i></p> <p>increased sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility; improved readiness to weather future public health/capitalist crises</p>
		<p><i>Impact</i></p> <p>a world in which there is equitable access to pleasure, healing, and liberation</p>

*Note.* Assumptions include, but are not limited to the following: 1) a generalized notion of “Carnival in the Caribbean”; 2) the COVID-19 pandemic will not prevent the complete cancellation of Carnivals in the future; 3) profit will not be the only motivational factor for Carnival entities, even with pandemic-related financial challenges; and 4) stakeholders will have an interest in Carnival as a cultural health asset worthy of systemic change efforts.

Frameworks for change can either be grounded in existing evidence or in a hypothesis. Due to the paucity of research on Carnival and positive health and wellbeing, my desire-based framework for change depicts my “hypothesis” for this project and subsequently guides my research questions. Since such an approach centers community resilience and resistance to oppression, a desire-based framework is particularly salient. This is because there exist stereotypes and un-nuanced perspectives of Carnival as unhealthy hedonism, both within and outside of the region by those who are not a part of the culture. These narratives do not reflect the meaning and power of Carnival to its participants, and this does a great disservice to Carnival’s impact and potential. This project’s desire-based framework for change will center the experiences and perceptions Caribbean people have about the positive health and wellbeing

benefits Carnival provides to them and will celebrate the complex personhoods and tensions inherent within Caribbean Carnival spaces.

## **Methods and Analyses**

As mentioned earlier under the “Analytical Approach” section, this project has two main components: Emancipatory Inquiry and Enabling Change. This chapter will explore their methods, analyses, and additional tools.

### **Emancipatory Inquiry**

#### ***Ethical Protocol***

The Human Research Protection Program in the Office of Regulatory Affairs and Research Compliance at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health approved my research protocol (IRB20-1096) for the interviews and document analysis and deemed it as meeting the criteria for exemption per the regulations found at 45 CFR 46.104(d) (2). As such, additional IRB review was not required.

#### ***Overarching Guiding Questions***

In qualitative research, researchers pose questions instead of hypotheses (Creswell, 2018). The questions that guided this project were:

- Q1- How do Caribbean masqueraders perceive the positive health and wellbeing impacts of Carnival on themselves?
- Q2- How are Caribbean masqueraders experiencing Carnival as bringing them pleasure, healing, and liberation, which are connected to wellbeing?
- Q3- How are Caribbean masqueraders reimagining how Carnivals must equitably adapt to make them more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable, given the current COVID-19 pandemic?

### ***Community Advisory Board***

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic was worsening in the second quarter of 2020, I realized I needed to think about possible research methods that were both realistic and feasible since in-person community-based participatory action research methods would become much more challenging. After reflecting on the many conversations I had about Carnival and positive health and wellbeing, I knew that I still wanted this project to directly engage my Caribbean Carnival community members as knowledge creators who have a say in the research. So, I sought out literature for new ideas on ways to go about this. I came across the “Resource for Integrating Community Voices into a Research Study: Community Advisory Board Toolkit” developed by Katrina Kubicek and Marisela Robles (2016) and knew immediately that creating a virtual community advisory board would be a good fit.

I reached out to my network of people of diverse Caribbean heritage who are affiliated with the Carnival industry to serve on a community advisory board (CAB). The purpose of this was: to 1) formalize community accountability and representation throughout the design and implementation of the project, especially given that participants would span multiple Caribbean countries, and 2) be in community and brainstorm ideas, since the idea for this project came from multiple discussions with other people in my Caribbean and Carnival communities. The final CAB was made up of 10 people of English-speaking Caribbean heritage who have intimate knowledge of Carnivals in the region. They helped me refine my project topic and fine-tune guiding research questions; collaborated on the development of the interview questions; provided feedback on the participant recruitment and consent process as well as on the project materials and procedures; and brainstormed ideas for the dissemination of this project’s results, among other actions.

## ***Participants***

The criteria for participation was: adults (i.e. age 21 and older) with heritage from the English-speaking Caribbean who have participated in at least one Carnival in the English-speaking Caribbean. These people classify themselves as masqueraders, carnivalists, or revelers.<sup>17</sup> Participants had heritage from a wide-range of Caribbean countries to ensure my sample represented Carnival being a transnational and transregional celebration and Carnivals around the region being patterned after the initial Caribbean Carnival in Trinidad. This purposeful sampling criteria ensured that participants provided intimate insider knowledge on their perception of the impact of Carnival on their lives. Folks who attend Carnival as active participants (instead of as only spectators) are best positioned to speak to the benefits they experience through their involvement. Additionally, as attendees/participants, masqueraders serve as Carnival's "North Star," providing clarity, direction, and meaning to the emancipatory cultural practice as an event experience (Wong, 2018). My community advisory board being composed of people from both the Caribbean and its Diaspora ensured ethical engagement with this wide-spread virtual research cohort.

To recruit participants, I leveraged my own connections to Caribbean and Carnival communities, both through personal networks and social media connections, as well as those through the Bahamianista platform of Crista Strachan, one of my doctoral thesis committee members. I worked with Bahamianista to host an Instagram Live session and Twitter chats, in addition to co-writing a blog, all related to this project's topic and aimed at participant recruitment. Participants were screened via a Qualtrics form to ensure participants met the criteria for either the interviews or Twitter analysis. Please see Appendix A: Interview Screening and Consent Form, Appendix B: Twitter Analysis Screening and Consent Form, and Appendix C: Social Media Recruitment Graphic to get a sense of the recruitment documents.

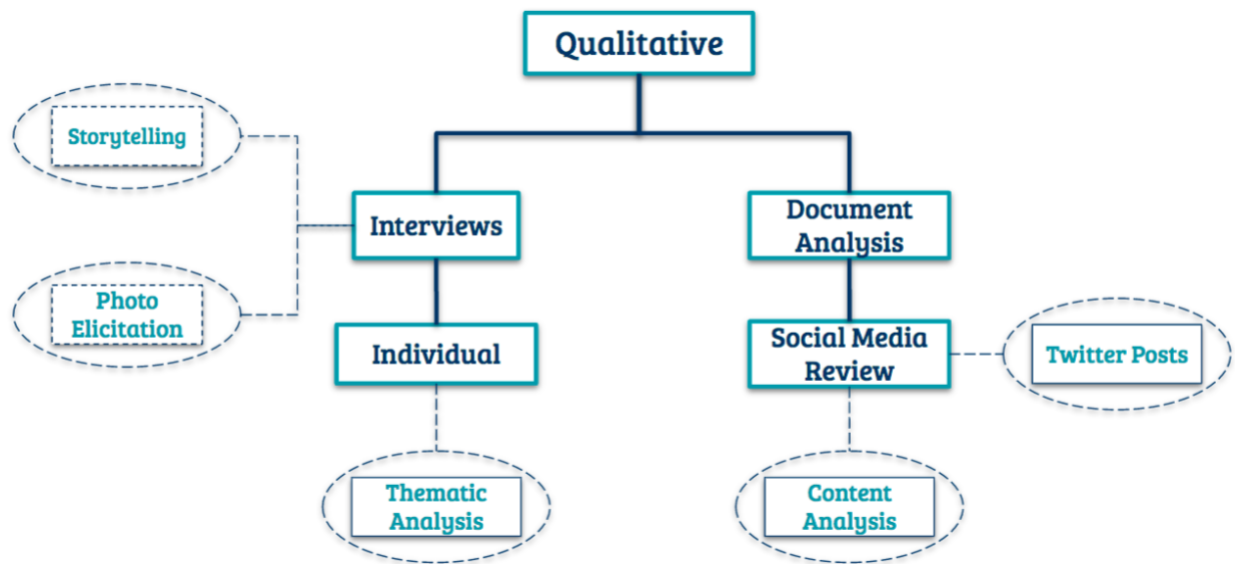
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<sup>17</sup> I will refer to the people who took part in this project as masqueraders, carnivalists, revelers, participants, or respondents.

Due to the exploratory nature of the project’s topics, it made the most sense to utilize qualitative research methods in order to explore community perspectives and gain nuanced insight into Carnival’s impact on health and wellbeing and its possibilities for equitable improvements. For my primary method, I chose semi-structured in-depth interviews to elicit rich themes stemming directly from masqueraders’ narratives about their experiences, thus honoring the emancipatory inquiry tenet of centering communities’ perceptions of themselves. For my secondary method, I chose to do a Twitter Analysis, i.e. a document analysis through using the social media platform of Twitter, with the goal of learning what people were spontaneously sharing around Carnival and COVID-19. Figure 3 shows the outline of my emancipatory inquiry methods and Figure 4 shows the breakdown of those methods.

**Figure 3**

*Emancipatory Inquiry Methods*





**Figure 4**

*Breakdown of Methods*

	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Document Analysis</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>	60-120 minute semi-structured conversations	Public posts identified via submissions, keywords, & hashtags
<b>Purpose</b>	Elicit rich perceptions of lived experiences	Broader insight into health impact of COVID-19 disrupting Carnival
<b>Specific Method(s)</b>	Photo-elicitation, Storytelling	Social Media Analysis
<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	People of Caribbean heritage who have attended Carnival in the region	People of Caribbean heritage who have attended Carnival in the region
<b>Recruitment</b>	Purposeful sampling	Purposeful sampling
<b>Platform</b>	Zoom	Twitter
<b>Final Status</b>	37 interviews	78 posts

***In-Depth Interviews***

My primary qualitative method was the semi-structured in-depth interview. Interview questions drew from conversations I have had with other masqueraders, my own Carnival experiences, and existing literature on health and festivals and celebrations. The interview protocol was developed with my community advisory board and doctoral thesis committee. Questions asked about people’s perceptions of the health and wellbeing benefits of Carnival; their feelings about its possibilities for pleasure, healing, and liberation; and their experiences of how COVID-19 has affected 1) them as masqueraders and 2) the future of Carnival. The interview questions also incorporated photo-elicitation and storytelling by asking participants to 1) share photos of themselves during a Carnival they attended in the Caribbean region that represent “pleasure, healing, and liberation” and 2) tell a story about a memorable Carnival experience that impacted their health and wellbeing.

Between October 2020 to November 2020, I completed 37 interviews, ranging from 60-120 minutes. I conducted the interviews virtually and audio-recorded them with videos turned off to provide grace due to the current reality of Zoom fatigue and camera performativity, as well as to make allowances for internet bandwidth/connectivity challenges of participants. The only time videos were turned on was when participants needed to share their photos. Given my choice of a semi-structured format for the interviews, I chose which questions to ask each participant based on the timbre of the conversations, questions participants had already answered in their previous responses, and spontaneous questions that followed participant comments that sparked my curiosity. To view the full list of questions, please see Appendix D: Final Interview Guide.

**Thematic Analysis.** I used Atlas.ti 9.0.5., a qualitative analysis and research software, to simultaneously code and clean up the transcripts automatically created by Zoom. Given time-constraints, I coded 22 of the 37 interviews and informally searched for keywords and themes in the remaining interviews. I coded both etically and emically, which enabled me to 1) have participants' perceptions represented in their own words and 3) apply my own understanding as a public health researcher and Caribbean masquerader. The combination of etic and etic coding resulted in 182 codes.

Coding this way also meant that there would be overlaps between codes. Given varied ways to conduct thematic analysis, it is evident that this process of coding to generate themes fits somewhere in between "coding reliability" and "organic" approaches to thematic analysis. In the former approach, coding takes the form of seeking out evidence for identified themes. In the latter approach, coding is exploratory, subjective, and creative (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Given the exploratory nature of this project, it makes sense that both of these approaches be employed.

The next phase of the thematic analysis was chunking/binning, a 3-part process:

1. organizing similar codes into sub-groups (titled with a sub-theme);

2. placing these sub-groups into clusters (for the purposes of this project, I arranged the clusters based on the research questions to which they best corresponded); and
3. assigning these sub-group clusters a larger theme.

I used Miro, a virtual whiteboard collaborative platform, to collapse and combine codes into larger generative themes. I transferred the codes that had been created in Atlas.ti to Miro. Then I grouped the codes by their corresponding questions, setting aside codes that did not seem to align directly with any of the research questions. When I encountered codes that were too general, likely a result of coding etically, I went back to the interviews and re-coded those sections with more nuance via emic coding. This process enabled me to realize when I was moving too quickly or labeling excerpts with themes instead of codes that indicated closeness to the data.

**Findings.** From the overarching 182 codes, 18 larger themes emerged (please see Appendix E: Full List of Interview Themes). Understandably there is overlap between the themes regarding participants' feelings, perceptions, and experiences, which reflects the interconnectedness of the data. I view these themes as 1) crucial to understanding the complexity of what Carnival provides on cultural, spiritual, emotional, and social levels and 2) relevant to the second stage of this project where I apply insights to enabling change in the Carnival ecosystem and the development of my entity.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on 14 of the 18 themes that I find most illuminate insights related to my research questions. Overall, rather than being an accurate identification of topics in the data, these themes reflect my interpretive choices through the coding and binning and chunking process to craft a compelling narrative that speaks to my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2016). In the following pages I will share some of the

findings and illustrative excerpts from the project's primary data that correspond with the 14 themes, organized by the research questions they fall under, as follows:

- **Q1**<sup>18</sup>- Themes 1-5
- **Q1/Q2**- Themes 6-8 (These exist at the intersection of research questions 1 and 2)
- **Q2**<sup>19</sup>- Themes 9-11
- **Q3**<sup>20</sup>- Themes 12-14

It should be noted that all names that follow are not the participants' legal names or nicknames, as participants chose their own pseudonyms, as well as pronouns, that could not be traced back to them.

***Q1- How do Caribbean masqueraders perceive the positive health and wellbeing impacts of Carnival on themselves?***

***1) Physical Health Benefits of Carnival Participation.*** All of the participants shared how Carnival confers positive health benefits to them. In terms of physical health, they felt that having Carnival as something to prepare for and experience 1) provides motivation for better health choices, 2) promotes being physically fit, and 3) boosts physical capabilities. Robyn shared:

Leading up to Carnival, I do make healthier choices, but I'm not sure if I'm making them because... I want to look in my prime, or as close to in my prime as possible, or if... It's

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<sup>18</sup> Q1- How do Caribbean masqueraders perceive the positive health and wellbeing impacts of Carnival on themselves?

<sup>19</sup> Q2- How are Caribbean masqueraders experiencing Carnival as bringing them pleasure, healing and liberation, which are connected to wellbeing?

<sup>20</sup> Q3- How are Caribbean masqueraders reimagining how Carnivals must equitably adapt to make them more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable, given the current COVID-19 pandemic?

because I'm just not mentally... I'm excited. So I'm not eating junk food, just to eat junk food.

The majority of participants gave examples of better health choices and taking steps to commit to healthier lifestyles, such as being mindful of eating choices, staying hydrated, or taking vitamin supplements to ensure their immune systems were strong enough to make it through Carnival activities. Many also discussed how working towards being physically fit included getting into fitness practices in order to increase stamina and endurance for the (sometimes surprisingly) lengthy routes of Carnival events, which in turn ended up being workouts themselves. Some masqueraders were motivated to stay active and felt their strength increased because preparing for Carnival was a year-round endeavor. Additionally, several shared how being able to make it to and through Carnival made them feel like they were physically capable of anything, although some noted that this applies only during Carnival because they are able to go the distance during, but not outside of it. Brittany gushed:

Like physically, but it also... really makes me feel happy... and tired, I guess, because... once the adrenaline is gone, you'll be beat... just want to go to sleep, and... rest for hours and days and whatever else. But... definitely makes me feel like I can do anything, and gives me ... what's the word, not motivation, but can't think of the word right now. But in short, it makes me feel like I can do anything that comes. Now I can conquer anything, if you can sit there and pump for 12 hours.

**2) *Physical Health Consequences of Carnival Participation.*** The majority of masqueraders were well aware that not all aspects of their participation in Carnival are health-producing. Many of them confessed to overuse of alcohol, characterizing this as “not good.” A few listed the injuries they sustained, such as toenails falling off from excessive pressing against

the front of their shoes while literally pounding pavement. Maggie spoke to the ramifications of the long duration of Carnival events:

But that's, that's eight hours of me on the road, walking this super long road that I don't normally walk any other time. I'm running half of it, jumping through half of it. It's basically a full day's worth of working out. And you don't ever feel how much that takes a toll on your body until the adrenaline is gone... And every single step is painful, every single step. It doesn't matter what kind of shoes you're wearing... I can come off the road in sneakers and be like, no, I should just walk barefoot, because even my sneakers aren't comfortable.

Alli reflected more broadly about the physical consequences of playing mas, echoing the sentiments expressed by most other participants:

Physically, I don't know... because the lack of sleep, and the possible dehydration all day, the possible melanoma from the sun damage to your skin. Yeah... I do go with a medicine bag for my ankles and stuff... it's funny because the amount of working out you do during Carnival for that week, if I did that at home...

Nearly all of the respondents were well aware of the negative impacts on their physical health from fully participating in Carnival events. But most of the masqueraders interviewed felt that even the physical exhaustion during Carnival itself was a reward for all that they did to make it to the end, and that this exhaustion was worth it.

**3) *Mental Health Benefits of Carnival Participation.*** In addition to physical health benefits, many participants expressed that participation in Carnival also had mental health benefits. For them, it was a means of taking care of their mental health and it often improved

their mental state/mood. In response to a question on the implications of COVID-19 for the Carnival community and Caribbean region, Jamette reflected on how Carnival is self-care:

It is not a party. It is how we give ourselves that massive social self-care. Yeah, a massive social self-care ritual every year. Because it has served us in the past, in terms of a space for catharsis, a space for joy, a space for release, a space for healing. And particularly because we've been through a year that is traumatic, still traumatic... A year from which we're going to see a lot of mental and emotional health fall out.

Additional perceptions of the mental health benefits of Carnival ranged from “Carnival saved my life” and “Carnival is like taking medicine” to Carnival serving as stress relief or anxiety reduction. Particularly salient were participants’ experiences around Carnival as reactive mental health care to help them deal with the hardships of life. They shared how having Carnival as an outlet made it easier to endure work or difficult life experiences, temporarily made problems feel lighter or nonexistent, and pushed against the negative things their depression told them. One participant even noted the realization that they stopped their usual coping mechanism of emotional eating when they began preparing for Carnival.

With these experiences and knowledge, masqueraders shared feelings that reflecting on and participating in Carnival created space for them to build resilience and be better equipped at dealing with adversity. Montana shared: “You use the Carnival for what you need it for and... it really helped me with getting over a lot of trauma to where now I'm... in a good headspace, even though things come, I know... Okay, I'm better equipped to deal with adversity.” These sentiments were particularly echoed in most respondents’ explanations of Carnival allowing a break or escape from oppression and the trials of everyday life because it enabled them to let go, be present, and feel relief or catharsis, at least temporarily. Pon Mi Head explained:

Just the fact that we have this season to... I don't know how to describe it... to let go, and I want to say... not care. But you have the whole year where you have all these stressful

things happening, and... you have these things to focus on: school, job, children, whatever it is. I feel like there's this season that comes that gives you all these opportunities to just let it go. And forget about it for however long, whether it's just you going to a fete. So you forget your problems for that night, you playing mas on the road for two days, you forget your problems for those two days for sure. And the healing for me comes with that, that I'm letting go of my problems, and I'm using this time to not only just bruk out and break 'way but... like for me.

**4) Mental Health Impact of No Carnival due to COVID-19.** Almost all participants shared how not being able to access Carnival in the ways they were used to, due to COVID-19 and the cancellation/postponement of large-scale events and travel restrictions/considerations, was negatively impacting their mental health. In responding to a question on coping with COVID-19 and its effect on Carnival, Maggie grieved:

Every time that there is an announcement, another Carnival has been canceled, I think I die a little inside. At first it started off, you know, me and my friends, making jokes about it. And the more that Carnivals got canceled, the more it was like, wait a second, we're really not going to get to do this. It's over? And that's been really hard... I can't do this thing that's more than just putting on something pretty, it's been this, you know, emotional and mental and spiritual thing for me. And it almost didn't even feel real. The cancellations didn't start to feel real until they were coming months in advance.

