

In the past two decades, questions about sexual health have become of pressing concern in light the global rise of the HIV epidemic. Statistics show that young people in sub-Saharan Africa make up a largest percentage of the African population infected with HIV and heterosexual sex is argued as the predominant mode of transmission. There is a growing body of research seeking to understand social determinants such as poverty, gender inequality and violence that contribute broadly to the sexual-wellbeing of particularly young South Africans, however, the impact of religion on the sexual lives of adolescents, despite an overwhelming majority of adolescents reporting close religious affiliation, is not enquired about much nor is it well understood.

This study is an exploration and investigation of the intersection of religion and the sexual perceptions, practices and wellbeing of adolescent South Africans. Using a case-study of Teens Ignited (TI), a Charismatic Pentecostal Youth Group in Potchefstroom, a town 100 kms West of Johannesburg, this study in an exploration of the impact of the discourse of sexuality identified at TI, as well as the power relations that impact on the way members of TI understand and experience their sexuality.

Using participatory research methods and a survey questionnaire, the perceptual and behavioral sexual patterns reported by the membership of TI is examined and critical insights about the positive and negative contributions of religion to the sexual-wellbeing of the participants of this study are discussed. Drawing largely on Foucauldian understandings of sexuality as a discursive project, the religious messages and power present at TI are analysed. The key findings of this study demonstrate that TI members have knowledge of the official message about sexuality at TI, however, discontinuities and disjuncture identified between the dominant discourse and lived experiences of TI members raise concerns about negatives impacts of religion on the way TI members negotiate their sexual lives. The aim of this study is to provide theoretical frameworks related to the sexuality and religion as a basis for understanding how the negative contributions of religion to adolescent sexual-wellbeing due to inadequate messaging and unequal relations of power can be redressed and positive contributions such as the sense of belonging TI members experience can be strengthened.



I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Tessa Gilda Dooms

30th day of September 2010



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Dedication

To Elliot and Irene Dooms,
any success I have or will ever have
is a tribute to you.

my God, Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the one who has granted me the time, ability and desire to do this research. I love You.

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