

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Personal Reflections

I am a 26 year old male member of a community of believers referred to as evangelical Christians. I have been in this community for the past 11 years. This is a community that, among others, teaches the morality of pre-marital sexual chastity. Pre-marital sexual chastity is generally thought and spoken of as abstinence from coitus or pre-marital penetrative sexual activity. I have committed to upholding this morality throughout my life as an evangelical Christian. Living a “chaste life” of non engagement in coitus, has been a very conscious reality for me, something that I am aware of and think of.

Though very conscious of my “chaste status,” I seldom discuss it. Only a few people know about it, and these are the people who are very close to me. I do not readily discuss my sexual status despite the fact that I spend a lot of time with friends discussing issues of sexuality and relationships. That I am an AIDS activist of a sort and also doing a research concerned with HIV/AIDS seems to further create a climate for discussion on sexuality. Still, I do not readily discuss the status.

I think I do have a clue why I am quiet about my sexual status. The environment in which sexual discussion takes place is such that it is easy to come out about your sexual exploits. It is an environment that assumes that at a particular age all people, especially of a masculine gender, are active sexually or at least, have been, until very recently. It makes it difficult to come up with an experience that is very different

from that. Thus, most people who come up with their sexual status are those who engage and had engaged in pre-marital sexual intercourse.

I am still quite about my sexual status despite the fact that I am the kind of Christian I am, belonging to the community of faith, that condemns pre-marital sexual intercourse which is seen as wrong, against God's will, a sin to be avoided. I realise that, still, within this community of belief, it is those with experiences of sexual conquest who discuss their status. Pre-marital sexual abstinence is advanced as ideal and sometimes as a potential preventive device against the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, personal testimonies of sexual behaviour are still of sexual conquest. But, this time are told with a deep sense of guilt. It is written on the face.

I do recall moments when I felt the impulse to disclose the status. The last time I felt this I was in a meeting with fellow members of the Wits HIV/AIDS education and support group. I am a member of this group. We usually come together on a weekly basis to discuss the work we are doing on campus and plan future activities. Responding to the comment to work closely with religious organisations Zandi burst in discontent: "it is ill-conceived to get these organisations on board. Christians are unrealistic, we all know that everybody is having sex, yet they insist on pre-marital sexual abstinence." This remark evoked a feeling to give a personal testimony of my sexual status. It was not for the first time that a remark of the kind was made in these meetings. And it was not for the first time I had felt the way I did. Still, it was not for the first time I had not acted on my feeling.

The remark Zandi made was all too familiar to me. However, it flew on the face of personal experience and that of friends. The latter problematised grounds for her claim that “everybody” is having sex. From a personal encounter with views exemplified by Zandi’s remark I became convinced that in my surroundings the view that pre-marital sexual activity (as in coitus) is inevitable has reached hegemonic status. The latter view overshadows voices of experiences to the contrary such as the voice of pre-marital sexual abstinence in a way that these voices, in order to be heard, they have to go against the grain and invite contempt.¹ This is the awareness I brought into the study.

In this study I sought to analyse the message of sexual abstinence as a strategy for HIV prevention. I analysed the sermons that took place at the conference conducted by the Christian Action fellowship to achieve this aim. It is now widely accepted that HIV has got implications for development in South Africa. In this study I also attempted to bring to attention the possible implications of the message of sexual abstinence for development in South Africa.

1.2. HIV/AIDS: A Threat to Development

The HIV/AIDS pandemic poses a serious threat to social and economic development in South Africa. Both information from academia and mainstream media highlights the negative implications that the spread of the HIV/AIDS has on social and economic development in South Africa. For example, Alexander and Martin (2001, 14), in their research report entitled *Students Response to Intervention* echo this sentiment:

¹ As I am doing in this study.

Whilst our work shares the general concern to reduce AIDS related suffering, it is also underpinned by a recognition that high rates of death among the present cohort of students will impact negatively on economic and social development, particularly given the chronic shortage of skills that now exists in South Africa.

To be sure, if recent statistics in the spread of HIV/AIDS are anything to go by, the impact of HIV/AIDS on the family could be disastrous if no major intervention is effected in South Africa, as the pandemic, in addition to the pain and suffering it causes, has the potential to deprive families of breadwinners. Thus far, the pandemic has hit hard on the adult sector of South Africa's society, depriving families of income and other sources of livelihoods.