Several respondents also reported feeling really sad or depressed and trying to find ways to cope with the absence of Carnival due to COVID-19. Some of them discussed how they did not know what to do without Carnival in their lives or being able to have it as an outlet or coping tool, especially during a global crisis when they would most need a release. Maggie's anecdote about her last Carnival summed this up:



I remember going through a really difficult time at work before my last trip to Trinidad for Carnival, and the trip that I took and being able to play mas and have that experience alleviated so much of the stress that I was feeling and the mental distress that I was feeling. And to not have access to that now, it's like.... You almost feel like, okay, well what do I do now? What happens now? And every cancellation gets harder and harder, and now you start feeling like maybe none of the things that I thought was going to be happening is going to happen. And now what do I do?

Others reflected on the privilege of being involved in Carnival as a passion instead of relying on it for one's livelihood, and what that distinction would mean for the future of Carnival. Nutmeg opined: "Carnival is a passion, like it's not paying my insurance. I don't think... the cancellation impacted me as much as someone who this is their only livelihood."

Further reflections revealed masqueraders' trying to wrap their minds around whether or not Carnival would have the same impact on them if it changes due to COVID-19. Maggie posed some poignant questions:

As the pandemic continues. I'm starting to think to myself... there might not be any Carnival in 2021 either. And if that's the case, then what happens? It's like... if there is a Carnival, what does that even look like? Because it will never look like what it used to be. And if it doesn't look like what it's been my entire life, then can it still have the same impact on me? Is it going to feel the same? Is it going to feel different? Like what happens to me then?

Respondents also felt that all this reflection during COVID-19 enabled them to rediscover and better understand their connection to the cultural practice. Kincaid mused:

Thinking of not having Carnival now, and many people having to essentially pivot for their mental health, is like what does that do now? It's like, now, you know, so many of

us are rediscovering what our connection to Carnival means, because... we don't have it in the physical sense. So what does it mean for other parts of us?

Several masqueraders also divulged how Carnival allows them to put things into perspective or gain a new perspective on life. And in the context of losing Carnival because of COVID-19 cancellations, some also admitted to personal realizations around why Carnival meant so much to them. Beyond revelers feeling in the moment that Carnival helps them get closer to achieving self-actualization or improves their quality of life because the experience is so euphoric, many masqueraders communicated deep awareness around how they should be happy every day, instead of living a life they hate, and that requires the kind of joyful experiences Carnival gives. Caribbean people's enslaved Black African ancestors fought for their own survival and celebrated freedom, and participants understood this legacy as their ancestors wanting them to be free and happy and not murdered or harmed by oppressive systems. Alli admitted: "Carnival is important to my wellbeing, because it does give me that euphoric escape. But now I'm realizing it's an escape... Like I should be happy every day. Or most days at least... I didn't realize how much my everyday happiness... was dependent on me looking forward to something." In a similar vein, Robyn stressed: "Carnival makes me realize, nah, nah, nah... somewhere in there. You know, you don't just work to pay bills. You work so you can enjoy things that add to your life, and Carnival is the thing that adds to my life."

**5) Health Implications of Carnival Nurturing Social Connections.** Carnival has additional health implications in that it nurtures social connections. Several masqueraders spoke to this as part of the culture of Carnival being a welcoming space that allows for an increased level of trust, safety, and comfort with both strangers and friends/family. Tina told a story that conveyed these sentiments exactly:

Like a couple of seconds after this, another random person who I don't know... a man... he comes, swoops in, and picks the two of us up to take us down the road. That goes back to that feeling of this community and just feeling safe and comfortable with everyone like, you know, I wasn't scared or... if somebody were to do that to you randomly, somewhere else at some other time, you know, it'd be such a different story. But at Carnival, there's so much freedom to just enjoy yourself, and I let go of those worries for a bit. And that feeling of togetherness and that feeling of... everybody on the road is your friend. You know, you don't have to know them. If somebody from a different race, a different culture, a different class, you have no idea, but you're just able to enjoy this festival with them.

This atmosphere gave many revelers the courage to be more sociable and make new friends, often resulting in strangers becoming family and new connections being sustained over the years as participants returned to Carnival after Carnival and reunited with other masqueraders. Friendships and connections were forged and strengthened in Carnival because of community support, feelings of togetherness, and actions of camaraderie. Maggie spoke to aspects of these connections and community care as she shared examples of pleasurable Carnival experiences: "I'm on the road for eight hours. And if I meet somebody two hours in, quick. That's my person for the next six hours. And it's not six hours of, 'so what's your favorite color? And what's your sign?' It is six hours of, 'are you okay? Do you need a drink? Are you hungry? Do you want to sit?'" Masqueraders understanding of why/how increased social connections occurred revealed the importance of Caribbean cultural values and how other masqueraders just "get it" because they share the same or similar cultures, which creates an environment where participants feel celebrated by their own people and revel in celebrating their culture. Maggie voiced her experiences of this:

They get where you're coming from without you having to say anything. So in those moments when I am praising and exalting that experience on the road. There are other people who will see me. And a similar energy or similar spirit will overtake them as well because they see it and they're like, I know exactly how you feel. Without... even if you can't put it into words. They see when they're like... I feel that, too. It's not something that you see outside of how it's outwardly expressed by the people experiencing it. It's not something that I could take to an interview and be like this is it. It's a feeling, it's like electricity.

However, there are tensions within the social context of Carnival as well. Some Diasporic participants spoke about stormers as potential harmdoers because of destroying costumes or shoving masqueraders in order to be able to be included in the Carnival events. Autumn Winters contemplated:

The word stormers come with this particular set of... actions and attitudes and... oftentimes violence. And violence looks like literally pushing, shoving, or destroying costumes, going in there with the intent to piss people off... liberation means doing whatever you want. And sometimes they're really good at embodying that. But then I think about, what if folks are not storming? A lot of what lies outside, and a lot of why there are so many people outside, is because it's not accessible, and maybe we need to start to think like... when we're looking at the histories and the origins of Carnivals, it wasn't like, do you have money?... it was very much freedom, liberty for all Afro-Caribbean people in that space.

### ***Intersection of Q1 and Q2***

- ***Q1- How do Caribbean masqueraders perceive the positive health and wellbeing impacts of Carnival on themselves?***

- ***Q2- How are Caribbean masqueraders experiencing Carnival as bringing them pleasure, healing, and liberation, which are connected to wellbeing?***

**6) Healthy Self-Concept and Self-Expansion.** Healthy self-concept<sup>21</sup> and self-expansion<sup>22</sup> also manifest through being able to participate in Carnival. Many masqueraders' narratives assert feeling like Carnival reinforces that it is okay for them to truly be themselves, makes them feel beautiful and/or powerful through the costumes, and inspires them to show their best selves as they put in effort to become more physical toned and engage in beautification activities in order to look good for Carnival. This relates to participants' connections with their bodies/selves, as they feel at home or feel like they are coming home to themselves during Carnival. In her response to what liberation through Carnival means to her, Cardi shared:

Again, that connection with coming home to yourself. So being able to be you, giving yourself permission to be able to be you. And I think there's unlearning that happens there, too. Because we taught ourselves that we're not allowed to be, I won't even put free at the end, we're just not allowed to *be*. All the salient things that we are, how we exist and show up in the world? We're just not allowed. And by we, I mean, I. I taught myself. Society taught me that, but I internalized it, and I allowed it to be my reality, and Carnival allows us, allowed me to unlearn that at least for the time.

Several masqueraders noted the (sometimes surprising) increase in confidence and self-acceptance they felt during Carnival, as they were more comfortable with others and felt more

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<sup>21</sup> Xu (2020) defines self-concept as what someone believes is true about themselves and their distinctive traits and essential qualities. The concepts of self-esteem and self-efficacy are closely related aspects of the self.

<sup>22</sup> As a model, self-expansion proposes that one of people's most fundamental motivations is to improve their self-efficacy and ability to achieve their goals. Because of this, people tend to seek exciting, challenging, and new opportunities that allow them to expand their self-concept. Because of this, self-expansion has the potential to affect people's motivations to employ more desirable health behaviors (Xu, 2020).

that they could unapologetically be their authentic selves. They also expressed being carefree, shame-free, and worry-free while playing mas. A notable anecdote comes from Montana:

Carnival was the only time—I feel like I'm gonna cry—where people saw me. Me! You know, even though I was fat or whatever. They weren't looking at this fat girl, you know, with the crooked teeth. They're like, “oh my God, you look so nice! I wish I had your confidence and confidence”! And I'm like confidence? And you know, everybody's dealing with their issues. And I'm like, oh, wow. Even me finding solace in the Carnival and the comfort. Here I am now finding that people are seeing me, and they're gaining something from it also.

**7) *Carnival's Facilitation of the Body-Mind-Spirit Connection.*** The aforementioned perceptions and experiences come together in the ability of Carnival to facilitate the body-mind-spirit connection. In their accounts, many participants highlighted how being a part of Carnival enhanced their connection to their bodies. They expressed sentiments around their bodies feeling good, realizing and appreciating their bodies and what they are capable of, their bodies coming alive during dancing, and how moving their bodies communally with other bodies is healing. Around experiences of embodied spiritual connection, mostly all of the masqueraders spoke to how they had deeply emotional and spiritual responses and full-bodied or out-of-body experiences that were difficult to explain and had to be felt. This manifested in unexpected physical and emotional responses like tears and bliss or feeling connecting to their ancestors' and what they might have felt in their own Carnival celebrations. Kincaid affirmed:

It's very emotional, it's very, very emotional, I tell people all the time. It's a very emotional feeling. And it's not to say emotional... because people tend to use the word emotional in a very bad connotation. It's a very good emotional ... it invokes so much feeling in you. Not to mention just the level of endorphins that are racing through your body. It's to the point where you can't handle it, and it gives you a physically emotional

response. You know, I've cried on the road before, because I can't believe I'm this absolutely happy.

**8) *Desires and Actualization of Better Selves and Futures.*** Being able to feel more deeply connected to their bodies and their ancestors fostered masqueraders' desires and actualization of better selves and futures. In her making sense of her Carnival experiences through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Kincaid expressed:

I'm just wanting to take care of my body better even more. Wanting to achieve very, very positive, very stable mental health moments, even in terms of distress. Being able to self-actualize and especially being able to hit self-actualization as a Black person. It's a lot of times unheard of. And I definitely feel I hit that top of the pyramid during Carnival. So I would definitely say those are my immediate, you know, health and wellness benefits that Carnival gives me.

Further, the gift that Carnival provides through creating space for transformation and giving people something to look forward to/plan for allows participants to realize that a better life is possible. Many of them speak to the act of masquerade—of putting on costumes and embodying a different persona or character through preparation, reenactments, and rituals—as a means of becoming more of themselves, of who they are really meant to be. Brittany mentioned this, saying:

So you can put all the other stuff on, your headpiece and your jewelry and stuff. It's like once you put the feathers on, that's when everything is activated. That's what this mode... I'm not Brittany, I'm not any.... I'm not that person at that time, I'm somebody different. Being in costume makes me feel like the... like my free self. So, if I say Carnival makes me feel free and my true self, once I put my costume on, I'm that person, I'm whoever that true self person is.

Several other masqueraders validated this sentiment of becoming another person. Maggie acknowledged: “it's also looking at myself and kind of watching myself transform into this other person than I am on a day to day, and being like, WOW.” Nutmeg’s account spoke to the confidence the transformation brought her: “You just become a whole new you? An extra, more confident you? That's how I feel when I put on my headpiece. Head up, shoulders backs, stepping like I own the road to go meet the band.” And Marie divulged an otherworldly experience of embodiment: “just like honestly doing it because I look like a damn angel. Or I look like a goddess. Or I look like some amazing creature from a different land, some fantasy.”

***Q2- How are Caribbean masqueraders experiencing Carnival as bringing them pleasure, healing, and liberation, which are connected to wellbeing?***

***9) Creation and Celebration of Black Euphoria and Joy.*** In response to questions asking participants about what influenced their desire to keep participating in Carnival; photos that reflected memorable Carnival experiences; and meanings of pleasure, healing, and/or liberation meant in the context of Carnival, nearly all participants reflected on the cultural practice’s origins as the celebration of the emancipation of enslaved Black Africans, thus marking Carnival as a celebration of Black joy and liberation that, at its core, uplifts and centers Blackness. For example, Marie stated: “I feel like a lot of people nowadays are forgetting that Carnival was rooted in... Black culture... I feel like Carnival goes against the odds of like... how do I explain it? It goes against anti-Blackness.”

Mostly all respondents also commented on the euphoric, blissful feeling Carnival produced for them that felt like nothing they had ever previously encountered. Nutmeg shared “This is... there's nothing else like this. This is really just.... all just having this ‘best moment of our lives’ kind of experience at the same time.” Participants tried their hardest to put their feelings into words, using words like “magical” and “ecstasy,” talking about how they felt



adrenaline rushing and comparing their relationship to Carnival as an “addiction” because of the high it provides. Bunny asserted: “it is... seriously a life-changing thing that is often addictive. Like I don't know one person that's gone to Carnival and had never gone back.” Even with their attempts, all respondents felt that words failed to fully capture the euphoria and joy of the cultural practice and agreed on it being indescribable, unexplainable, unbelievable and something people would have to experience for themselves to fully understand the scope. Marie opined: “Just pure happiness, bliss, euphoria... it's out of this world. I can't describe it to anyone like, I'm done actually describing it to anyone, because I'm like... you just need to do it.”

### ***10) Carnival's Expansion of Capacity to Navigate an Oppressive World.***

Participants' understanding of Carnival as an emancipatory cultural practice was reflected in feelings around how Carnival can expand one's capacity to navigate an oppressive world. Several participants spoke to Carnival's historical and current manifestations of resistance, rebellion, and protest in mas. Jamette encapsulated this in her explanation of what healing in Carnival means to her:

Carnival, first and foremost, is a space our ancestors created for resistance, for resilience, and rebellion. And for us, all of those were needed for us to heal. We had to find ways to resist what is telling us we are wrong, or that we are animals, or that our sexuality is animalistic in nature, that we are subhuman. We had to be resilient when we were abused and chained, sexually abused, etc. And it came a point in time when we said, well, enough is enough. We're not taking this sitting down. Carnival was created to have all of that as part of healing.

Kincaid spoke to the current manifestations of resistance and protest in her recollection of a Twitter thread about the protests against police murders of Black people in summer 2020:

Back in June when some of the protests started happening because of the George Floyd case... I will never forget when she tweeted something, she said, “hey, guys, remember when we said we didn't have Carnival, you know, in 2020? But look outside, mas is happening.” And I said “you god damn right. This is mas!” This is mas in its purest sense, because it’s people fighting for liberation. This is mas, people fighting for liberation, fighting that oppression. This is literally mas that we're looking at. This is people in the street, holding up signs speaking their truth, fighting for their truth. This is mas and here we never thought we was gonna have Carnival. But this is mas!

Other participants also spoke to Carnival enabling 1) challenges to white supremacy and patriarchy; 2) counteractions to capitalist values around work, productivity, and structure; and 3) call-outs of anti-Blackness and the constructed precariousness of Black life.

**11) Carnival as Community-Level Creative Arts Therapy.** Many of the respondents’ narratives indicate that Carnival serves as community-level creative arts therapy. Several masqueraders effused about how Carnival feels like a spiritual cleansing or puts their spirit in a better place and provides replenishment by pouring into them and filling them up when life tries to empty them. Kincaid confidently expressed this: “That's what Carnival does for me in terms of healing. You know, it fills me back up when life has tried to empty me.” These experiences of rejuvenation, resetting, re-centering, and re-energizing factor into how masqueraders view Carnival as a therapeutic/healing mechanism that helps them to process and release grief, sadness, and trauma. After thinking about what healing means in relation to Carnival, Jamette explained:

Carnival for us is literally a year-long prep because you're preparing your body to be going literally almost non-stop for several weeks. And for two days straight, all day on the road... I think of it as a very intense kind of body-based therapy. It is one of the ways that trauma is released from the body.

In her response to my inquiry about how she was dealing with the COVID-19 changes to Carnival this year, Montana shared a memory of how she started using Carnival as therapy: “My first Black therapist... he was like, find something, what is it you love? And I was like, I love Carnival... And we built my little life around this Carnival to where I became a person that could function and go to work.”

Participants’ perceptions of Carnival as creative arts therapy also reflected a relationship between Carnival and rewarding yourself. Many of the respondents felt that Carnival was something they could do to treat themselves proactively or something they could earn after doing something else for themselves. In response to a question about their desire to continue participating in Carnival, Coral admitted:

I know that I put blood sweat and tears into liking the versions of myself. That was my reward. Like, I get to... I earned this. There's really nobody who can say anything about that... so that was part of why I wanted to jump... that was that was all part of my decision of jumping for the first time. Like this is a part of my culture... This is part of what makes my identity.

***Q3- How are Caribbean masqueraders reimagining how Carnivals must equitably adapt to make them more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable, given the current COVID-19 pandemic?***

**12) Exclusion/Discrimination as Antithetical to Carnival.** Many respondents also opined on exclusion and discrimination being antithetical to Carnival, as they felt Carnival is supposed to be for everybody and should be a safe and welcoming space. Montana commented: “We come together as one to enjoy the music, the food, the feathers, the revelry... Nobody's on the bullshit. You know we just here to have fun and enjoy ourselves. And it's a safe place.” Marie expressed her frustration with some Carnival bands spoiling these feelings of safety and inclusion by pricing people out, saying: “that takes from the origins of Carnival. Carnival is supposed to be for everybody, but you have these bands who are monetizing it and taking from it.”

Several participants also identified issues around ableism and lack of accessibility for disabled people during Carnival events, sizeism through people with bigger bodies having difficulties with costume fit or not being represented at band launches, and colorism via darker-skinned people being sidelined in representations of a cultural practice rooted in Blackness. Tigress shared her experience of a school for disabled children “going out of its way to make sure that there are disabled kids feeling included in this cultural celebration,” but noted that in general, “There isn't a large contingent of disabled people participating the festivals... this has a lot to do with accessibility of the roads.” In considering instances of exclusion, Grace talked about her challenges with finding “a costume that will look good or fit properly or be secure in the right places” and how she sees the “standard of beauty within the community is definitely changing. People are calling it out now, and to me that's the most important thing, because this is our culture. We have to protect it. We're not one color, one size.”

Additionally, some participants asserted that while they observe and know more Queer people who participate without experiencing overt anti-Queer violence, representations and considerations of Queerness are still lacking because people in modern-day manifestations of Carnival are not always welcoming of Queer folks. Pon Mi Head shared:

On the one hand, it's very inclusive, because I've seen and experienced playing with people from all across the gender spectrum and sexuality... and identifying as different sexualities, being attracted to different sexualities... But is it welcoming? That's the question? In some aspects, no... I guess it depends on who you're with, which band you're in, where you're going. You could feel safe, you can feel safe sometimes, in some areas, in some bands, with some people, but if you step out of that bubble, you're definitely at risk of... I've never seen any violence is what I want to say, but I've witnessed threats.

Tigress expressed concern for the lack of ensuring safety for Queer people at Carnival:

There's not a system in place for the Queer community to freely express themselves, and we don't express explicitly how we're going to keep them safe from people who don't mean them well. You have security... from my own experiences the security are not willing to intervene in any shit that's going down with masqueraders unless it's turning violent.

Jamette spoke to the colonial origins of anti-Queerness and how this wasn't part of the original Carnivals:

I think that is still something that we need to, that we haven't worked on, that we have not completely accepted, and it's a reflection really of what's happening in our larger society... we have inherited that colonial view of dehumanizing non-heterosexual people, of not accepting bodies that are not obviously or strictly male or female. So we've got some work to do there, and it's part of general and overall anti-colonial and decolonial work when it comes to that.

Marie gave her own thoughts on this:

And when I saw that, I was all like... Carnival is Queer. But a lot of people have not adjusted to that thought process. But those are probably people who don't even study liberation. Let's be real... Carnival has kind of, like, shaped that, too, 'cause it just kind of shows that sexuality is more fluid, and then even, too, when you study indigenous roots and stuff, sexuality was always fluid. It wasn't until colonization that it became non-fluid.

A few participants even highlighted how the language of “female” vs. “male” to differentiate costume styles or “man and woman” to talk about whom should dance with whom contributes to the exclusion of and violence against gender non-conforming, non-binary, Trans, or Queer people. Kincaid pleaded:

Let's pay more attention to how we choose our DJs for the road. So you know when we use language, when DJs use language of, “okay guys, woman in front and a man behind, woman in front and a man behind,” We must pay attention to that language. That language is very, very violently heteronormative, and I say violent because at the end of the day, not accepting people who they are is violence.

She also questioned:

Why is there female costumes and male costumes? That's not inclusive. That language is not inclusive. Let's even focus on that. Because at the end of the day... what if I.... yes I may identify as female, but what if I want to dress in what you consider a male costume, why is that a problem? I should be able to buy shorts, put on my headband and go chip. That should not be a problem. So even the very framing of Carnival is exclusive in that fashion.

In addition, several revelers shared recommendations that registration, costume sizing, and band launches should be more inclusive. They also believe that Carnival should be more

affordable and suggested having higher prices for non-locals so that local people could receive discounts. They situated these recommendations in their beliefs that participation in Carnival has gone from one extreme (inclusion of impoverished, formerly enslaved Black African people) to the next (more people of greater financial means, lighter skin, from origins outside of the Caribbean, euro-american body norms, etc.), going against what inclusion in Carnival is supposed to be. Pon Mi Head exclaimed: “I just find that it’s so strange that we went from basically the polar opposite of what Carnival was, to—well in terms of who participated in Carnival—we went from one extreme, and like we're heading into another extreme. We’re not there yet, but it’s getting there.”

**13) *Barriers to Equity in Carnival.*** Participants also shared their thoughts on factors that limit Carnival participation for Caribbean people, and consequently, chances to have the positive health and wellbeing experiences Carnival offers. Many of them identified social barriers such as the roles of religion and the government. Alli shared an experience of religious condemnation of Carnival:

I think a main barrier for people is religion... if it's accepted in your family, and it doesn't look... it's not looked down upon already, then you're exposed to it. If your family already looks down upon it... it's more of a religious thing... And a good example is when I went to Jamaica Carnival, I got passed out bottles of water that said, Jesus loves you, please, repent.

Quite a few masqueraders spoke about the financial barriers due to the capitalist context in which modern-day Carnival finds itself, where tourism and economic interests are of primacy, Carnival is prioritized as a business so bands aim to have higher profits, and the Trinidad-style Carnival is replicated in other locations for economic purposes without connection to its roots. Tigress called for governments to deprioritize thinking about Carnival as primarily “profit

making enterprise.” Related to this are respondents’ discussions of financial considerations in Carnival participation where classism and profit create an environment in which people who want to be included take out Carnival loans or just do not participate because they cannot afford it. Kincaid expanded upon this sentiment to discuss reducing financial barriers to participation even though Carnival bands need to make money:

Carnival is a business and we cannot deny it's a business. So we're saying that we're spending thousands of dollars on Carnival... but what about the people who don't have access to thousands of dollars to spend on a costume? Because they have to worry about feeding children, have to worry about, you know, paying bills... etc.? So how can we make Carnival more inclusive for people of different socioeconomic backgrounds?

**14) Different Carnival in a COVID-19 World.** Almost all participants reported that they felt COVID-19 is changing so much about Carnival and wondered what it will be like if/when it returns fully. Many of them talked about how the cancellations/postponements of Carnival have affected those who rely on its revenue as their income. Maggie explained:

It's not... this isn't a two week job... For people who rely on whatever income mas' production creates for them, they don't even have that now. And this thing showed up without warning. So all of the Carnivals in 2020 that were impacted, especially in the islands, a lot of those people have already put up money of their own to cover their preliminary costs that would have been covered by masqueraders. Now you have no masqueraders, but you have these people suffering. And people who aren't, who think that Carnival is just one gigantic party, will not understand the ways that this impacts other people.



Some participants themselves are involved in the Carnival industry or have their own Carnival-related business, and thus directly experienced the impact of the pandemic on their business practices, goals, or finances.

Many participants noted that they had a lot of hopes for Carnival during this time of pause, reset, and pivoting and see now as a time for changes, evolution, and innovation. Given that COVID-19 has affected Carnival's viability as a business in the short-term, Bunny affirmed that "you have to think outside the box about ways to remain sustainable" and listed people in the Carnival industry who are doing just that: "Fonrose just launched a Design Academy... normally she would be designing costumes for a whole bunch of different Carnivals... so there's a lot of pivoting going on in the scene." Maggie's account corroborated this notion of creating new elements for Carnival to survive: "I think this is the opportunity for Carnival to be reinvented into something better than what it already was. And everybody's starting on the same level playing field right now because nobody... there's no you can't buy your way out of the pandemic." Alli, on the other hand, was hesitant: "I don't see how it can evolve that much. Like I don't really see how it can change due to COVID. I'm really, I'm very.... I almost feel like it's going to be like the NFL, or the NBA, or it's gonna be like baseball... like go continue to play and hope you don't get it."

Calls for Carnival to honor its origins appeared in the majority of interviews. Cardi viewed COVID-19 as presenting an opportunity for reimagining Carnival: "I'm thinking that maybe they needed this break, and I would like to see them do what we've already said... not necessarily go back to our roots, but try to elevate that a bit, too, as well as being progressive." Nutmeg also described this pandemic moment of slowing down and reflecting as beneficial:

Carnival was getting a little big and a little excessive... and in some elements, we were losing the true essence of it. So it gives us an opportunity now to reflect on what Carnival is, what it means, what we're trying to get out of this, and then rebuild. And not focus so much on the, what can I offer you that nobody else, that other band isn't offering you?

Instead of just trying to one up everybody, right, how do we strip it away, all of those extra, the glitz and glam, to ensure that we're maintaining the true essence, and then start rebuilding from there? Because we definitely cannot, will not be able to jump right back into having 12,000 people in a band on the road... And the only reason we've been able to sustain that, with all the glitz and glam, is because you have the volume. And so without volume, then you have to strip away and look for the true essence... Can we have Carnival with just a pan going on the road and people chipping down the road behind the band? And the answer is yes. Carnival does not have to be this big glitzy or glamorous thing all the time. That when we resume that first Carnival, instead of trying to be the biggest, baddest, bestest, how do we retain that authenticity? Because we can't just jump right back into where we left off.

Participants' narratives such as the above also reflected their belief in the power of masqueraders, who are the main consumers of Carnival as an experience and "product," and how they can push back on the things they do not like about Carnival in order to bring about change. Some masqueraders opined that when Carnival returns, they think it will be smaller, more expensive, and more dependent on local people. Maggie viewed a size reduction as "probably the best way to maintain the integrity of Carnival, while also managing the safety of participants. These small islands don't have infrastructure to support somebody coming into their country who may or may not know they're sick and getting everyone sick because they want to party." But she also thought that this might mean "if anything, it's going to be even less accessible because the numbers are going to have to be smaller... And the problem with that is if it becomes something where it's exclusive in that way, then of course... the price is going to go up higher." Tigress underscored the fact that if this happens, Carnival bands will have "to evolve to be more inclusive, because now you are depending more heavily on people who are already in your region. So that audience that you've been so okay with excluding, you're gonna have to look

to them to make up numbers.” Overall, given that all participants expect Carnival to return, many emphasized the need to make COVID-19 health considerations and take certain precautions to ensure that Carnival does not become a super-spreader event, such as requiring vaccinations to participate.

Overall, in their reflections on the longevity of Carnival, some revelers stressed the need to protect the cultural practice from losing local characteristics and being gentrified by non-Caribbean people, especially in countries where Carnivals are much smaller. Robyn shared: “I think small island Carnivals need to be protected and conserved and... protected from becoming a carbon copy of Trinidad... I just think small island Carnivals should be protected at all costs.” In relation to the Carnival Columbus situation that happened in 2020,<sup>23</sup> Bunny reflected: “It just might be people who overstep, and then it kind of makes you want to take it back... kind of makes you want to... like no. You can’t have this thing anymore, and it becomes possessive.” Regarding sustainability, some respondents spoke to the environmental consequences of Carnival around littering and pollution and how those need to be remedied if Carnival is going to improve and be able to sustain itself in this context in which COVID-19 has limited supplies and diminished revenue. In this regard, quite a few mentioned Carnicycle, a social enterprise bridging the gap between environmental health/awareness and Carnival.

Mostly all masqueraders highlighted that they are rethinking and negotiating their participation in future Carnivals. For example, considering COVID-19’s effect on Carnival, Robyn stated: “it has made me rethink if I really want to do Carnival as big as I’ve done it in the past.” In contrast, Maggie asserted: “it still never made me think that I wouldn't go... Even though I was like, I don't know what it’s gonna look like or how that's going to impact me... the

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<sup>23</sup> Carnival Columbus is the moniker given to a white person from the u.k., who was well-known for their appearances at Carnival in St. Lucia, after they arrogantly and falsely claimed that they were “paving a way” for Black dancers who practice the Caribbean dance form known as wining. However, Black Caribbean people have already been creating successful career paths for themselves due to their technical expertise of wining, with @royal.g, @empressece, and @\_inhalemee as the most renown contemporary examples.

thought never crossed my mind that, oh, maybe I'm never going to want to go to Carnival again.”

Alli was adamant about not feeling like she could have 100% control over avoiding COVID-19, and declared that for the next Carnival:

I'm going to take that risk anyway. I know that there's no way for us to have a COVID-friendly Carnival. I mean this is a virus. It's always... we were always putting ourselves into it. You're always putting yourself in danger, touching anyone at any anytime.

Carnival is a contact sport where you are touching random people that you do not know every second. This is impossible.

### ***Twitter Analysis***

My secondary qualitative method was a document/media analysis of posts that participants shared on Twitter. My goal for this was to explore the participatory culture of Twitter as a valid data source (Stewart, 2016), since #CarnivalTwitter is a large virtual community where a lot of conversations on happenings in the Carnival world occur. In addition, social media serves as a personal document that provides a first-hand account of people's beliefs, experiences, or actions. I sought to learn what people were sharing between March-December 2020 about their health and wellbeing in relation to COVID-19 causing postponement and cancellations of Carnival events, without being primed by knowing they were going to participate in a research project before they tweeted. It was my intention for this method to reduce the possibility of recall (specifically social desirability) bias, in which participants respond in a way they think would be seen as agreeable to others.

Only publicly available tweets of accounts from people of heritage from the English-speaking Caribbean who attended Carnivals in English-speaking Caribbean countries were included in this Twitter analysis. This was done after I either a) obtained tweets from people who directly submitted their information to my Qualtrics form or b) sought permission from people whose tweets I found, who subsequently completed the Qualtrics form after I shared it

with them. The prompt for tweet submission was: “Please submit links to each of your tweets in the box below. Tweets should reflect how the COVID-19 pandemic causing the cancellations and postponements of Carnivals around the Caribbean affected your health and wellbeing or possibilities for experiencing pleasure, healing, and liberation.”

**Content Analysis.** To analyze the Twitter data, I used content analysis to identify and describe concepts, their frequencies, and which concepts overlapped the most. I uploaded a cleaned-up version of the spreadsheet Qualtrics generated, from the participant screening/consent/submission form, to the Atlas.ti software. Tweets were not edited as they came directly from the participants instead of being channeled through a recording software (e.g. Zoom’s automatic transcription). I read each tweet and highlighted it as one quotation, rather than segments of quotations, as the unit of analysis for coding.

**Findings.** Of the 78 submitted tweets, eight (8) were excluded for not fitting the criteria/theme. Using an emic approach, I coded each tweet/quotation with short phrases until I developed a full list of codes. Each tweet/quotation could have more than one code. I went through the dataset a few more times, tweaking codes and ensuring that they were as close to the data as possible while also reflecting similarities and/or differences with codes in other quotations. The 70 eligible tweets generated 35 total codes. I then copied the codes from Atlas.ti to my Miro board and organized the codes into categories based on the applicable themes from the interview thematic analysis to provide some continuity and assess overlap. Using Google Sheets, I then matched the quotations/codes with their corresponding categories.

The 35 codes fit into seven categories that were taken from the 18 themes derived from the interviews: 1) Sankofa<sup>24</sup> Principles for Individual and Cultural Healing, 2) Creation and

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<sup>24</sup> Sankofa is an Akan Twi word from Ghana. It is a principle that signifies understanding where you come from in order to know where you’re going (Temple, 2010).

Celebration of Black Euphoria and Joy, 3) Mental Health Impact of No Carnival, 4) Pursuit and Continuance of Carnival, 5) Health Implications of Carnival Nurturing Social Connections, 6) Different Carnival in a COVID-19 World, and 7) Desires and Actualization of Better Selves and Futures.<sup>25</sup> Three of the 35 codes fit under an eighth descriptive category titled “What COVID Did to Carnival.”

***Selected Quotations and Categories.*** Table 1 shows selected quotations and their categories serves as a snapshot of the content analysis in which I determined the presence of specific concepts within participants’ tweets. It is clear that there is overlap with the themes that were reflected in the thematic analysis, thus indicating continuity of themes across methods.

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<sup>25</sup> While themes 1 and 4 exist in both the interviews and the Twitter Analysis, they were not included in the interview findings as a prioritization choice.

**Table 1***Twitter Analysis Excerpts and Categories*

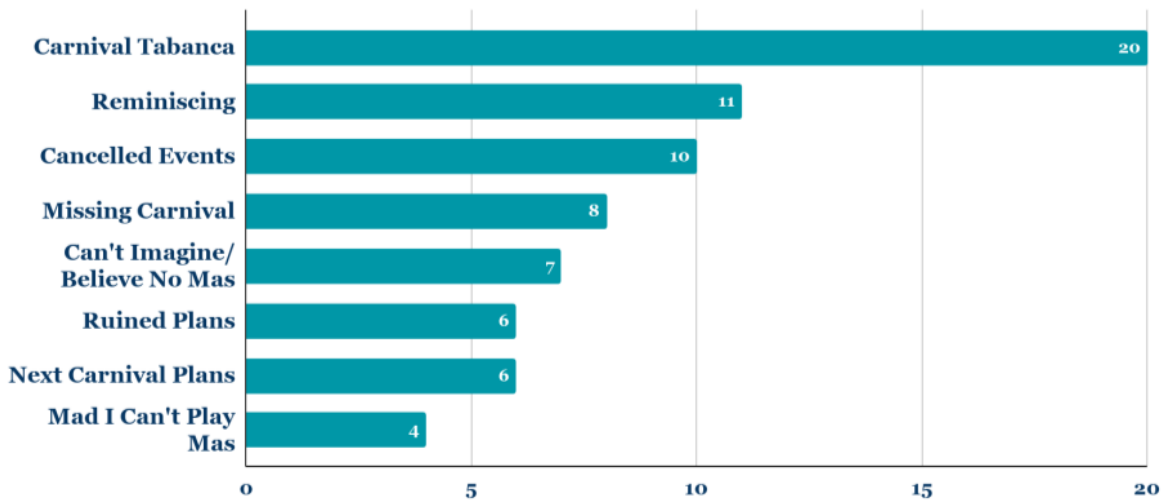
<b>Tweet/Quotation</b>	<b>Categories</b>
so this is why I was so upset about that white shitlate dude. Carnival is not just winking up at fetes. this is a celebration of our freedom. it's in our blood.	Creation and Celebration of Black Euphoria and Joy
Playing mas in Barbados during Crop Over/at Gran Kadooment was a life changing experience. I felt so free and it was so liberating. Gave me something to look forward to every year.	Desires & Actualization of Better Selves and Futures
Wouldn't it be great if this forced the industry to actually get back to the culture of Carnival & not the commercialization of it!!	Different Carnival in a COVID-19 World
I miss carnival. I miss fete. I miss playing mas. Every single day. It's the only time I'm 100% comfortable being sociable. 😭	Health Implications of Carnival Nurturing Social Connections
not gonna lie this video made me tear up a bit. "If you only knew what we been through, you would understand how amazing our joy is..."	Mental Health Impact of No Carnival
So I dreamt I was playing mas last night 😭!! Got up thinking what's gonna be the outcome for Carnival 2021 with Covid-19 and international travel restrictions forecasted to be disrupted till maybe 2023. Have me regretting not playing mas this year even more!! ❤️	Pursuit and Continuance of Carnival
Much respect. Just tried to recreate what I felt for carnival that just past... Seems like we all have to remember our more recent carnival experience right now.	Sankofa Principles for Individual and Cultural Healing
The fact that I won't be getting my makeup done at 6am tomorrow and playing mas the rest of the day. No costume pick up today, no j'ouvert or Friday Night Mas tonight, no road tomorrow, no entanglement on Sunday, no Carnival Rehab on Monday. It's just...I'm not ok.	What COVID Did to Carnival

**Code Frequency.** References to Carnival tabanca occurred most frequently (21/70, or in 30% of the tweets). Reminiscing on past Carnival memories occurred in 15.7% (11/70) of tweets, and mentions of the cancellation of various Carnival events appeared in 10/70, or 14.3% of tweets. Please see Figure 5: Twitter Analysis Code Frequency for the top 8 frequent codes, all

of which appeared more than two times in the group of 70 tweets. The remaining 27 codes either appeared twice or once (please see Appendix F: Full List of Twitter Analysis Codes).

**Figure 5**

*Twitter Analysis Code Frequency*



**Code Co-Occurrence.** Many of the quotations were matched with multiple codes, which meant that there would be co-occurring codes. This co-occurrence indicates a relationship/association between the codes. Table 2 shows the codes that appeared the most together.



**Table 2**

*Twitter Analysis Code Co-Occurrence*

	<b>Can't Imagine/ Believe No Mas</b>	<b>Cancelled Events</b>	<b>Carnival Tabanca</b>	<b>Reminiscing</b>	<b>Ruined Plans</b>
<b>Can't Imagine/ Believe No Mas</b>	0	2	1	0	1
<b>Cancelled Events</b>	2	0	4	1	3
<b>Carnival Tabanca</b>	1	4	0	5	1
<b>Reminiscing</b>	0	1	5	0	1
<b>Ruined Plans</b>	1	3	1	1	0

The co-occurrences of note are:

- 1) Carnival Tabanca & Reminiscing (5)
- 2) Cancelled Events & Carnival Tabanca (4)
- 3) Cancelled Events & Ruined Plans (3)
- 4) Can't Imagine/Believe No Mas & Cancelled Events (2)

### **Enabling Change**

This section will introduce the empathy map, experience map, and actor/stakeholder map, tools used in experience design and systems thinking, to synthesize the emancipatory inquiry findings and engage in sensemaking and meaning-making around Carnival. It will also summarize the supporting activities I did that helped to provide more learning and training around Carnival, the creative and cultural industries, building a business, and desire-based community-building. I will expand on how these activities helped me to interpret the research findings in the subsequent Discussion chapter.

## Empathy Map

Empathy maps are visualization/communications tools typically created in the earlier phases of the design thinking process where researchers/designers build upon the information they have learned about the participant/experiencer and the issue context in order to analyze and make sense of the data (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). As a component of the synthesize step of my analytical approach, the empathy map enables us to situate the insights participants provided in an experience design framework by building on the previous empathize step. I created an empathy map (Figure 6) using information from the interviews and Twitter analysis to visualize and summarize Carnival masqueraders' feelings, influences, questions, pain points, and overall goals.