Aids has become the single biggest cause of death in South Africa, responsible for about 40% of deaths of South Africans ages 15 – 49 in 2000... about 20% of all adult deaths in the country in 2000 were due to AIDS (Nation's Health 2001: 11).

Business is not immune to this, as the victims are also players in the labour market. Thus a significant loss of labour or weakening of the available labour power will also affect business as more funds are allocated to address the situation:

More funds are used to deal with the malaise and its effects. In overall material terms the economy becomes the net loser, and business get to be more badly affected (Mabogoane 2003: 5).

HIV/AIDS has also been identified as one of the major causes for the failure of small, micro, and medium business (i.e. SMMEs), a terrain that the government has targeted as an important player in social and economic development.

AIDS, crime and poor management are the major causes of failure of small, medium and micro enterprises in South Africa, according to a study published on Wednesday. The three causes are blamed for up to 80% of SMME's failures in South Africa. According to the study conducted by the University of Port Elizabeth's business and statistics departments small business in South Africa absorb almost half of about 37% to the country's GDP. The study showed that AIDS and crime

are important interrelated and mutually reinforcing issues that led to SMME's collapsing (Xinua 2001).

1.3. Paradigms of Development and The Message of Sexual Abstinence

In my analysis of the message of sexual abstinence as a preventive strategy and its implications for development in South Africa I drew from the alternative development paradigm. It is in the second chapter that I introduce this paradigm. In this chapter, I highlighted the paradigm preceding the alternative paradigm called the modernisation paradigm of development. I discussed this paradigm as a way of providing a clear background to the alternative paradigm of development as well as my research intervention. In this chapter, a link between the modernisation paradigm of development and a particular condescending attitude towards the message of sexual abstinence advanced by faith based organisations (FBOs) was established. From this discussion, I then discussed the alternative development paradigm. This paradigm represents one of the major critiques of the modernisation paradigm of development. In contrast to the modernisation paradigm that seeks to provide civilised solutions to local problems, this paradigm, is prepared to interact with local initiatives in finding important solutions to problems. It is in the tradition set by this paradigm that I became interested in initiatives advanced by FBOs in fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, I also identified some major loopholes in this paradigm in relation to religion. Religion is not given sufficient attention within the paradigm. This research study seeks to contribute to the tradition set by the paradigm by exploring this avenue. It is with the insights provided by the alternative paradigm of

development that I set on analysing the implications of the message of sexual abstinence on development. The important question becomes, what new challenges does this paradigm pose for HIV/AIDS intervention in South Africa in relation to effects on development. In the third chapter I gave focus to the status quo pertaining to the HIV/AIDS intervention in South Africa. I discussed how this intervention is undermined by discourses of male sexuality within the South African context that constructs male sexuality as uncontrollable force that overwhelms men in the face of male sexual desire.

1.4. HIV Prevention and The Construction of Male Sexuality

The current status quo pertaining to HIV/AIDS intervention is that characterised by the dominance of the line of intervention hugely informed by the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice model (KAP model). This model addresses people as individuals and the knowledge disseminated by HIV intervention strategies informed by it, is meant to be appropriated by people as individuals. Thus intervention strategies informed by the model ultimately targets the individual. It is with the fervour of saving the vulnerable and reducing possible suffering through assumed universal superior knowledge about HIV/AIDS that intervention is advanced. The assumption is that when faced with this knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention, people will respond by changing their sexual behaviour accordingly. From research literature I identify a major shortcoming pertaining to this assumption. This is the assumption of a clear and unproblematic link between knowledge and response to this knowledge in terms of behaviour.

I cited the example of a well-documented discourse that demonstrates the shortcomings of the KAP model. This is the example of a discourse on male sexuality that defies the relevance of the KAP model in addressing the problem of engagement in high-risk sexual behaviour by South Africans. The discourse represents men as being inherently unable to use the knowledge about HIV transmission they have accumulated when faced with the desire and opportunity to engage in sexual intercourse. It also emasculates women in so far as they feel that they cannot do much in the face of male desire that objectifies and victimises them. Thus, in this discourse, we encounter a certain knowledge pertaining to male sexuality that renders the efforts of mainstream intervention ineffective. With the insights of chapter three, that exposes the shortcomings of the KAP model on the one hand and that highlights alternative discourses on issues involving HIV/AIDS on the other, I turned my attention to the American Influenced Evangelical Faith based Organisation in South Africa and the strategy it utilises in advancing the message of sexual abstinence as an HIV preventive youth behaviour.