**Figure 6**

*Empathy Map*



## ***Experience Map***

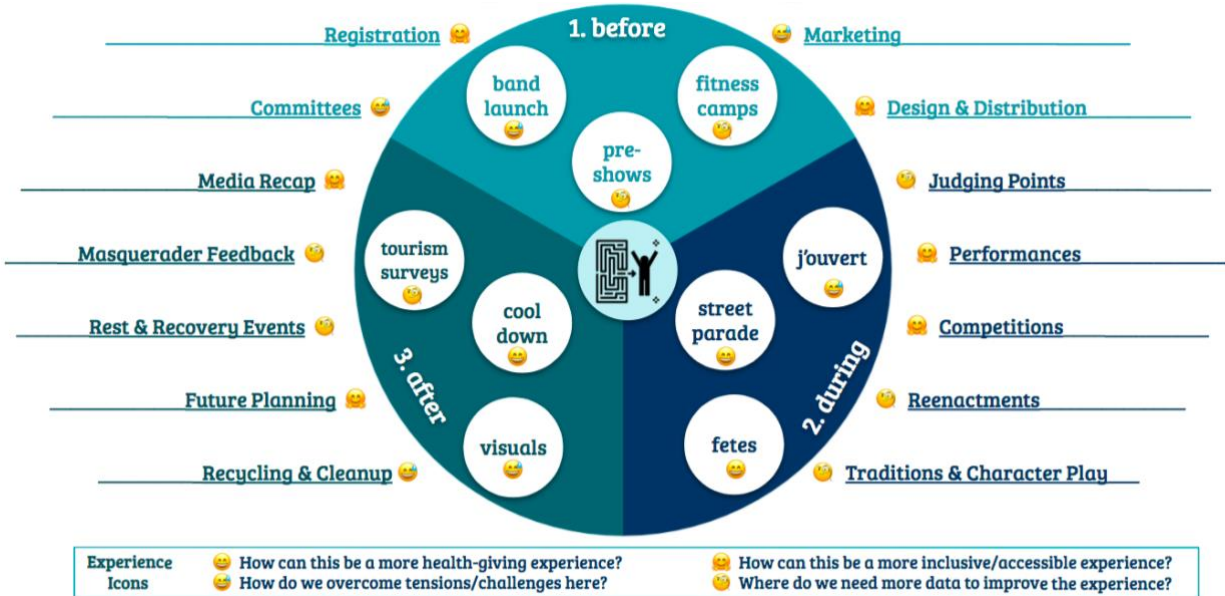
Experience maps are holistic visual models of capturing a participant’s journey through the anticipation (before), participation (during), and reflection (after) phases of an experience and the entire experiencescape. They spotlight how actors or potential actions fit into the greater ecosystem or context by pinpointing the main touchpoints—distinct times and place within an experience where a participant engages with the different elements of the designed experience (Rossman & Duerden, 2019)—whose adaptations have the potential to improve experiences (Mirzaie, 2017). These kinds of experience design maps are often created once participants are known, their needs are understood and articulated, and potential responses and solutions to those needs have been identified. They can also be used to deconstruct experiences that already exist as the primary action towards improving them (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). I created an experience map<sup>26</sup> (Figure 7) using insights from the interviews to deconstruct Carnival and my participants’ experiences through the lens of specific Carnival touchpoints that might be found in iterations around the Caribbean.

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<sup>26</sup> Design inspired by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia’s (2016) “The Health Experience Wheel,” LEGO’s “Designing the Experience- Example WOW” (Temkin, 2009), and the “Event Visitor Experience Map” by Satya Janakiram of VXMedia, LLC (Janakiram, n.d.).

**Figure 7**

*Experience Map*



*Note.* This is not meant to be exhaustive or fully representative, especially because Carnivals vary from place to place around the Caribbean. Some touchpoints can have more than one icon, but the map is simplified for ease of representation.

### ***Actor/Stakeholder Map and Prioritization***

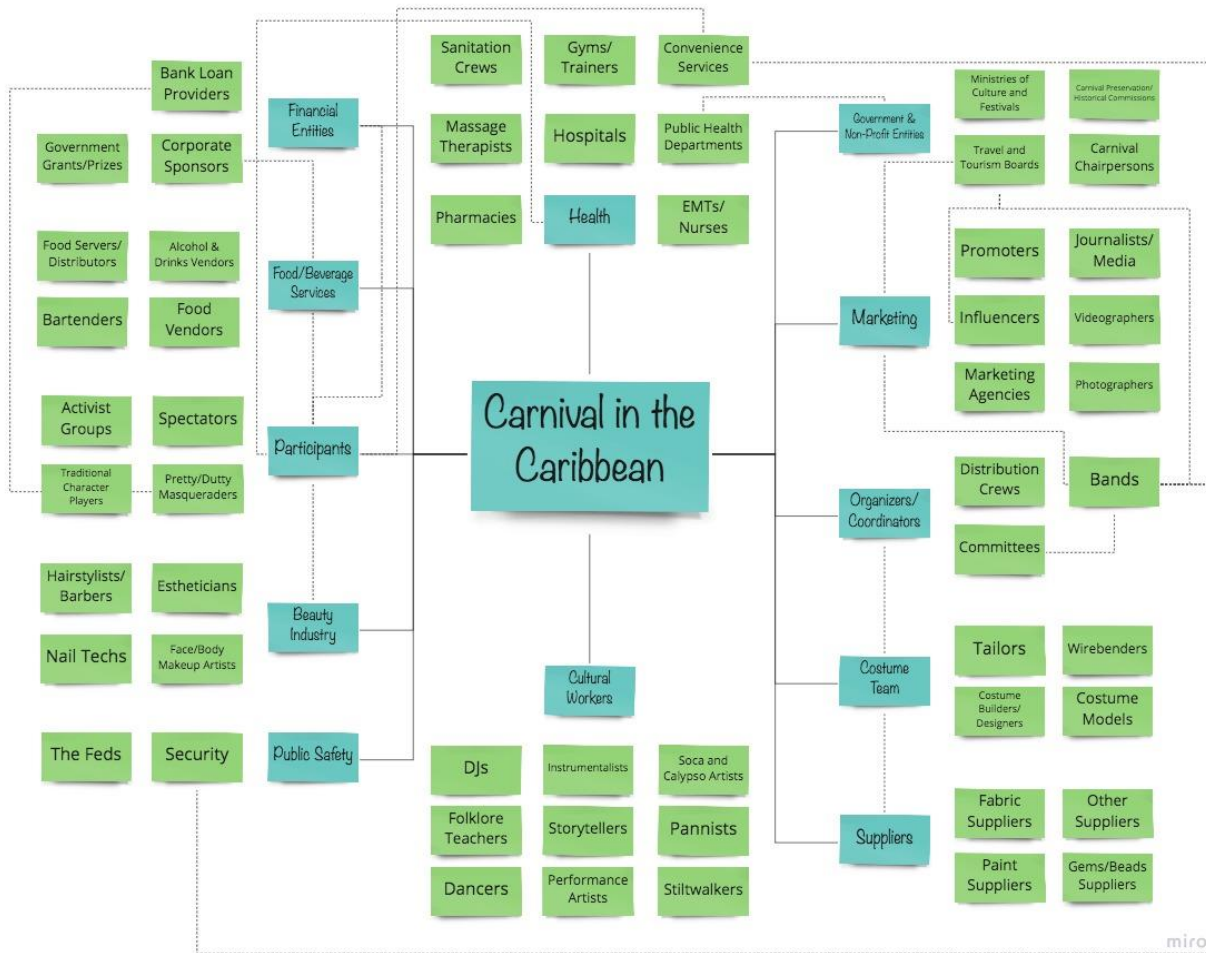
An actor map, more commonly known as a stakeholder map, is a visual representation of the central organizations and individuals in a system, inclusive of those whose actions influence the system and those who are directly affected by the system. Given that not all influential entities are “stakeholders,” (i.e. those who have a “stake” in the outcome or initiative), the term actor mapping is more accurate (Gopal & Clarke, 2015). According to Anna Savina (2019), the process of mapping organizes all the internal and external people and/or organizations of a project, product, or idea in one map in order to get a fuller picture of everyone who is connected

to the project and how all are connected. Once these individuals or entities have been identified, the mapping enables greater understanding of who has the most influence, who might benefit the most, where there are the most resources, and what the next steps might be (Savina, 2019). As a systems thinking and practice tool, actor mapping facilitates understanding the 1) contextual landscape; 2) roles and connections of the various actors to involve; 3) changes and patterns of convergence/divergence; and 4) opportunities for exploring additional parts of the system and forging new relationships (Gopal & Clarke, 2015).

Figure 8 shows my actor map for this project. It is not extensive or comprehensive, but rather, gives a general sense of the actors across Carnivals in different countries. Figure 9 shows the main actor/stakeholder groups mapped onto a prioritization graph.

**Figure 8**

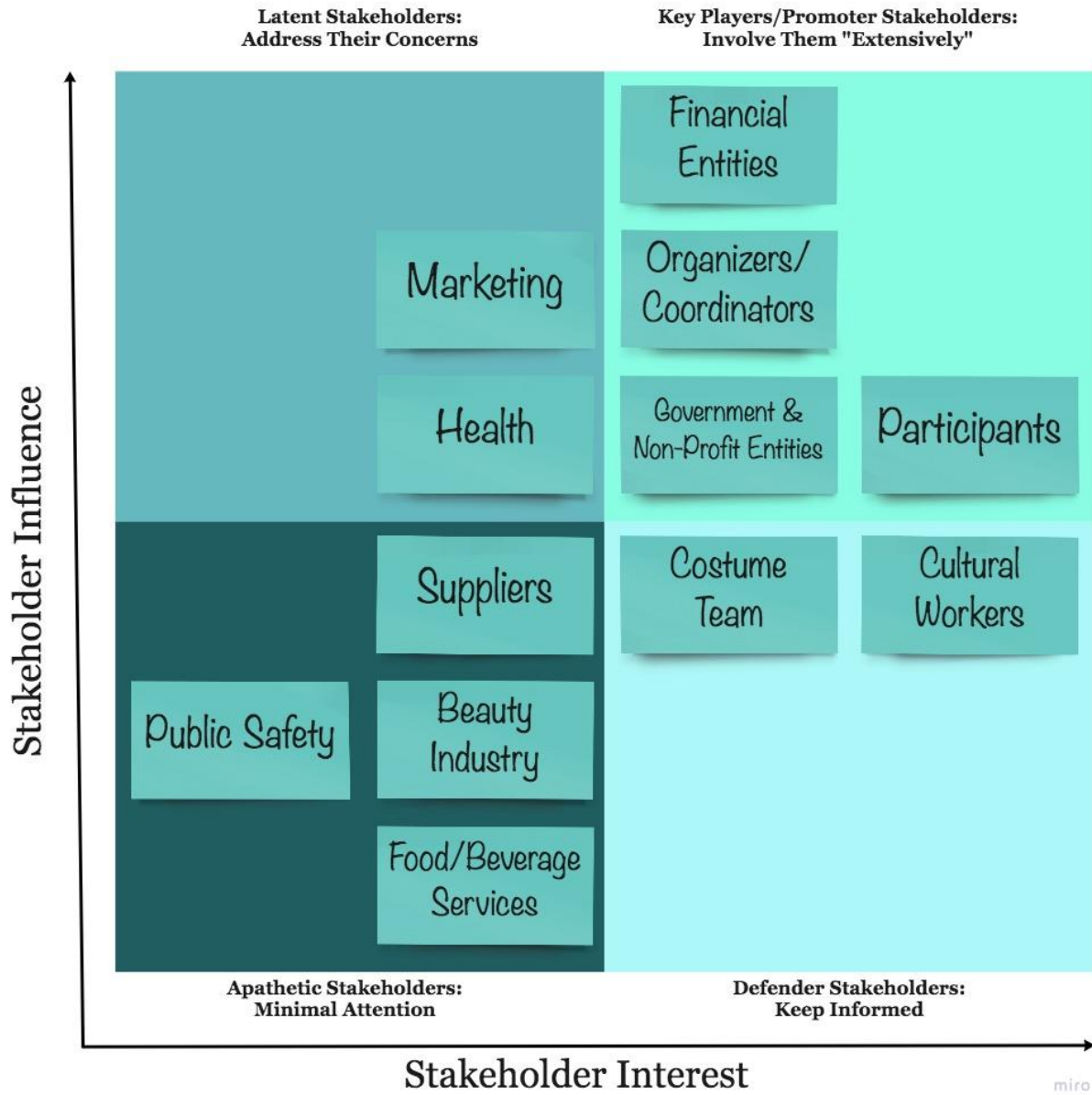
*Actor/Stakeholder Map*



*Note.* The solid lines go from the center of “Carnival in the Caribbean” towards the main groups of actors/stakeholders in teal, which lead to smaller breakdowns of actors/stakeholders within those groups (these are in green). The dotted lines represent a portion of the connections between the smaller breakdowns of actors/stakeholders.

**Figure 9**

*Actor/Stakeholder Prioritization*



## ***Supporting Activities***

In addition to the research, I also engaged in several activities that helped to expand my experience and insight into the Creative and Cultural Industry in the Caribbean, in addition to providing some structure on developing my own creative entity:

- Served as part of the research team for “So-Yuh-a-Fete: Fitness Check: Physical Activity Pilot Study 2020,” where I collected physical activity data via fitness tracker and administered a survey to masqueraders during Trinidad Carnival in February 2020 in collaboration with Dr. Steve Duane Whittaker. Results are expected to be reported in summer 2021 at a virtual public health poster presentation.
- Participated in a six-session Digital Creative Training capacity building initiative hosted by Kingston Creative, Catapult, and Fresh Milk Barbados. The training sessions were: 1) Digital Marketing for Creatives, 2) Ecommerce and Online Sales, 3) Project Management for Creatives, 4) Protecting & Benefiting from your Intellectual Property, 5) Social Media Management for Creatives, and 6) Managing Your Money.
- Participated for three months in the “Profitable Positioning Comprehensive Program” by Dandridge Design Consulting, a digital operations management firm specializing in business infrastructure solutions.
- Watched videos from the Business of Carnival Series by Carla Parris, LLB LLM.
- Engaged in informal conversations with Caribbean Carnival scholars, including Claire Woods and Kearn Williams from the Carnival Institute of Trinidad and Tobago and Dr. Kai Barratt, Carnival scholar and lecturer at the University of Technology in Kingston, Jamaica.
- Organized a virtual conference with Onisha Etkins, titled: “Cultivating Joy and Collective Restoration: (Re)Imagining and (Re)Claiming Pleasure and Liberation,” that reflect the pleasure and healing principles of this project.



- Participated in and observed various Twitter and Instagram discussions on Carnival, by accounts such as @nwannia, @otasha18, and @bahamianista.

## Discussion

### **Overview**

The in-depth interviews illuminated meaningful perspectives around health and wellbeing in masqueraders' past Carnival experiences and their hopes for future Carnivals in the context of COVID-19. I had anticipated that the screening would produce a yield of 20-30 eligible participants<sup>27</sup> and surpassed that number to complete 37 interviews in total. Overall, the interviews indicate that masqueraders perceive their participation in Carnival as providing motivation for 1) making more healthful food choices, 2) engaging in more physical activity, 3) taking both proactive and reactive measures to improve mental health, and 4) enhancing social connections and community care. The analysis also shows that revelers experience pleasure, healing, and liberation through Carnival's 1) origins in Black emancipation and the creation and celebration of Black euphoria and joy, 2) provision of space for opposition and resistance to systemic oppression, and 3) role as community-level creative arts therapy providing replenishment and reward. The findings also highlight participants' awareness of several barriers to achieving equity in Carnival participation and their ideas for changes to include more Caribbean people who have been excluded.

Participants submitted 78 total tweets for the Twitter analysis. This was lower than expected, but in fielding questions from potential participants through social media recruitment, I learned that people were more comfortable doing interviews than having their tweets featured in research.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, having to search for past tweets was a deterrent for some people, even with the steps to conduct an advanced Twitter search delineated in the consent form. Overall, participants' Twitter posts about the negative mental health impact of COVID-19 taking

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<sup>27</sup> The range common to other qualitative DrPH doctoral thesis projects.

<sup>28</sup> The continued security breaches on social media platforms over the past several years, as well as research that shows people are concerned about use of their personal information (Rainie, 2018), may also give insight into why these numbers were so low.

away Carnival experiences 1) reinforce seven of the themes from the interviews; 2) convey the importance of this cultural practice as vital for survival, release, and coping; and 3) further elucidate the impact of the mental health crisis exacerbated by the pandemic.

### ***Interpretations***

Following the same structure as the findings section in the Methods and Analyses chapter, this section depicts my interpretations of the findings from the interviews and Twitter analysis and the insights drawn from the enabling change mapping activities.

#### **Interviews and Twitter Analysis.**

**1. *Physical Health Benefits of Carnival Participation.*** The finding that participants have experienced positive impacts on their physical health from participating in Carnival supports the notion that they are getting tangible health benefits. This may not be widely documented through research, but masqueraders carry this knowledge with them based on their lived experiences. And while some participants did not realize the extent to which they would have to engage in physical activity and more healthful nutrition to build up their endurance, stamina, and immunity, they quickly learned the importance of doing so. Others who already knew that Carnival required active participation prepared for multiple months throughout the year. This aligns with existing research on the health benefits of festivals and celebrations as well as attendee participation motivation, which show that people go to these events seeking and experiencing positive impacts on their health. This met my own expectations as a researcher, given that as a masquerader I have felt this for myself.

**2. *Physical Health Consequences of Carnival Participation.*** That the revelers interviewed were forthcoming about the more unhealthful effects of participating in Carnival signifies that they acknowledge the complex nature of the cultural practice and make risk-

benefit analyses to decide whether the drawbacks outweigh the advantages. In some ways, the negative health impact often results from the active pursuit of Carnival's positive health and wellbeing impact. For example, some revelers imbibe alcohol so that they can further unwind and experience more carefreeness in the moment. And many masqueraders are so focused on the pleasure and release aspects of the experience that they sometimes forget to reapply sunblock, drink enough water, or pay attention to small injuries. This is in alignment with research on attendee participation motivation that discusses the unfavorable side of the risks that people take, and the resulting impact on their health, when attending large-scale festivals and celebrations. These insights also underscore how participants tap into their own self-determination to engage in actions that minimize the toll of alcohol use, sun exposure, dehydration, and injuries in order to maximize their participation. Viewing this from a positive health lens, we can understand that Carnival masqueraders make tradeoffs between healthful and unhealthful behaviors because their motivation to boost their physical health is not as high as their motivation to experience the other benefits of participating. Carnival's health impact is nuanced, but these complexities contribute to participants' overall reasons for actively engaging in the experience in the first place. This intricacy is central to desire-based frameworks, which hold complexity and contradictions, instead of pretending that there are no challenges. So, while critiques of Carnival that focus on any negative elements are valid, they do not tell the full story or center masqueraders' needs and interests in the celebratory space.

**3. *Mental Health Benefits of Carnival Participation.*** The fact that all masqueraders perceive playing mas as having a positive mental health impact on them, whether from seeking joy as a response to stress or wanting to claim their right to joy as an uplifting state of being in and of itself, endorses the view of Carnival as a massive social self-care and community care ritual. Revelers gain improved mental health for themselves, but also as a collective/community through the shared experiences in which they interact with and support

one another. By situating the research in the context of the psychological, cognitive, and emotional requirements for participants' satisfaction with their experiences, we gain insight into how Carnival can meet individuals' and communities' current or anticipated mental health needs through both reactive and proactive mental health approaches. This is also in accord with the literature on cultural activities contributing to psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction, which are attributes of flourishing. Additionally, Carnival conferring mental health benefits to masqueraders confounds common critiques that Carnival is a frivolous, hedonistic practice with no meaningful merits.

**4. *Mental Health Impact of No Carnival Due to COVID-19.*** There are two critical findings under this theme: 1) the majority of masqueraders felt that the postponements and cancellations of Carnival due to the pandemic negatively affected their mental health and wellbeing, and 2) more than 50% of the tweets directly referenced the mental health impact of not having Carnival because of COVID-19. Perhaps unexpected was the extent to which the majority of participants so deeply felt this impact, as evidenced by some participants breaking down, crying, and needing a few moments to process and regroup during the interviews. Some even described the semi-structured conversations as therapeutic, as the joyful catharsis they did not anticipate receiving, but needed during the pandemic. Considering the research that shows that cultural activities play a role in addressing the social determinants of mental health through providing social connectedness, these participants' experiences of grief and depression are congruent with feelings expressed over the past year by people who are accessing much fewer connections with others due to physical distancing measures to curb COVID-19.

**5. *Health Implications of Carnival Nurturing Social Connections.*** The feelings of community, safety, and trust during Carnival that are prevalent in most participants' experiences reflect previous research findings of cultural activities' mental health benefits that

attendees gain through social connections. Assessing the findings in the context of research on cognitive social capital leads us to understand that at the community-level, Carnival impacts health through shaping health-enabling environments and norms. For example, revelers seeing other members in the Carnival community engage in healthful behaviors to boost their participation capacity inspires them to partake in similar behaviors for themselves. Additionally, through participants' responses, we see that Carnival furthers all three types of social capital.<sup>29</sup> For example, the interactions between masqueraders in the parade route and spectators on the sides could be an example of linking social capital, people of different class levels playing in Carnival together might serve as an example of bridging capital, and friends and family playing mas as a group can be thought of as an example of bonding capital. However, masqueraders' concerns about needing to be protected from stormers primarily intimate how 1) Carnival is not accessible and people are (rightfully) rebelling against this inaccessibility, and 2) there are contradictions between some revelers' wishes for Carnival to be more inclusive but wanting a VIP-type of exclusive experience. As Autumn Winters summed up, "Carnival has put a price on liberation," and the security ropes and additional measures that are meant to keep non-paying people out of some events serve as a manifestation of capitalist and class oppression which renders tenuous social connections across socioeconomic lines.

**6. *Healthy Self-Concept and Self-Expansion.*** Participants' narratives of improved positive sense of self due to feeling truly seen, inside and out, by other masqueraders overlaps with accounts of how Carnival 1) increases self-efficacy by motivating participants to make better choices for their bodies and 2) makes them feel like they can do "anything." The key idea of coming home to one's self indicates internal and environmental safety and comfort through

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<sup>29</sup> Mentioned in the literature review section and duplicated here for ease of access: "Social capital can also be broken down into types: linking (vertical ties among people in different power hierarchies, bridging (weaker ties between people of different networks), and bonding (strong ties within a network) (Eriksson, 2011)."

partaking in the experience in community with others who understand the practice and its social etiquette. In addition, the topic of unlearning harmful messages is also particularly noteworthy in today's context in which hyperconnectivity and hypervisibility due to technological advances enables the proliferation of oppressive messaging that can be detrimental to one's personal, social, and cultural understanding of self. Overall, these results illustrate how beneficial Carnival is in contributing to healthier self-concept and self-expansion. This is further supported by the literature on people's motivations for attending events or pursuing certain experiences, which identifies self-esteem as a critical motivation. It should be noted that none of the participants spoke about Carnival having a negative impact on their sense of self, which warrants further inquiry due to expressed tensions around representation.

**7. *Carnival's Facilitation of the Body-Mind-Spirit Connection.*** Revelers' Carnival experiences being so embodied, emotional, and spiritual, yet still being difficult to explain with words, such that all participants acknowledged a need for others to experience it for themselves to truly understand, is consistent with Carnival's positive mental health implications. The inclusion of this theme is critical in the context of research showing that euro-american models of health and wellbeing frequently fail Caribbean, African, and Asian communities, as these models do not practice the anti-oppressive, social justice-oriented, equitable care they claim to provide. This is due, in part, to those models' 1) limited conceptualization of health and illness being located in either the mind or body, but not the spirit and 2) denigration of spirituality as a determinant and restorative element of health. This contrasts many non-euro-american cultures whose values are based in collectivism, spirituality, and holism (Sutherland et al., 2013). And so, Carnival's upliftment and embodiment of the wholeness and interconnectedness of the body, mind, and spirit serves as a culturally-affirming health integration practice.

**8. *Desires and Actualization of Better Selves and Futures.*** Masqueraders yearn to continue their experiences of improved self-concept and self-expansion, e.g. taking better care of their physical and psychological health, in order to reach self-actualization and become the current or future selves they want or dream they can be. This being most physically felt through costume transformation speaks to the aforementioned body-mind-spirit connection innate to most Caribbean cultures, as well as the mental health perks of Carnival participation. Collectively, the responses under the theme of desiring and actualizing better selves and futures can be contextualized in the literature on flourishing, specifically around its domains of character and virtue, happiness and life satisfaction, and meaning and purpose. Additionally, this is also linked with Moodley and Bertrand's (2013) reasoning that foundational Caribbean concepts of health are tied to freedom from oppression, indicating the desire for better lives and existences.

**9. *Creation and Celebration of Black Euphoria and Joy.*** The shared understanding of Carnival as honoring Blackness and the unexplainable euphoria it brings to masqueraders can be interpreted through the specific lens of the psychological and emotional participant requirements for satisfaction with an event or experience. The psychological aspects relate to how revelers want to be perceived and how their images or roles during the experience factor into this. So, for the majority of participants to feel such deep conviction about Carnival as resistance to anti-Blackness, and how this affirms them as Caribbean people whose existence is inextricably connected to our enslaved Black African ancestors, suggests that they 1) see the cultural practice as centering their current lived experiences and 2) want these experiences to be joyful. The emotional factors relate to how Carnival enhances positive emotions, such as euphoria and happiness, to address masqueraders' emotional health needs. It should be noted that the mix of participants located in Canada, the U.S., and the Caribbean meant that the different regions' racial contexts influenced the degree to which masqueraders perceived how



Carnival creates space for uplifting Black euphoria and joy. For example, participants in the u.s. focused more on how Carnival goes against anti-Blackness than participants in the region did, because u.s. participants were contextualizing it in the current (continuing) events of white police killing Black people in the u.s., and thus held even tighter to experiences that visibly affirm Blackness on a large scale. For regional masqueraders, the celebration of Blackness was a given core element that was affirmed first as positive in and of itself, instead of being primarily thought of in opposition to systemic oppression. Although deeper analysis of these nuances is beyond the scope of this thesis, all masqueraders opined positively about the theme of Black euphoria and joy and how they need Carnival to return to experience these benefits again.

**10. *Carnival's Expansion of Capacity to Navigate an Oppressive World.*** Building on the upliftment of Blackness, participants' accounts of Carnival facilitating the reclamation of joy and using it to defy and resist oppression gives further weight to Carnival being a cultural health asset, given that it contributes to community vitality. Further, through an assets-based approach, the interviews help us understand how Carnival promotes individual and community-level capacity-building, through utilizing joy as resistance, that empowers Caribbean people to work towards more positive futures. Without prompting, several respondents made connections between the roots of Carnival as protest and the summer 2020 global protests against the murders of Black people by police, showing their awareness and sensemaking around the interconnectedness between global Black struggles for freedom from oppression.

**11. *Carnival as Community-Level Creative Arts Therapy.*** The literature on the impact of festivals and celebrations on health and wellbeing is especially applicable with this theme, as most masqueraders' stories depicted Carnival's rejuvenating and healing powers through the uplifting rhythms of Soca and Calypso and collective dance in the street parades, fetes, and j'ouverts. This aligns with the research on and practice of collective movement for

healing trauma, particularly in Caribbean cultures, as Hérard-Marshall and Rivera (2019) write about in “Embodied resilience: Afro-Caribbean dance as an intervention for the healing of trauma in dance movement therapy.” These authors spotlight the fact that people of historically and currently oppressed communities hold history and collective memories in their bodies and how dance/movement therapy is a therapeutic modality that better fits African and other non-euro-american belief systems and cultures (Hérard-Marshall & Rivera, 2019). Accordingly, this fits in with the notion that Carnival provides the body-mind-spirit connection that underpins Caribbean conceptualizations of holistic health to serve as community-level creative arts therapy.

**12. Exclusion/Discrimination as Antithetical to Carnival.** This theme weighed heavily on most of the participants, evident in how much they had to say about manifestations of classism, sizeism, ableism, colorism, and anti-Queerness in Carnival. However, as they shared their common grievances, I found it unclear whether some respondents were rehashing critiques that have been floating around the Carnival community or if they connected with them on a personal level. This was mainly true for those who described other people’s experiences of fat-antagonism or anti-Queerness, for example, but did not identify as (or shared stories around) being the targets of such discrimination.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the tension between some respondents’ negative feelings towards stormers and their beliefs that Carnival needs to be more inclusive allows us to understand that Carnival inclusivity is more complex than just involving anyone who wants to participate. Regardless, given that existing literature highlights the role that festivals and celebrations play in cultivating inclusion, the findings in relation to this theme make it clear that masqueraders are aware of inequities in Carnival, whether directly influenced by them or not and whether they are truly hoping for greater

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<sup>30</sup> It is perfectly in participants’ (and anyone’s) right to abstain from divulging and re-living traumatic experiences, so this is not viewed negatively.

inclusion or not. This implies the need for multi-tiered approaches to achieving equitable change in Carnival.

**13. *Barriers to Equity in Carnival.*** Revelers did not have as many examples as to the deeper causes of inequities in Carnival as they did with the types of inequities they see on the surface. But they were able to identify some of the most impactful contributors as religion (in relation to anti-Queerness and denigration of expressions of sexuality, for example) and capitalism (in relation to Carnival bands' imperative to make profits and extractive tourism, which caters to non-Caribbean regional people, being one of the few options Caribbean countries have for their economies). Even though Carnival may increase masqueraders' capacity to deal with oppression, in a way, its current structure also replicates oppressive characteristics. This nuanced contradiction is important for all masqueraders and other Carnival actors/ stakeholders to sit with and to reflect on regarding their contributions to inequities in the cultural practice. It also has implications for the types of changes that would be possible to make Carnival more equitable, as while there is a lot of work to be done on the cultural and systemic levels, changes must occur at different points between the individual and systems levels for a holistic approach.

**14. *Different Carnival in a COVID-19 World.*** The postponements and cancellations of Carnivals around the region and imaginings of what they might look like when they return<sup>31</sup> were perhaps the most challenging and uncertain parts of the interviews. They were also the source of some levity and jokes in people's submitted Tweets. This speaks to how participants are trying to make sense of the possibility of not having Carnival anytime soon, which means they will not be able to partake in the various health, wellbeing, pleasure, healing, and liberation

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<sup>31</sup> Ideally amid vaccinated populations, appropriate public health prevention measures for large gatherings, and personal protective equipment designed to match costumes.

experiences the practice offers. Revelers will likely have to get this from other (virtual) places, but knowing where and *how* to obtain such experiences that *might* provide a semblance of what Carnival provides, while we are still in the middle of the pandemic with limited, large-scale, safe physical interactions, is neither straightforward nor promising. Overall, it is clear that masqueraders are worried, both about their own health and wellbeing and for the future of the emancipatory practice. This shows that Carnival's role as a cultural health asset cannot be underestimated; people need more culturally-affirming ways of coping with daily life and celebrating their survival in the face of elements, systems, and viruses that try to harm or kill them. This is even more significant now because the COVID-19 pandemic has already taken away some of people's coping strategies and healing possibilities through the loss of social connections and diminishing social capital, which negatively impacts health and wellbeing and notions of flourishing and thriving.

**Mapping Activities.** Synthesizing the emancipatory inquiry insights, the experience design and systems thinking tools provided useful visualizations to make sense of Carnival as both a cultural health asset and experience that confers positive health and wellbeing benefits and experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation.

By organizing insights from the interviews with masqueraders into the categories of feelings, influences, pain points, overall goals, and questions, the empathy map made it easier to identify the most salient and relevant characteristics of Carnival to target when making recommendations for enabling equitable change. For example, seeing all of the participants' questions, and how much they reflect people's anxieties around Carnival and COVID-19, juxtaposed with their perceptions of how Carnival makes them feel, enables us to better understand why Carnival is such a big deal culturally and socially, why it means so much to people on an individual level, and why not having it and not knowing when it might return has affected masqueraders' mental health and wellbeing so profoundly. As such, recommendations

would need to speak to changes that ensure masqueraders' questions are answered while also affirming that any changes will still elicit the positive feelings participants have come to value. As well, being able to see revelers' pain points alongside their overall goals for Carnival participation facilitates appreciation for how seemingly opposing characteristics of the cultural practice can exist simultaneously. This existence cannot simply be labeled as cognitive dissonance, and so recommendations must also treat these conflicts not as points for condemnation and dismissal, but as opportunities for improvement.

Incorporating participants' perceptions and my own experiences of Carnival, the experience map pictorialized a snapshot of different potential touchpoints of masqueraders' engagement throughout the different phases of Carnivals in the Caribbean. This provides a holistic view of the practice's experiencescape, while also breaking it down to the places at which change might be enabled by asking questions at the various touchpoints. For example, being able to identify the street parades as one of the most compelling touchpoints during the participation phase of the Carnival experience and asking how we can make it a more health-giving experience permits us to situate the masquerader at a specific time and place. Then we can think through how to address tensions around injuries, dehydration, overuse of alcohol, or COVID-19 prevention through actions that prioritize the masquerader's health and wellbeing in this particular instance. Now, given that this map may or may not align with how current Carnival entities are designing their experiences, especially because this visualization would look different for Caribbean Carnivals in different locations around the region, the experience map serves as an example of what an actual Carnival experience map could look like, given all that we have learned from the diverse perspectives masqueraders shared with me. Overall, this activity indicates that while we are not quite at the design stage of this project's analytical approach (this would come in the third diamond, which will occur after the submission of this thesis), as an exploration, it is a useful tool that can help shape decision-making.

The actor/stakeholder map and prioritization chart revealed that the primary stakeholders to make recommendations to are participants (e.g., masqueraders, activist groups, spectators), financial entities (such as corporate sponsors, bank loan providers, and government grant providers), Carnival bands, and cultural workers (like steelpan players, artists, performers) because of their high levels of influence and interest. A lot of masqueraders' pain points are with Carnival bands because they are the entity providing the most touchpoints for masqueraders. But there are multiple groups that can and should play a role and be held accountable for equitable change in Carnival, including masqueraders themselves. Through an understanding of the sociocultural history of the region and speaking with Carnival scholars like Dr. Kai Barratt, it is clear that a lot of the tensions within Carnival spaces go back to the deeper, systemic issues of the effects of capitalism and colonialism. This necessitates the inclusion and action of multiple actors/stakeholders at various levels of interest in order to produce the changes many of us want to see, given the inevitable social and economic shifts the COVID-19 pandemic is causing.

Together these mapping tools convey how the benefits, conflicts, and inequities in the year-round celebrations of Carnivals in the Caribbean that have been illuminated in this project are situated in a complex, layered system with multiple actors, influences, and root causes, such that concerns cannot be easily addressed with a quick fix or simple recommendations.

### ***Implications***

Carnival in the Caribbean can be thought of as an emancipatory cultural practice originating in the region as a culturally-affirming adaptation and community-level mental health care practice by and for formerly enslaved, displaced, and neglected communities to serve as an intervention against oppression and all of its resulting impacts on health and wellbeing. Carnival grants participants release and increased mental fortitude and speaks to the very human need to be socially connected to one another, all of which were critical for ancestral Black

Caribbean folks, and are additionally essential now in the face of continued systemic oppression. The illumination that respondents are so aware of the (frequently) indescribable pull that Carnival has on them implies the need and yearning for life experiences that fulfill our bodies, minds, and spirits in such tumultuous times, in alignment with Caribbean cultural values around spirituality, collectivism, and holism (Sutherland et al., 2013). This has great implications for understanding the value of Carnival beyond diversion and economics.

Further, situating revelers' experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation in Rossman and Duerden's (2019) experience types framework, we can understand Carnival as memorable through the emotions it elicits, meaningful in its ability to create space for participants learning more about themselves and the world, and transformational because of the profound impact it has that motivates people to make positive attitudinal and behavioral changes. This project's findings communicate the fact that masqueraders who know Carnival deeply, who return to it year after year, or even several times a year, do so for beneficial reasons in alignment with its memorable, meaningful, and transformational characteristics. And this has implications for how Carnival entities might continue to adapt the practice after the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to meet attendees' needs and ensure Carnival's sustainability and viability as part of the creative and cultural industries. Building upon this, I will discuss additional implications of this project's findings in four areas: 1) positive health and wellbeing; 2) pleasure, healing, and liberation; 3) equitable change in Carnival (with special topics on "sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility" and "Carnival industry, extractive tourism, and capitalism"); and 4) public health research and practice.

**Positive Health and Wellbeing.** While health may not be the first concept people associate with Carnival, and though some voyeurs might think health contradicts what they believe to be true about the cultural practice, this project's findings matter because they are adding to the small, but growing evidence base on how Carnival can and does positively impact

health and wellbeing. This homegrown data, done by/for/with Caribbean people, can be used to leverage Carnival as a cultural health asset (not just a business or cultural asset) to buttress calls for more healthful changes to Carnival and increased sustainability, accessibility, and inclusivity in order for more Caribbean people to experience its benefits. It also serves as a foundation for mixed methods research exploring how the pursuit and practice of Carnival may impact some of the region's most pressing health outcomes, such as metabolic syndrome and chronic non-communicable diseases.<sup>32</sup> This may have additional implications for accessing financial resources for less-funded aspects of Carnival (especially those that typically have to rely on government support), from the health business sector, for example. Moreover, understanding Carnival's positive health and wellbeing implications might also provide additional pleasure- and-desire-based framing to the activism/advocacy efforts that often take place during Carnival around public health issues like HIV/AIDS, a/gender and a/sexuality-based violence prevention, and perhaps COVID-19 vaccine access inequity, in future Carnival iterations.

Understanding Carnival as a coping mechanism or proactive/reactive care for physical health, mental health, and social health permits us to empathize with it being so deeply missed in the context of a painful and traumatic pandemic year in which the ubiquity of Black pain and Black death has been overwhelming. Countless articles have characterized the resulting mental health and loneliness crisis as a second pandemic, enumerating the missed experiences and social connections that were so core to people's pre-COVID-19 lives (National Alliance on Mental Health, n.d.). Though Carnival cannot happen in the way communities are used to, this does not mean that Carnival is forever destroyed (although it may be forever changed). It exists in the bodies, minds, and spirits of Caribbean people, and the performances, competitions, street parades, costumes, etc. are just the external expression of this. Masqueraders' practices of

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<sup>32</sup> Dr. Steve Duane Whittaker has a forthcoming poster presentation, titled "Physical Activity Profiles among Caribbean Residents with Brief Comment on Uptake of Fitness Tracking Technology" that shares his research on some of these issues.



reminiscing using photographs and videos have been helping them to relive more joyful moments in their lives. And even without the official celebrations, people have reinvigorated the spirit of Carnival in their own homes, in their yards, and on their streets, dressed in old costumes and gallivanting in physically distanced ways to partake in the living ritual and spiritual practice. If there is one thing that has been made certain through this project's exploration, it is that even though most Carnivals in 2020 and 2021 were and have been cancelled, it is clear that embodied Black joy has not been and cannot ever be cancelled. And so, Carnival's conferral of physical, mental, spiritual, cultural, emotional, and social health and wellbeing benefits buttresses our ability to hold onto joy and hope during traumatic life events.

**Pleasure, Healing, and Liberation.** Carnival has a role not just as proactive/reactive individual and community care but also in Caribbean people's active and ongoing efforts to actualize pleasure, healing, and liberation. This project matters as an example of historically and currently oppressed peoples (especially those of Black African descent who live in countries recovering from the atrocities of the imperial core)<sup>33</sup> continuously holding onto hopes that better will come during and after COVID-19. Such hope remains even though the experiences that bring us restoration, joy, healing, etc., have been postponed or have had future possibilities for them terminated by the pandemic. And for so many of us who must work in order to meet our (and our families') basic needs, the coping strategy of overlooking the fact that there is more to life than survival and work is becoming more difficult, as we increasingly realize that the systems we live in are forcing us to continue working, during the heightened risk of increased morbidity and mortality from COVID-19, at the expense of our lives.