1.5. The American Evangelical Influence: The Message of Sexual Abstinence

The statement “American influenced evangelicalism” might evoke questions about the influence of American evangel theology on South African evangelicalism. In my search for a theological background of the evangelical FBOs in South Africa, I realised that South African evangelicalism has been strongly influenced by American evangelism. I cannot speak for all churches or organisations under the evangelical banner since no comprehensive study regarding the profile of evangelical churches in

South Africa has been undertaken. However, the existing academic literature demonstrates a strong theological link between the evangelical faith based movement in South Africa and the one in America. This resonates well with my knowledge from personal involvement in the movement. It is this information that led me to devoting the whole chapter on an analysis of the message of sexual abstinence as a preventive strategy against HIV infection. Doing analysis, I identified what I refer to as the strategy of identification. This strategy is deployed to advance the message of sexual abstinence to the targeted youth. I refer to this youth as the sceptical youth/audience. This is the youth that calls for rational grounds in order to accept and uphold the message of sexual abstinence. This youth is also very vulnerable to peer views and messages alternative to the message of pre-marital sexual abstinence. Argumentation and debate are used to convince this youth. This youth is imaginary, its “existence” serves to create an object for a coherent campaign and discourse on HIV preventive behaviour. To be sure, the message is targeting all young people, however, by constructing the message in a way that addresses the sceptical audience, the speaker/author seeks to reach beyond the boundaries of young people who believe in the validity of the message of sexual abstinence.

1.6. The Message of Sexual Abstinence in South Africa: *The Case of CAF*

I will treat the fourth chapter very much as a prelude to the more important chapter, i.e. the fifth chapter. I considered the American evangelical background significant for this research study and devoted the whole chapter to it because of the enormous influence it has on South African evangelicalism. Within the South African context, I chose one important event to providing me with the data I needed for analysis of the

message of sexual abstinence as a strategy for HIV prevention. The event was a men's conference organised by the student Christian organisation called the Christian Action Fellowship (CAF). Prominent South African Christian speakers within the evangelical fold were invited to deliver sermons to students on the topic: *Reawakening Men; The Role of Men in a Changing South Africa*. In two of these sermons I identified an interesting connections between their sermons and the international Christian men's movement called the Promise Keepers (PK). The connection is a life changing experience with God, reflected in the Christian scriptures and encountered in prayer who they encounter in the scriptures, through prayer, introduced to through conversion and sometimes called upon to work in ones life through deliverance. In addition to encouraging the student audience about the importance of a life changing experience with God, measures were also taken to convince students of the supremacy of the message of sexual abstinence. Analysis of these measures revealed the deployment of the strategy of identification in advancing the message of sexual abstinence among youth. As in the American evangelical trend, argumentation and debate are used to engender a sense of identification with their project among youth.

It should be made clear from the onset that this study was never meant to determine the impact of the message of sexual abstinence as on youth preventive behaviour. This, is the challenge I leave for further enquiry. Thus from this study, I still cannot speak authoritatively on the latter. However, the study does point at some forms of intervention taken to curb the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the part of the

faith-based movement² or by some agents within the movement. The spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to pose a serious threat to national development. My premise in this study is that, the national is made of a multiplicity of localities. The alternative development critiques of the modernisation paradigm demonstrate that universalising assumptions and strategies have seriously failed development. In the light of the tradition set by the alternative development paradigm, the challenge remains to explore with development interventions at a local level. A challenge at hand being the threat of HIV/AIDS to development in South Africa and elsewhere. To be sure, addressing this challenge is surely a development intervention. In the tradition of Gestalt theory³, I premise that if successes is gained at a multiplicity of localities then major inroads are also taking place at a national level and beyond. My position, which is my starting point in this study, is that development goals and challenges, though pursued with national ambitions, should be addressed at local sites, tapping into local resources. This premise is the backbone to this study.

² This categorization, i.e. faith based movement/organizations is ambitious. I do admit that this study does not automatically permit me to use the categorization since my sample was limited to the evangelical movement. However, it can be taken as an indicator of my desired aim, which was seriously hampered by limitations of space, time and resources to widen the scope so as to do justice to the categorization.

³ This is the theory that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.