At the core of what enables Carnival to provide experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation are its facilitation of time spent with loved ones and new social connections, cultural

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<sup>33</sup> Another name for colonizing and settler-colonizing places like Canada, Europe, and the U.S.

identity and creative self-expression, performance and transformation, and reflection and meaning-making, for example, that brings purpose, diversion, and enrichment to our lives. These are the aspects of existence that provide spiritual and emotional sustenance and rejuvenation, always during life under oppressive systems, and at heightened levels during unprecedented times of crisis. Being able to imagine futures in which these meaningful experiences return to us, not just in full, but better and more intentional than before, is crucial in our nurturing of the desire to make it to a world in which the mismanagement of COVID-19, and other forms of structural violence, does not pose the threat and havoc it does now. Carnival inherently provides space for this, but there need to be sustainable changes so that the practice can better weather future public health crises and inevitable capitalist maelstroms.

Solaris and Hurt (2019) state that if event experiences were created to center people's need to belong, connect, and socialize, participants would thrive and flourish. Consequently, the goal should be for event attendees to explore new ways of thinking, discuss their futures, and engage in shared dreaming. And so, given that Carnival is part of the "experience economy," which is changing (and will continue to change), in part, due to COVID-19, it makes sense to think of how as an experience it has provided pleasurable, healing, and liberating moments for masqueraders that we continue to dream about when we think of the future. Any adaptations implemented in the context of COVID-19 must be strategic and intentional enough to support the emancipatory cultural practice in enabling participants to thrive, flourish, and continue claiming better existences.

**Equitable Change in Carnival.** The issue of trying to enable equitable change in Carnival, for the increased participation of Caribbean people who have been excluded, is complex given the practice's centuries-long history, current existence in a capitalist economic system, and dynamic nature and differences in the various Caribbean countries. We have come to learn that masqueraders in this project point to religion, capitalism, and government as some

barriers to equity, with the Carnival bands being a specific target of who they think need to lead the changes. Dr. Kai Barratt questions the practicality of seeking change at only the level of that specific group of Carnival actors/stakeholders: “how can it change in Carnival if we’re not changing in society?” (in conversation with the author, April 2, 2021). This pushback and framing are key, as they speak to the fact that 1) systems-level/upstream interventions have greater social impact for reducing barriers and 2) masqueraders must hold themselves accountable as well, as the choices they make to secure their participation can often make them complicit in the exclusion of others. Assessing the findings through the socio-ecological model applied to Carnival (please see Appendix G: Socio-Ecological Model for Change) helps us to visualize and organize possibilities for changes that need to happen at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and systemic/enabling environment levels, with the latter being paramount. Overall, no matter the level, any thinking on how to enable equitable change in Carnival in the Caribbean must center Caribbean people and account for/counter the impact of non-Caribbean people benefiting from the practice.

***Sustainability, Inclusivity, and Accessibility.*** To reiterate, when it comes to the areas of Carnival in which we need equitable change, the most pressing issues masqueraders discussed were around anti-Queerness, ableism, classism, sizeism/fat-antagonism, and sexism. Thinking about this in terms of accessibility in our COVID-19 era, participants understood the virtual events as enabling more people to experience some of the joy and healing Carnival provides, because the discriminatory in-person barriers did not exist in the same way in virtual spaces. However, there remains a digital media accessibility issue for those who may not have access to the internet or even wifi-compatible devices, in addition to the potential lack of virtual representation of those who typically are excluded from the in-person experiences. Additionally, participants sharing that they felt there was no explicit or physical anti-Queerness during the celebrations does not mean that intentional inclusivity is a part of Carnival experiences. This

indicates a need to hear directly from more Queer Caribbean carnivalists. In her article “Queer Masqueraders; We’re on the road too,” Shanese Indoowaaboo Steele (2020) writes about how the t-shirt options offered as an addendum to the typical “female vs. male” costume options have “more to do with offering an option that covers more of your body than providing the Queer community with an alternative to the more gender specific costumes.” Her analysis alludes to a larger point about incorporating affirming inclusivity practices that enable all participants to feel that there are options for them instead of feeling otherized and/or shamed for not conforming to a “standard.” Furthermore, the sustainability of Carnival as a festival tourism business in this COVID-19 world is threatened by the possibilities of 1) continued postponements/cancellations, 2) non-regional people traveling to attend,<sup>34</sup> 3) regional and local masqueraders having reduced finances because of the economic recession, and 4) shortages of outsourced costume materials due to decreased global manufacturing production, among other consequences of the pandemic. Ensuring that when Carnival returns more Caribbean people will be able to participate requires unlearning and dismantling the anti-Queer, ableist, classist, sizeist, and sexist practices that deter or prevent more regional/local people from opting in and enjoying. Going into further detail is beyond this thesis’ scope, but these topics will be further explored in the continuation of this project after submission.

***Carnival Industry, Extractive Tourism, and Capitalism.*** Also of special note under the topic of equitable change is this project’s relevant implications for the Caribbean’s tourism industry. Carnival in Trinidad was first banned/cancelled during World War II due to security concerns, as Trinidad had given the u.s. leases on military bases.<sup>35</sup> usonians<sup>36</sup> living

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<sup>34</sup> In particular, because geopolitics and inequitable vaccine access has made it likely that more non-Caribbean Carnival-goers will be vaccinated than Caribbean masqueraders.

<sup>35</sup> The u.s. laid claims to the strategic positioning of the island (Doyle, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> A synonym for “americans” that better specifies which *kind* of american (i.e. people living in the united states) given that north america, Central America, South America, Latin America, etc. exist.

there became a part of Trinidadian society, and their patronizing of calypsonians and steelbands positively impacted the economy (Doyle, 2021). It was only after the independence movements in the region that Carnival started to be developed and marketed as a national product to entice tourists to bring in revenue (Dr. Kai Barratt, in conversation with the author, April 2, 2021). This is congruent with the long pattern of residents of the imperial core flying to the Caribbean to escape from their everyday realities and being welcomed because they have greater access to financial capital. This is *disrespectfully* continuing even during the pandemic. As more folks from the u.s., canada, and europe get vaccinated, more people are traveling to the Caribbean region for vacation (Kolinjivadi, 2021), with little care for the fact that they are (likely) bringing COVID-19 to recovering countries and territories whose health infrastructure development has been undermined by the geopolitics of the imperial core. Instead, tourists' current concerns are being able to flee the mentally depleting global environment of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety created by COVID-19, to go to the Caribbean where they are catered to as outsiders and do not have to engage with harsher realities. The pandemic has highlighted how insidious extractive tourism<sup>37</sup> has always been, but even more audaciously at this time.

Even though they are on hold, Caribbean Carnivals fit into this context, especially given their marketing as festival tourism that caters more to non-regional people (including the Caribbean Diaspora, whose citizenship in the imperial core often grants them access to more economic resources). Being able to leverage and uplift Carnival as a cultural health asset can enable actors/stakeholders to center Caribbean people in a more intentional and culturally-affirming way. Additionally, focusing less on bringing in tourists and more on including more Caribbean people can grant sustainable economic benefits in addition to the health and

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<sup>37</sup> That is, tourism in which “capitalism exploits labor”, nationals are underpaid, money does not flow into the hands of the people (but rather to international or non-local corporations), tourists strain the local infrastructure, gentrification catering to non-residents causes displacement, natural resources are privatized for economic gain, environmental destruction prevails, etc. (Kolinjivadi, 2021).

wellbeing benefits. This is significant because it speaks to how even access to Carnival as a cultural health asset is distributed inequitably, skewing towards those who exist “beyond the community bound by a culture” (Dr. Steve Duane Whittaker, in conversation with the author, March 6, 2021).

Replacing tourism as many Caribbean countries’ main source of individual income and country revenue is likely not feasible in the current capitalist economic system, especially with no practical and comparable alternatives that are neither extractive nor detrimental to both Caribbean people and the environment. As Angelique Nixon (2015) asserts, “there is still more work to do if Caribbean tourism is to be transformed, locally led, and not participate in the exploitation of Caribbean cultures, places, or people” (p. 186).

**Public Health Research and Practice.** An additional implication of this project is that it provides a model for finding health within spaces and systems that are not framed using a conventional public health lens. I began this project with inquiring about what kind of emancipatory cultural practices already exist within historically and currently oppressed communities that could be perceived as conferring positive health and wellbeing benefits to community members and the possibilities for expanding and improving them. I have held true that there are valid, health-giving, culturally-affirming reasons for engagement in traditions like Carnival that promote healthful behaviors and mental states of being driven by the motivation to increase pleasure and healing. This approach contrasts the typical public health tactic of first looking at undesirable health indicators and metrics at the community-level and then looking for ways to fix them by changing or removing people’s exposure to or engagement in systems or actions that produce these adverse public health outcomes. Many public health initiatives do not incorporate pleasure or healing motivations into health issues like substance misuse and smoking cessation, diet/nutrition adaptations for chronic non- communicable disease prevention, sexually transmitted infection or pregnancy prevention, physical activity for

cardiovascular health, etc., and thus fall short in their capacity to enable long-term behavioral change. In this way, this project serves as an example of moving from a damage-based framework to a desire-based framework to improve health and wellbeing by acknowledging and highlighting the good in Carnival practices instead of solely lamenting the negative consequences. It would behoove public health researchers and practitioners to further develop frameworks that do this as well.

In addition to serving as a transdisciplinary, desire-based example to explore health and wellbeing, this project introduces experience design as having potential as a discipline for public health impact. One of the experiences that inspired me to think of taking this approach for the doctoral project is my background in health promotion and communication as well as program planning and implementation, which often included organizing and producing events like community health fairs, behavioral change activities outreach, interactive workshops and training, national conferences, and more. Events and experiences like those have been a part of public health initiatives for improved health outcomes, but their long-term impacts are not always documented or clear. As Matthew Trowbridge wrote for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Culture of Health blog, "public health must improve its ability to develop multi-dimensional interventions to more successfully provide environments and experiences that encourage positive health outcomes. Put another way, public health must develop its capacity for design thinking" (Trowbridge, 2013). Through this project, I have been able to explore experience design as a method of design thinking, opening up new ways of knowledge creation and innovation to address complex public health issues, especially around mental health and wellbeing for historically and currently oppressed communities. It would be a great affirmation if this project inspires more explorations into the intersections between public health and experience design.

## ***Strengths and Limitations***

The emancipatory inquiry and experience design approach are this project's greatest strengths. This transdisciplinary and exploratory process allowed for curiosity and knowledge co-creation, visual synthesis for deeper analysis, and the centering of the desires of freer, healthier, and happier futures for historically and currently oppressed communities. The project also placed Caribbean people's lived experiences and perspectives at the heart of all findings and resulting actions, which is critical for community and person-centered research. In addition, my own inclusion as a member of the Caribbean and Carnival communities being studied aligned with the practice and value of reflexivity, which is core to both emancipatory inquiry and Black Caribbean feminist praxis. Being transparent about my positionality as a researcher who is also an insider-outsider provided personal insights that could be provided only by someone who understands the culture well and afforded me additional trustworthiness within my own community.

Regarding the research methods, the in-depth individual interviews elicited many rich narratives and meanings, and the resulting 18 themes is testament to the wealth of knowledge the participants hold and how important Carnival is to Caribbean people's health and wellbeing. The interviews also served as a healing experience for many participants, as well as myself, thus becoming both a research method and intervention that does *not* skew the research. This is a strength in the context of public health because many initiatives often conduct research on communities without providing any resources or benefits at the same time, due to concerns of affecting the research outcome. Additionally, choosing to include an analysis of Twitter posts and seeking consent to use them 1) provides support to the interviews, 2) adds to the body of work uplifting social media as a valid qualitative data source, and 3) sets an example for ethical research practices on public platforms. This relates to the need for public health practitioners and researchers to approach their work and the communities they work in/with/for to take a more intentional and desire-based approach.



The findings of this thesis should be understood with certain limitations in mind. First, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to gather insights from masqueraders during actual Carnival celebrations. This meant that respondents were subject to recall bias and may have remembered their participation differently from how they experienced them in the moment. Additionally, there is likelihood of both self-selection and social-desirability bias. Even though I used purposeful sampling, revelers who completed the screening process may have had different experiences and perceptions from those who saw the recruitment materials and decided not to pursue participation. Also, given the fact that this project is being carried about through a doctoral-level academic degree program at Harvard, participants potentially may have overreported positive perceptions because of a desire to have the research reflect positively on their culture. While these are limitations within the context of traditional research, in this project they are seen as characteristics to be acknowledged and processed through reflexivity, as emancipatory research rejects colonial notions of “objectivity” in which these bias types are situated. Furthermore, the fact that my focus was on masqueraders’ perceptions, rather than trying to identify any one “true reality” means that these potential biases are not critical to the insights and meaning-making produced, as well as the recommended actions to take.

An additional limitation was that the voices and lived experiences of masqueraders from the non-English-speaking Caribbean, other key actors/stakeholders in the Carnival ecosystem, and spectators and other Caribbean people who have been excluded from Carnival were not centered in this project. Including them would have added nuance to the existing narratives and recommendations around the need for equitable change. Also, this project speaks to Carnivals in the Caribbean on a general level, although each country/territory’s Carnival has local nuances that are not generalizable. And lastly, the limited sample size of the Twitter Analysis, while enabling this to serve as a pilot of this method for Carnival studies, did not provide as great a breadth of posts as anticipated. Even so, the results of this project still provide answers to my

research questions and help me think through how we can produce equitable change in Carnival in the Caribbean for greater health and wellbeing impact.

### ***Recommendations***

Now that the emancipatory inquiry and experience design processes are complete, the next step in my analytical approach is the ideate phase of devising responses to equitable change in Carnival for increased positive health and wellbeing impact for more Caribbean people. My primary public health intervention is to contribute to the narratives and research around Black joy, Caribbean people, Carnival studies, and pleasure, healing, and liberation as rights and positive things in and of themselves, not just as counters to oppression. Accordingly, instead of coming up with a new initiative to address some of the concerns highlighted in this project, I am using the four groups of actors/stakeholders who fell into the “Promoter Stakeholders” quadrant of the prioritization quadrant (see Figure 9: Actor/Stakeholder Prioritization in the Methods and Analyses chapter) to structure recommendations on possible actions to take to enable equitable change in Carnival. Some of them may repeat, as different actors/stakeholders can implement similar actions at their respective levels. The recommendations are not meant to be exhaustive, and some may already be in progress to varying degrees. It is challenging to assess this in the scope of this project, but it is my hope that these actions can be taken more widely across the region as we move towards Carnivals that center sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility for Caribbean people. Please see the recommendations and their accompanying notes below.

- **Participants** (e.g. masqueraders, activist groups, spectators, etc.)
  - **Support grassroots and civil society organizations** already doing equity and justice work to enable cultural change

- around issues of sexism, ableism, classism, anti-Queerness, colorism, and sizeism/fat-antagonism, which frequently appear in Carnival spaces
  - **Leverage the power of numbers** and negotiate from strength through collective mobilization
    - e.g. for a Carnival Consultants Association or some other masquerader network to advise bands
  - **Match the direction of your dollars with action**
    - choose to participate with bands that are intentional in not reproducing oppressive, exclusive practices
  - **Urge bands to visibly support/contribute to specific movements** throughout the year
    - e.g. a/gender and a/sexuality violence prevention, LGBTQ health and wellbeing, disability justice, etc.
    - ask bands to
      - contribute a portion of profits to certain (health) causes
      - tie these movements into bands' visual presentation themes
      - connect non-regional masqueraders with partner organizations they can support as part of the registration process
- **Financial Entities** (e.g. corporate sponsors, loan providers, etc.)
  - **Fund grassroots and civil society organizations** already doing equity and justice work to enable cultural change
    - around issues of sexism, ableism, classism, anti-Queerness, colorism, and sizeism/fat-antagonism, which frequently appear in Carnival spaces
  - **Invest in (health) technology and sustainability innovations** to boost Carnival experiences for masqueraders

- processes to help bands with differential scheduling and pricing for locals vs. global masqueraders
      - similar to how cultural landmarks have different pricing
    - recycling options that can be coordinated by smaller businesses like Carnicycle
    - incentives for partaking in and documenting certain healthful practices
  - **Partner with governments to provide additional support to cultural workers**
    - they are often overworked and underpaid, but are the driving force behind Carnival events
  - **Make the process for acquiring Carnival loans less prohibitive** and reduce interest rates
    - loans can be thought of as predatory, but there are people who value them
    - reducing barriers to acquiring and paying off loans would contribute to more equitable inclusion
- **Organizers/Coordinators** (e.g. Carnival bands, committees, etc.)
  - **Sponsor/collaborate with grassroots and civil society organizations** already doing equity and justice work to enable cultural change
    - around issues of sexism, ableism, classism, anti-Queerness, colorism, and sizeism/fat-antagonism, which frequently appear in Carnival spaces
      - e.g. Lost Tribe X UN Women Caribbean partnership for #GenerationEquality
    - have a portion of profits go to these organizations, under creating shared value (CSV), corporate social responsibility (CSR), or whatever model fits business values

- **Offer hybrid Carnival options** that include shipping costumes and experiential videos that can be livestreamed
- **Develop an open-access database** about Carnival bands costs and profits
  - this can increase trust through transparency and accountability
  - for the purpose of network building and resource sharing
- **Host interactive pop-up virtual and in-person events** that speak to sustainability, accessibility, and inclusivity
  - in collaboration with organizations like Carnicycle and Dazzire
- **Government/Non-Profit Entities** (e.g. ministries, preservation commissions, etc.)
  - **Collaborate with grassroots and civil society organizations** already doing equity and justice work to enable cultural change
    - around issues of sexism, ableism, classism, anti-Queerness, colorism, and sizeism/fat-antagonism, which frequently appear in Carnival spaces
  - **Develop an open-access database** of Carnival businesses to pair with local organizations
  - **Implement inclusion programs for excluded Caribbean people**
    - e.g. Carnival arts/mas-making training, tax benefits for Carnival businesses
  - **Promote creative community health programs** that include Carnival elements as mental health therapy, for example

These recommendations, if undertaken, would contribute to efforts to enable equitable change in the Carnival ecosystem ideally at the organizational, community, and enabling environment levels of the socio-ecological model.

## **Independent Venture**

### ***Background***

After graduating from a Master of Public Health program, I found myself deeply frustrated by the lack of culturally-affirming, positively-framed health interventions in both my education and places of employment. I also felt that there was something missing; these experiences did not create space for me (nor enabled me to make space) to feel fulfilled and be my most authentic selves.<sup>38</sup> As such, I considered that if I wanted to be able to holistically honor my intersecting interests and enable the change I wanted to see, that it might be best to develop my own entity to do so. Of course, I struggled with the euro-american notion of people creating new entities, in both non-profit and profit spaces, just to have their name on something “new,” which frequently results in duplication of efforts and/or the “scarcity” of funding. Even though my motivation is to change narratives rather than having an organization behind my name, reflections on my career trajectory kept leading me towards this pathway.

So I started brainstorming, but things were not quite fitting together, and with work I seldom had time to fully execute my projects. After taking some time to rethink my vision, I noticed how my interests had evolved since I first started exploring the idea of positive framing in public health. I decided to shift my focus to a more equity, social justice, a/gender-liberated, and holistic approach to health and wellbeing. Around that same time, I had been meditating on words from Marianne Williamson<sup>39</sup> that reminded me to not dim my light, not be afraid to

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<sup>38</sup> Plural to honor the fact that we have multiple aspects to ourselves that both stand alone and exist as part of our whole being. The self we show at any given time can be one of these selves, a combination, or all at the same time.

<sup>39</sup> “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?... Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we

shine, and not let fear hinder me. This inspired me to think about going beyond shining to dazzling and dreaming of a future free from pain and harm. With that came the name “Dazzire,” as a mashup of “Dazzle” and “Desire”, a moniker embodying resistance and resilience to encourage people to follow their hearts’ desires and embrace their brilliance, even though oppressive systems would rather that we succumb to fear instead of reveling in our power and the pleasures of life.

As such, having Dazzire as an independent venture for this project granted me room to further develop my vision through a culturally-affirming lens. Currently, I plan for it to be a digital health media platform that centers emotional, spiritual, social, and cultural health and wellbeing. Ideally it will do so by creating and curating graphic and literary content, experiential events, and community partnerships to celebrate pleasure, healing, and liberation for/by/with Black, Asian, Latine/x, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander peoples and persons of diverse a/genders and a/sexualities. My long-term vision for it is to contribute to long-lasting social change through its overarching goal of facilitating individual and community flourishing to sustain more healthful lifestyles and environments for maximum positive health and wellbeing impact. Through Dazzire, I aim to make a significant contribution to the field of public health by uplifting cultural health assets that promote pleasure, health, and liberation as pivotal and necessary to overall health and wellbeing.

I have not identified organizations that are utilizing a similar approach, but I have come across ones that work on similar issues, such as The Black Joy Project, The Nap Ministry, and the Carib Healing Collective. These focus on information sharing, storytelling, and skills-building workshops targeting Black and Caribbean Diasporic people for them to reclaim joy, rest, and healing. Dazzire will expand upon these efforts to prioritize the interconnectedness of pleasure, healing, and liberation as public health imperatives. As such, it takes an intersectional

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are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others” (Williamson, 1992, pp. 190-1).

approach that reflects that many of us are impacted by the historical and current oppression of our communities. Additionally, it will focus on actualizing and celebrating pleasure, healing, and liberation as worthwhile in their own right, not just in response to oppression. Dazzire will also serve as an example for future public health innovations to focus more on desire-based approaches that humanize communities and support them in telling their own narratives and being co-creators of their own healing and flourishing.

### ***Guiding Concepts: Pleasure Activism and Healing Justice***

“Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good” by adrienne maree brown<sup>40</sup> (2019), a Black feminist writer, organizer, and facilitator, is one of the influential texts framing my thinking as I develop Dazzire. Many of pleasure activism’s elements, as a politics of happiness and healing, have shaped the connections I draw between cultural practices and health and wellbeing. brown (2019) describes pleasure as:

- all of the experiences in life that make us feel alive, bring us happiness, and allow us to access transcendence; as happy enjoyment or satisfaction (p. 17);
- what we as humans are created and engineered for, inclusive of “aliveness and awakening, the gratitude and humility, [and] the joy and celebration of being miraculous” (p. 16);
- one of the pivotal activities and strategies for our enduring survival (p. 54); and
- the work we do, in the face of all of the effects and impacts of oppression and supremacy, in order to reclaim and secure our complete, satisfiable, and happy selves (p. 13).

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<sup>40</sup> adrienne maree brown styles her name in lowercase letters.



Conceived of in these ways, pleasure is not merely tied to the sexual, romantic, sensual, erotic, fantasy, or desire worlds. It is whatever brings us joy: being part of a community, delicious food, meaningful work, beautiful colors, getting through tough conversations, singing and dancing, healing ourselves, celebrating the well-lived lives of those who are no longer with us, learning and teaching, etc. Each of us has our own versions of pleasure, which may or may not be the same as those of the people around us. And each of us deserves to be able to experience all of our lives' pleasures, whether simple or complex. In vein with this, Ingrid LaFleur, a pleasure activist, curator, and Afrofuturist who specializes in liberatory practices for the creation of equitable futures, says that "for oppressed people to intentionally cultivate pleasure is an act of resistance" (brown, 2019, p. 271). This is what Dazzire intends to embody and further, and as such, its content, projects, and experiences will all be political in their intentional efforts to resist oppression and center practices that bring historically and currently communities healing and happiness.

Another concept that aligns with my intentions for Dazzire is Healing Justice. It arose out of the lived experiences of Trans, Queer, Black, Brown, disabled, impoverished, working class, and Southern/rural u.s.-based healers invested in social justice, who saw changemakers in their communities dying from the physical and spiritual deprivation caused by stress, unrest, and trauma (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2016). Cara Page, a Black and Indigenous Queer femme cultural worker who is one of the guiding forces of the healing justice movement, describes healing justice as: a framework for determining 1) holistic responses and interventions to generational violence and trauma and 2) collective practices that can influence and revolutionize how oppression impacts our bodies, minds, and hearts (Transform Harm, 2020). In this way, healing justice uplifts survival and resilience practices that champion the safety, sustainability, health, and wellbeing of communities for long-term survival (Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, 2019).

More broadly, healing from the various oppressions in life is something many people actively seek out through spiritual practices, community care, the medical and mental health industrial complex, and other means. Often, people go into the caring professions or activist work as a way of dedicating their lives to this pursuit of healing. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, a Queer disabled non-binary femme cultural worker and writer, writes about the origins of the healing justice movement, which developed as a response to frustration with 1) ableist movement work that dismissed the necessity and validity of healing, 2) scarcity of access to first-rate healthcare and healing by oppressed people, and 3) burnout in activist spaces (2016). It also was created out of the hopes and desires for the reclamation of Indigenous and homegrown ways of healing that people from historically and currently oppressed communities have utilized for their own survival prior to colonialism until now (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2016). Healing justice serves as a reminder for individuals and groups invested in social change to ensure that action is expanded to support the interdependence, resilience, self-determination, and resistance of those who have been impacted by oppression (Transform Harm, 2020). These values are central to my own hopes and dreams for Dazzire.

### ***Learnings and Evolving Approach***

While one of the options for the DrPH doctoral thesis project is the development of your own public health business/organization, the DrPH program does not provide this structured guidance. Previous students in my program have also pursued the development of startups, consulting firms, and non-profit organizations through the culminating project. However, many of these students already had the groundwork for their organizations at the beginning of the thesis project and were able to build out the structure relatively quickly because of this. Not having this foundation caused me to hesitate to pursue the route of an independent venture. However, as someone who is 1) completely new to creating a new entity, 2) motivated to understand the nuances of building from scratch, and 3) supported best by explicitly structured

learning and guidance, I knew that I would benefit from being in a program that provides individual and group coaching for organizational development. This was the main reason for one of my supporting activities being a business development program. Now I am better equipped with a framework and resources to help me further develop Dazzire.

I had many leadership learnings from working on Dazzire's foundation alongside the research for this thesis. First, I came to the realization that just because you *can* do something, or are *good* at something, does not mean that you should *do* it. This factored into what I wanted Dazzire's offerings to be, as I had to limit myself from choosing all of the services I believed I could do through this entity. I also learned that as a leader taking an "unconventional" approach to public health, managing expectations (*especially* my own) will be a lifelong journey. With the quiet and alone time the conditions of the pandemic have afforded me, I have learned a lot about my project management style and best working structure (e.g. needing to break things up into shorter-term projects instead of one large project). Managing up, with regards to my committee, was also a major lesson. I had to ensure I provided my committee members extra grace because we were all dealing with so much outside of this work, in an environment that still pushed heavily for our productivity. In addition, I also received unexpected support and had to rely on non-traditional team building to complete this project. Overall, I see my own adaptive leadership capacity as evolving and gaining strength from drawing from and pouring into my community. In a sense, this doctoral project served as my own personal experience design professional-development, and for that I am grateful.

Due to the inner workings of Dazzire still being in development (and this being a public document), I will not be providing additional details on business strategy or the framework.

### ***Looking Ahead and Next Steps***

For next steps, my collaborative partner is Carnicycle, a Caribbean social enterprise bridging the gap between Caribbean Carnival culture and sustainability through advocacy and

recycling. As entrepreneurs and Carnivalists, they are committed to local collaboration for direct impact for health and sustainability. They have partnered with Carnival bands like Tribe in Trinidad, which has the largest population of Carnival participants (50,000+) and have worked in multiple countries. Our collaboration's goal is to plan and produce a creative virtual public health "activism" exhibition for Carnival actors/stakeholders and the wider community. Through this, we will co-create with community members possibilities and solutions for increasing sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility in Carnival. In turn, this will ideally create content for further disseminating project findings via visual and literary means. The hope is that once actors/stakeholders see these responses and possibilities from a public health and experience design lens, they will be more motivated to try different ways of carrying out their work through prioritizing Caribbean masqueraders' health and wellbeing. A dream would be for them to partner with Dazzire to do so through iterative partnerships, as the experience design approach can lead to the increased satisfaction of masqueraders, Carnival bands, spectators, and other invested parties.

After the event with Carnicycle, next steps could include pursuing more emancipatory inquiry around health and wellbeing in Carnival with band leaders (e.g. through key informant interviews) and people who have been excluded from Carnival due to classism, sizeism, colorism, ableism, etc. (e.g. via survey questionnaires). It would be eye-opening to 1) learn from Carnival bands to find out what kinds of equitable change plans and COVID-19 related health initiatives they already have in place and 2) interface with actors/stakeholders to build and disseminate the database(s) mentioned earlier. Additional research could also explore the short-and-long-term impacts on health and wellbeing of stopping intense dieting and working out to facilitate Carnival readiness when the Carnival season officially ends. Another potential research direction could be to survey masqueraders on before-and-after COVID-19 eating and exercise practices in comparison with changing health markers and outcomes.

## **Reflection on Original Plan**

### ***Actual Timeline***

Although I had given myself the full ten-month timeline between June 2020 to March 2021 to give myself extra wiggle room, it still did not feel like enough time. I originally planned a tiered approach where each task in my timeline would only take a few months at most, briefly overlap with the next task, and then stop soon after. However, with all the difficulty and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting not only communication and scheduling, but also my own personal relation to this project while tending to my own mental health and wellbeing, each task stretched for longer than intended. As such, I had to manage expectations and cut back on what I planned to finish by April, making executive decisions to postpone some deliverables until after thesis submission, since this written work is part of a larger project that I am continuing through Dazzire and my community partners. Please see Figure 10: Actual Project Timeline for an overview of my project schedule.

**Figure 10**

*Actual Project Timeline*

Tasks	Jun '20	Jul-Aug '20	Sep-Oct '20	Nov-Dec '20	Jan-Feb '21	Mar-Apr '21
IRB Application	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Community Advisory Board Meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Literature Review	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interview Guide and Twitter Analysis Plan	✓	✓				
Recruitment Design and Rollout		✓	✓	✓		
Data Collection			✓	✓		
Data Coding and Analysis				✓	✓	
Carnicycle Project Planning			✓	✓	✓	✓
Thesis Writing					✓	✓
Leadership Reflection Paper		✓	✓	✓		✓
Oral Final Exam (OFE)						✓

***Completed Deliverables***

My original deliverables for this project were as follows: 1) recommendations to interested actors/stakeholders on how to equitably increase access to Carnival so that more Caribbean people could experience its health and wellbeing benefits and experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation; 2) visually compelling graphics to pictorially represent learnings and exploration; and 3) articles on open-access websites and media platforms. The recommendations appear in this thesis, and I will create additional visuals and a sound art project in conjunction with Carnicycle for our activism event, which will take place after the submission of this thesis. In addition, Dazzire’s webpage will host articles developed through this project. I also see the execution of the “Cultivating Joy and Collective Restoration: (Re)Imagining and (Re)Claiming Collective Liberation” graduate student conference that I am

planning with Onisha Etkins, PhD '21 as both an offshoot from the research and exploratory work that I have done through this thesis and a desire-based experience design project.

### ***Project Goals***

When I first proposed this project, I had six goals for it under two themes: 1) Public Health Leadership and Professional Goals (a-c) and 2) Doctoral Thesis Goals (e-f):

- a) Challenge me to follow through on my original ideas and push through the discomfort of the uncertainty, inconvenience, and instability associated with pursuing a new, unestablished endeavor
- b) Inform the future development of an entity on pleasure, healing, and liberation in Black, Asian, Latine/x, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities, highlighting those in the English-speaking Caribbean
- c) Develop initiatives using social-justice based, transdisciplinary frameworks
- d) Serve as one of the initiatives of an emerging entity/future organization
- e) Explore the culturally-specific example of Carnivals in the Caribbean and their positive public health ramifications and opportunities
- f) Develop strategies for future enhancements to Carnival that can sustain more healthful lifestyles and environments for more Caribbean people

I can say with confidence that I have accomplished all of these goals. When I started, I had a partially formed idea of the frameworks I would use, but I had no idea what form enabling change would come through, nor what I would decide for Dazzire's structure. This has given me additional motivation and spurred me to seek community support as I build this new entity. This is a huge deal for me as someone who craves certainty, convenience, and stability. But as this last year of the pandemic has taught many of us, sometimes the discomfort never ends, and you have to sit with it and move through it.

Furthermore, I gained an immeasurable amount of knowledge from my project participants and collaborators as I aimed to achieve these goals. This project has been such a fulfilling experience. Hearing others echo how much Carnival means to them and does for them helped to assure me that I was adding to the fields of Carnival studies, Caribbean studies, and public health and offering an additional way of thinking about this enduring sociocultural phenomenon. This project led me down a path towards event experience design for public health impact, an unanticipated but fitting direction because of my passion for event planning and background in public health program planning and implementation.

What has changed over the course of this project is a specificity in naming the communities I am talking about, through using the language of “Black, Asian, Latine/x, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander individuals” or “persons of diverse a/genders and a/sexualities” for example, instead of relying on the general term “Black, Brown, and Indigenous”, and not just limiting Dazzire’s work to the English-speaking Caribbean. I am increasingly drawn to solidarity across liberation movements by historically and currently oppressed communities and the intersections/interactions between Pleasure Activism, Healing Justice, and Disability Justice, for example. And so, my life goal and dreams for Dazzire have adapted with this evolution in thinking.

### ***Framework for Change***

My framework for change evolved over the duration of this project, as I came to better understand what a framework for change is and should do, and as I realized the life my project was taking on for itself. Being able to use the Double Diamond Framework as a foundation that I then adapted for my own purposes was extremely useful in that it provided me a blueprint upon which I could map emancipatory inquiry and experience design. I found it immensely valuable because I could refine it with the clarity I gained over the course of this doctoral project. For example, being able to specify experience design as a method of design thinking for my



framework of change was crucial, as I had originally planned to use a behavior-centered design or human-centered design approach without fully understanding the difference between the two. Further, including experience design in my framework for change enabled me to visualize a roadmap for moving from activities to outcome that would enable me to think about possible ways to make an impact and achieve results. As such, I view the framework for change as a flexible, adaptive guide that certainly helped to structure my approach and enable change.

## **Conclusion**

Actively pursuing pleasure, healing, and liberation is a coping strategy and resistance mechanism enacted by historically and currently oppressed communities for their own self-determination and self-preservation. As a culturally-affirming practice, Carnival bridges ancestral upliftment of emancipation with contemporary desires for bodily autonomy and physio-spiritual freedom and serves as a strength of Caribbean communities that is rooted in the erotic and celebratory. While it has health and wellbeing implications for its participants, not all Caribbean people who want to engage in it are able to do so, due to inequitable practices that are vestiges of colonialism and manifestations of a capitalist world economy, which leads to both self-exclusion and external exclusion. The pandemic and the subsequent postponements and cancellations of Carnivals around the region have especially highlighted the mental health impact of this practice and its role in nurturing community-level coping and healing.

Through an emancipatory inquiry approach for the research component and experience design and systems thinking for the enabling change component, this project explored the positive health and wellbeing benefits; experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation; and equitable changes to Carnival in order to better understand how the cultural practice might have greater positive public health impact for more Caribbean people during and after the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although my analyses of the interviews and Twitter posts do not represent the entirety of perceptions of Carnival, they do provide insight into the various perspectives around Carnival's profound meaning and impact. And the experience design especially has provided a systematic way of organizing, visualizing, and strategizing using the information, insights, and data acquired through this project's process.

The findings of this project will ideally impact equitable participation in Carnival as a sustaining force for more pleasurable, healing, and liberated lifestyles and environments for more Caribbean people, and challenge the un-nuanced "Carnival as unhealthy hedonism"

narratives that do a great disservice to its importance and potential. If we look at Carnival through the lens of event host objectives in event and experience design literature (Sharples et al., 2014), we can understand it as a prime example of an event that contributes to the objectives of community cohesiveness and cultural celebration, and one of Carnival's undocumented, but ultimate, goals is to improve health, wellbeing, and quality of life. Now that we have this evidence base with participants corroborating similar perceptions and experiences related to such objectives and goals, this research can be built upon for future inquiry and exploration.

This project reinforces that as Caribbean people, and especially as masqueraders, we know what this emancipatory cultural practice means to us, and we know the origins of where it came from and what it celebrates. Given our current context, where we are still encountering and living in oppressive systems, we also use it as a way to help us to cope, to navigate, and to remind us of the strength of our ancestors and their beliefs in a future where their Black descendants exist. This is why Carnival is important to us—this is why we keep seeking it out month after month, year after year—as a counterbalance, coping strategy, and healing mechanism for all of the trauma and the oppression we (have had to) face in our lives.

In sum, this DrPH doctoral thesis project has:

- 1) produced qualitative evidence on Carnival's health and wellbeing benefits and possibilities for pleasure, healing, and liberation, given that little currently exists, that centers the voices of people intimately involved with the Carnival industry
- 2) developed recommendations for different groups of Carnival actors/stakeholders on possible actions to take to enable equitable change that will ideally lead to increased sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility
- 3) enabled a collaboration with Carnicycle, a Trinidad-based environmental sustainability organization, to produce an arts and public health virtual activism exhibition

- 4) contributed to the strategy and desire-based framework of Dazzire, my developing creative social entity

The fact that I was able to pursue this project focusing on Black (Caribbean) joy, emancipatory cultural practices, and positive health and wellbeing, as topics I am passionate about, definitely echoed the assertion a previous DrPH student shared. While contemplating what they wanted to do for their thesis, they said to themselves: “I want a doctoral project that speaks to my soul.” That is what this project does for me. It has stretched my mind, body, and spirit to capacities I was not even aware I embodied. And it has enabled me to hold tight to the idea that pleasure and healing can be a core part of my future work at the intersection of health equity and social justice for the reclamation of liberation by people of historically and currently oppressed communities. I am immensely grateful for this, as I believe in the conceptualization of joy and pleasure (of all kinds) as human rights, or, at the very least, in the necessary incorporation of pleasure and joy into how we approach health, human rights, and social justice (brown, 2019; Simmons, 2019).

It is undeniable that cultural practices affect health and wellbeing. In the Caribbean, even during all this uncertainty, masqueraders are holding onto joy and reminiscing on past experiences in the hopes for better ones in the future. So, whether we are inside for a long time, or when we are able to be more physically connected once COVID-19 is no longer a deadly pandemic, we will continue to embrace pleasure, healing, and liberation and celebrate our survival in spite of all the systems and enablers that perpetuate debilitating and deadly conditions. The memories we hold of euphoric, joyous experiences such as Carnival grant us extra momentum to make it through these times. Certainly, even during this bewildering, frightening, and disheartening public health crisis, Rona cyah cancel embodied Black joy.

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## Appendices

### **Appendix A. Interview Screening and Consent Form**

Hey there! Thank you so much for your consideration of my doctoral project. My name is Sherine Andreine Powerful, and I am a Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) student at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. I am a Diasporic Jamaican and deeply invested in Carnival and health within the Caribbean region and throughout the Caribbean Diaspora.

This project aims to learn more about your experiences as a person of West Indian heritage (i.e. from the English-Speaking Caribbean) who considers themselves a Carnival Chaser or Carnivalist. I hope to use Carnival as a site of analysis for understanding 1) the positive impact of emancipatory cultural practices on people's health and wellbeing and 2) culturally-affirming experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation.

If you are eligible to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview that should take around 90 minutes. Specifically, you will be asked to respond to questions about your perceptions and experiences of Carnival's: 1) positive impact on your health and wellbeing; 2) possibilities for pleasure, healing, and liberation; and 3) postponements/ cancellations due to the COVID-19 pandemic and how this is affecting you.

In addition, you will also be able to review interview transcripts, coding, analysis, interpretations, and draft manuscripts before publication for your approval. Upon completion of the full interview, you will receive US\$30 to thank you for your time. There is no compensation for incomplete interviews.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at [spowerful@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:spowerful@hsph.harvard.edu).

By clicking below, you acknowledge that you have read the description of the project and agree to participate if eligible. You also confirm that:

- Your participation in the project is voluntary
- You are at least 21 years of age
- You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time for any reason

Do you wish to check if you are eligible to participate in this project?

- Yes, I wish to check if I am eligible
- No, I do not wish to check if I am eligible

Please select your age range:

- Under 21
- 21 and above

Do you live in the European Union, or the European Economic Area?

- Yes
- No

Do you have heritage from any of the following places? Please select all that apply.

- Anguilla
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Barbados
- Bahamas



- Belize
- Bermuda
- British Virgin Islands
- Cayman Islands
- Dominica
- Grenada
- Guyana
- Jamaica
- Montserrat
- Saint Kitts and Nevis
- Saint Lucia
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Turks and Caicos
- U.S. Virgin Islands

Have you been to Carnival in any of the following places? Please select all that apply.

- Anguilla
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Barbados
- Bahamas
- Belize
- Bermuda
- British Virgin Islands
- Cayman Islands
- Dominica

- Grenada
- Guyana
- Jamaica
- Montserrat
- Saint Kitts and Nevis
- Saint Lucia
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Trinidad and Tobago
- U.S. Virgin Islands

How many Carnivals in the Caribbean have you been to in the past 10 years?

Please share the best email address to contact you. Our team will reach out to you about the interview!

## **Appendix B. Twitter Analysis Screening and Consent Form**

Hey there! Thank you so much for your consideration of my doctoral project. My name is Sherine Andreine Powerful, and I am a Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) student at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. I am a Diasporic Jamaican and deeply invested in Carnival and health within the Caribbean region and throughout the Caribbean Diaspora.

This project aims to learn more about your experiences as a person of West Indian heritage (i.e. from the English-Speaking Caribbean) who has attended at least one Carnival in the English-Speaking Caribbean. I hope to use Carnival as a site of analysis for understanding 1) the positive impact of emancipatory cultural practices on people's health and wellbeing and 2) culturally-affirming experiences of pleasure, healing, and liberation.

If you are eligible to take part in this project, you will be asked to submit links to Twitter posts you shared online since March 2020 that reflect how the COVID-19 pandemic causing the cancellations and postponements of Carnivals around the Caribbean affected your health and wellbeing or possibilities for experiencing pleasure, healing, and liberation.

You will also have the opportunity to provide your email address to be included in a raffle for an electronic gift card worth US\$100 at the end of the data collection period in December 2020.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at [spowerful@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:spowerful@hsph.harvard.edu).

By clicking below, you acknowledge that you have read the description of the project and agree to participate if eligible. You also confirm that:

- Your participation in the project is voluntary

- You are at least 21 years of age
- You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time for any reason

Do you wish to check if you are eligible to participate in this project?

- Yes, I wish to check if I am eligible
- No, I do not wish to check if I am eligible

Please select your age range:

- Under 21
- 21 and above

Do you live in the European Union, or the European Economic Area?

- Yes
- No

Do you have heritage from any of the following places? Please select all that apply.

- Anguilla
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Barbados
- Bahamas
- Belize
- Bermuda
- British Virgin Islands
- Cayman Islands
- Dominica

- Grenada
- Guyana
- Jamaica
- Montserrat
- Saint Kitts and Nevis
- Saint Lucia
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Turks and Caicos
- U.S. Virgin Islands

Have you been to Carnival in any of the following places? Please select all that apply.

- Anguilla
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Barbados
- Bahamas
- Belize
- Bermuda
- British Virgin Islands
- Cayman Islands
- Dominica
- Grenada
- Guyana
- Jamaica
- Montserrat
- Saint Kitts and Nevis

- Saint Lucia
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Trinidad and Tobago
- U.S. Virgin Islands

Did you tweet about how the COVID-19 pandemic causing the cancellations and postponements of Carnivals around the Caribbean affected you?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

You are (likely) eligible to participate in this project! Here is additional information so that you can provide your informed consent.

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and declining to participate in any part of this project will not negatively impact you. You have the right to stop participating at any point in time, and there is no penalty for doing so. And you won't hurt mine or anyone else's feelings if you decide that this is no longer for you.

The risks, discomforts, or inconveniences to you are unlikely and minimal, but they might include sadness around Carnival cancellations and postponements. I will provide you with online support resources should this happen. Your submissions will be de-identified so that your identity will be kept as confidential as possible, and you will be assigned a pseudonym so that you are only identifiable by that pseudonym in the data and all documents.

Given that someone might be able to re-identify you if they look up your direct tweets, I cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. But I will keep the research data secure as best as I can through password-protected servers, and I will keep confidential the list linking identifiable information back to the list of pseudonyms used. Overall, none of the information collected, if disclosed outside of the project, would reasonably place you at risk or be damaging to you.

Only I will have direct access to your data, but my thesis committee and community advisory board may see my coding, analysis, and interpretation of the de-identified project data. The findings gathered from all participants will be used in my doctoral thesis and final presentation for my Doctor of Public Health degree; the thesis will be submitted in April 2021.

Although your current participation is related to my doctoral thesis, if you consent, the information you share can be included in future projects individually produced by me (Sherine) beyond the doctoral thesis, such as articles or other publications. Do you consent to your data being used in future projects?

- Yes, I consent to my data being used in future projects
- No, I do not consent to my data being used in future projects

This project can't promise any direct benefits to you or others from participating. Possible benefits of participating in this project include the chance to relive positive Carnival experiences and reminisce on moments of joy and freedom.

Do you consent to participate in this project?

- Yes, I consent, I wish to participate
- No, I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Please provide your email address in the box below:

Please submit links to each of your tweets in the box below. Tweets should reflect how the COVID-19 pandemic causing the cancellations and postponements of Carnivals around the Caribbean affected your health and wellbeing or possibilities for experiencing pleasure, healing, and liberation.

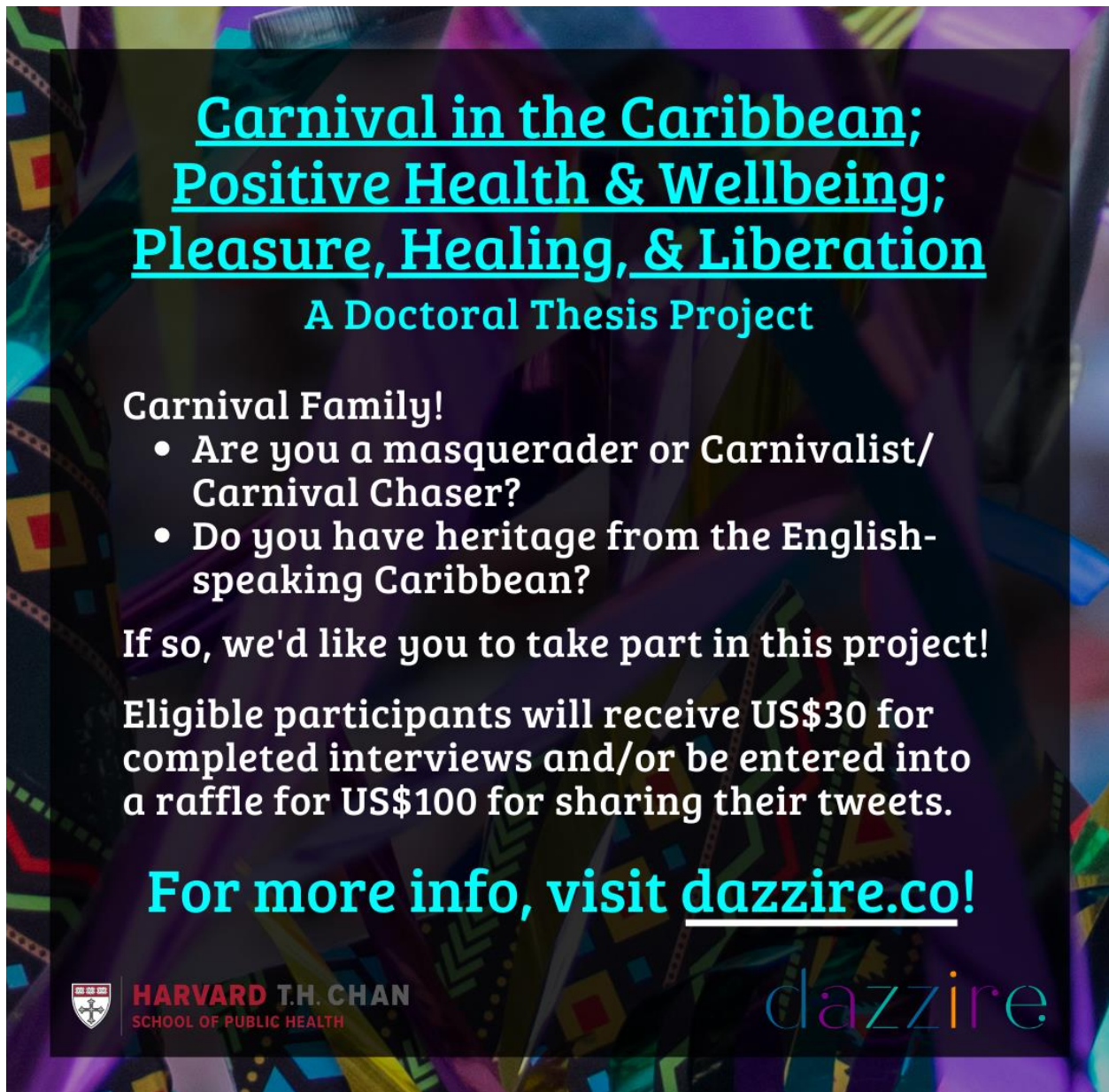
Helpful Tips: If you'd like to add tweets one by one, separate tweets by pressing enter to add a new link on the next line.

To get a link for multiple tweets:

- Go to [twitter.com/search-advanced](https://twitter.com/search-advanced)
- Under "Any of These Words", type words like: Carnival, mas, costume, covid, corona, etc.
- Under "From These Accounts", enter your handle/username
- Under "Dates", select from March 1, 2020 to today's date
- Click the "Search" button at the top
- Copy the link in your web browser
- Paste and Submit in the box!

Please note that you cannot come back to this survey once it's complete, so please submit all your applicable tweets at the same time. Once you've added all of the tweets you'd like to submit, click the "Next" button.





**Carnival in the Caribbean;  
Positive Health & Wellbeing;  
Pleasure, Healing, & Liberation**  
A Doctoral Thesis Project


Carnival Family!


- Are you a masquerader or Carnivalist/  
Carnival Chaser?
- Do you have heritage from the English-  
speaking Caribbean?

If so, we'd like you to take part in this project!

Eligible participants will receive US\$30 for  
completed interviews and/or be entered into  
a raffle for US\$100 for sharing their tweets.

**For more info, visit [dazzire.co](http://dazzire.co)!**

 **HARVARD T.H. CHAN**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH



## **Appendix D. Final Interview Guide**

\*Questions with an asterisk are “must-ask” questions

### Informational Questions (5 minutes)

- How would you describe your cultural heritage? \*
- Do you live in the Caribbean or do you live somewhere else? \*
- Which Carnivals in the Caribbean region have you attended? \*
- What originally influenced your desire to participate in Carnival? \*
- Would you like to share anything about any of your salient social identities that would help me to get a sense of how you might experience Carnival? \*
  - By salient, I mean the ones that play a significant role in how you experience Carnival. Examples include gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, class, occupation, nationality, disability, etc.

### Icebreaker Questions (10 minutes)

- Can you tell me a story, in as much detail as possible, about a particularly memorable Carnival masquerade experience? \*
  - What was it about that Carnival that made it so memorable?
  - How typical do you think that kind of experience is?
  - How do you think your experience aligns/doesn't align with other people's experiences?
  - In what ways did that Carnival experience impact your health and wellbeing?

### Pleasure, Healing, and Liberation (15 minutes)

Carnival in the Caribbean is one example of Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities' pursuit

of pleasure, healing, and liberation. Pleasure can be thought of as all of the experiences in life that make us feel alive, bring us happiness, and allow us to access enjoyment or satisfaction. It is whatever brings us joy and is not merely tied to the sexual, romantic, sensual, erotic, fantasy, or desire worlds. Healing uplifts survival and resilience practices that champion the safety, sustainability, health, and wellbeing of individuals and communities for long-term survival. And liberation is a sense of freedom and agency that can be obtained through pleasure and healing and is tied to our ancestors and our future. But these things can mean different things to different people.

- What does pleasure mean to you in the context of Carnival? \*
  - How have you experienced pleasure through Carnival?
  - What stands out most for you about this experience?
  - What are some emotions you associate with this experience?
- What does healing mean to you in the context of Carnival? \*
  - How have you experienced healing through Carnival?
  - What stands out most for you about this experience?
  - What are some emotions you associate with this experience?
- What does liberation mean to you in the context of Carnival? \*
  - How have you experienced liberation through Carnival?
  - What stands out most for you about this experience?
  - What are some emotions you associate with this experience?

Photo-Elicitation (10 minutes)

Do you have photos with you today that reflect your interpretations of your experiences of pleasure, healing, or liberation during Carnival? \*

*If they have brought photos:*

- Can you describe the photos to me?
- What made you choose these particular photos?
- What stands out most for you about this experience?

*If they do not have photos*

- *Move on to next questions*

### Positive Health and Wellbeing (20 minutes)

- What makes Carnival a part of your identity?
- What influences your desire to keep participating? \*
- Can you tell me about Carnival as a physical experience, that is, how it makes you feel physically?
- Can you share with me what it feels like for you to be in costume? \*
- What are three words you would use to describe how Carnival makes you feel? \*
  - Why these words?
- What would you say are some of the health and wellbeing benefits you have experienced from participating in Carnival? \*
- How would you describe Carnival's impact specifically on your physical health? \*
- How would you describe Carnival's impact specifically on your mental health? \*
- How would you describe Carnival's impact on any other aspects of your health and wellbeing? \*
  - These could include spiritual health, emotional wellbeing, social health, etc.
- If you feel comfortable answering, how have your Carnival experiences helped shape your perceptions of your own sexuality, during and outside of Carnival?
- When you think of your own resilience and the ways in which Carnival has impacted this,

what comes to mind?

- How does Carnival impact what you feel in your life is worthwhile?
- In what ways, if any, does Carnival contribute to your purpose in life?

#### Equity in Carnival (10 minutes)

- What are your thoughts on the implications of the inclusion/exclusion of different types of people in Carnival? \*
  - This can be in reference to class, body size/shape, skin color, sexuality, nationality, etc.
- As you know and have experienced it, in your opinion, in what ways is/isn't today's Carnival a welcoming space for people of different a/genders and a/sexualities? \*
- Can you share your thoughts on how Carnival has become a tourism product that encourages non-Caribbean people to participate? \*
- What are your thoughts on how we can get more people to experience the benefits Carnival has to offer? \*

#### COVID-19 and Carnival (10 minutes)

As you know, our current reality of experiencing the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in the postponement/cancellation of most 2020 carnivals. This has spurred many people and organizations to take the opportunity to reimagine what Carnival looks like and how it needs to evolve beyond the narrow consideration of the impact on economies and tourism.

- How have you been dealing with the COVID-19 changes to Carnival this year? \*
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted how you feel about your participation in Carnival in the future?
- What do you feel are the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the Carnival community and the Caribbean region? \*

- How do you feel about the virtual events taking the place of in-person Carnival-related events? What do you think has been their impact?\*
- In your opinion, given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, how might Carnivals need to evolve (particularly around making them more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable)?\*

**Wrap Up** (5 minutes)

Is there anything else you would like me to know? \*

## **Appendix E. Full List of Interview Themes**

1. Barriers to Equity in Carnival
2. Carnival as Community-Level Creative Arts Therapy
3. Carnival's Expansion of Capacity to Navigate an Oppressive World
4. Carnival's Facilitation of the Body-Mind-Spirit Connection
5. Creation and Celebration of Black Euphoria and Joy
6. Cultural Preservation vs. Profit-Driven Inclusion
7. Desires and Actualization of Better Selves and Futures
8. Different Carnival in a COVID-19 World
9. Exclusion/Discrimination as Antithetical to Carnival
10. Health Implications of Carnival Nurturing Social Connections
11. Healthy Self-Concept and Self-Expansion
12. Mental Health Benefits of Carnival Participation
13. Mental Health Impact of No Carnival Due to COVID-19
14. Physical Health Benefits of Carnival Participation
15. Physical Health Consequences of Carnival Participation
16. Pursuit and Continuance of Carnival
17. Sankofa Principles for Individual and Cultural Healing
18. Sexuality and Erotic Expression

## **Appendix F. Full List of Twitter Analysis Codes**

1. Accepting Scaled Down Events
2. Am I Going Crazy?
3. Appreciating Everything When Carnival Returns
4. Can't Imagine/Believe No Carnival
5. Cancelled Events
6. Carnival COVID Innovations
7. Carnival Deprived
8. Carnival Feels Like So Long Ago
9. Carnival is More than a Costume/Party
10. Carnival Makes Me More Sociable
11. Carnival Not Missing Me
12. Carnival Tabanca
13. Carnival Withdrawal
14. Celebration of Freedom
15. COVID Forcing Return to Carnival Roots
16. Doing My Own Carnival
17. First Time Missing Mas
18. Flight Prices Still High
19. Fortunate to Play 2020 Mas
20. Future Stories About No Carnival
21. Hoping for Carnival to Return
22. I'm Not Ok
23. Mad I Can't Play Mas
24. Missing Carnival



25. Next Carnival Plans
26. No Bacchanal
27. Not Knowing What to Do without Carnival
28. Post-COVID Carnival = Packed
29. Pray for Carnival
30. Regret Not Doing 2020 Carnival Events
31. Reminiscing
32. Rethinking Future Participation
33. Rethinking Future Participation
34. Ruined Plans
35. Something to Look Forward to
36. When's the Next Carnival?

## Appendix G. Socio-Ecological Model for Change

### Enabling Environment

- *Cultural Values*

### Community

- *Grassroots & Civil Society Orgs*

### Organizational

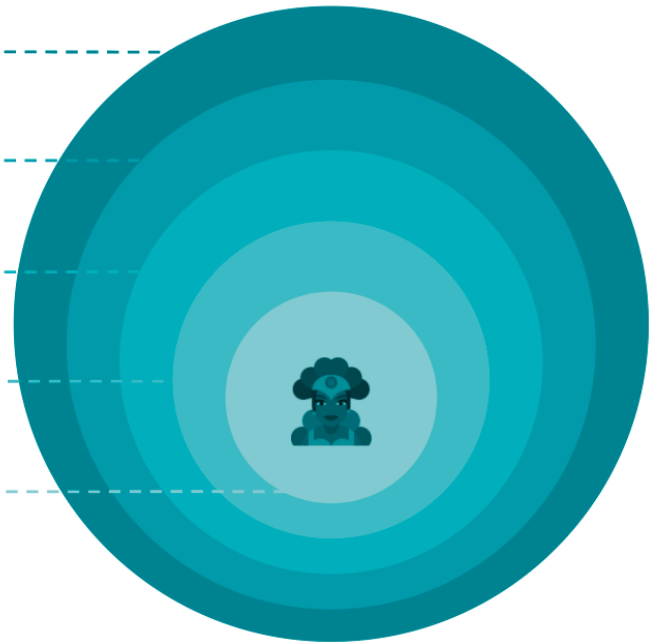
- *Carnival Bands*

### Interpersonal

- *Family and Friends*

### Individual

- *Masqueraders & Spectators*



*Note.* Items listed under each level serve as single examples and are not meant to be exhaustive.

The image in the center of the model is meant to represent the masquerader.