
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study is inspired by almost a decade of lecturing at a tertiary institution and working with young adult black females. I am also involved in HIV/AIDS-training with the students and have become increasingly alarmed at the behavioural patterns in young black women. Although they are generally well informed about the dangers of unprotected sex, it seems to me that they simply ignore what they know and they have sexual relationships with no regard for the consequences. Many fall pregnant while at college and others are already mothers when they start studying. I endorse the research findings cited by Nel (in Hayes, Porter and Tombs 1998: 399) that “many young people in South Africa have a ‘do not care’ and fatalistic attitude”. I have also noticed that young women are mostly ignored in the literature, focussing mainly on deviant behaviour of young women in this age group. I regret the missing discourse regarding the sexuality of young adult women. I thus work with students who are largely ignored or simply lumped with adults. The young adult years are important for the formation of life-long behavioural patterns and attitudes and I would like these students to speak about life and love in the face of pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and violence.

The parental home is mostly a single-parent home where the mother is struggling to make ends meet. The young women often live in worlds with different world-views: the westernised college atmosphere and the African home environment. This causes stress in their lives because cultural values clash with other values they experience. The church is often a place of comfort and spiritual serenity for many students. They like going to church, listening to the sermons and participating in the activities. Yet the church may preach certain attitudes and behaviours that do not manifest themselves in their lives. Often the opposite of what is preached is achieved. The church also tends to be very reluctant to talk about sex and these young women often do not have a clear knowledge of the

outlook of the church. I concur with Josephine Gitome when she says: “Girls like these are torn between education, Christianity and parental culture” (in Kanyoro and Njoroge 1996: 216).

This age group already has a very well defined spiritual outlook on life. They find that religion and spirituality grow with them into adulthood. They have a distinct picture of right and wrong and some have very strong viewpoints on issues like abortion and rape. They can also see how behaviour not only affects them, but also society as a whole. Although they possess knowledge and beliefs, I find a dichotomy between the norms and beliefs of young adult women and their actual behaviour. I have spoken to parents who are crushed by the behaviour of their children. They raise their children under difficult circumstances and yet the children often disappoint them.

The advent of HIV/AIDS in 1981 has changed the face of Africa in many ways. It has managed to make sexual behaviour visible. Although it was initially known as a homosexually transmitted disease, it soon became apparent in Africa that it was a predominantly heterosexual disease. This disease has now been around for more than twenty years, although it is only during the last decade that it has spread so rapidly in Southern Africa. Educational programmes at schools and colleges have ensured that young people in the age group discussed in this study are generally well informed about HIV/AIDS. I am actually usually amazed at how knowledgeable young adult women are about HIV/AIDS. Regardless of this fact, behavioural patterns do not tend to change. HIV/AIDS is generally not seen as something to be afraid of and it is certainly not changing behaviour into responsible sexual practices. During the past few years some of my students have died from AIDS-related illnesses, others have discontinued their studies because they became too weak to continue and others have shown signs of full-blown AIDS. Although a few students have disclosed their HIV-status, they generally are secretive, with stigmatisation and isolation being their main concern.

The church as a moral and social institution is included in this study to see how it affects the behaviour and morality of young adult women; also to discover whether there is a connection between what the church says sexual behaviour should be and the cultural beliefs that are still apparent in society. This study has therefore developed from my specific interest in the moral behaviour of young adult women.

This study will be conducted from the viewpoint of feminist theology (refer to 2.1). These young black women are influenced by many different voices speaking about their bodies and sexuality: cultural voices, patriarchal voices, voices of power, disembodiment, subordination and an overpowering male religion. Although it is difficult to measure the exact influence of these voices on moral behaviour, they need to be explored and deconstructed in order to create a healthy and wholesome sexuality of the body. Lisa Isherwood (2000: 28) notes that “young women are drawn into their own disempowerment through their conception of what sexual encounters are all about”. This study hopes to contribute to the process of moral development of young females where sexuality is regarded as mutuality, an accountable sexual behaviour and a regard for “their sexual partner as one to be loved and cherished” (Ruether in Isherwood 2000: 52).

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

From the above factors the following research question can be formulated for the purpose of this study:

What is the role of the parental home, church and belief in the sexual relationships of young black women?

1.3 AIMS OF THIS STUDY

In order to answer the research question, the following aims for this study have been set:

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- to give a voice to young black women in order for them to talk about influences on their sexual behaviour
 - to describe what role the parental home, the church and young black women's belief ultimately play in their sexual behaviour
 - to contribute towards responsible and accountable sexual behaviour amongst young black women

1.4 DEMARCATING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE RESEARCH

Young adult women's sexuality is a complex and multidimensional matter in which numerous personal, social and cultural aspects are intertwined. I set out to determine no more than the influence of the parental home, church and belief on the sexual relationships of young adult black women, but I soon realised I could not analyse their sexual behaviour without analysing the context of sexuality and the construction of sexuality in that context. I therefore include the context of their sexuality in the study and attempt to suggest alternatives within that context.

1.5 RESEARCH METHOD

1.5.1 LITERATURE STUDY

For the purposes of a general orientation and background, a study was made of relevant literature about feminist theology, culture and body theology, with the emphasis mainly on the influences on the sexuality of young adult women.

1.5.2 QUESTIONNAIRES

In order to obtain information regarding the sexual behaviour of young adult women, two types of research were undertaken, namely qualitative and quantitative research. The preliminary research was qualitative and was deemed necessary for the establishment of the relationship issues pertaining to the study. The qualitative data was then used as a basis for the semi-structured questionnaire, which contained questions of both a qualitative and a quantitative nature.

1.5.2.1 PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

A questionnaire¹ was developed listing 25 relationship issues that I considered important. This list was established as a consequence of the literature study and personal experience. This list was handed to 52 female college students between the ages of eighteen and twenty four years. This group was not selected but the questionnaire was only handed to black female students between the ages of eighteen and twenty four who professed their Christian belief. I personally explained the aim of the research to the students, clarified the terminology used and requested them to answer as honestly as possible. The results were processed in a spreadsheet programme and listed in order of importance². The ten most significant issues were included in the scope of this study and then used in the second questionnaire³.

1.5.2.2 RESEARCH

In order to obtain a notion of the influence of the parental home, the church and belief on the sexual relationships of young adult women a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of a 106 questions was completed by 42 young black women. I handed out 50 questionnaires and received 42 back. I again set criteria when I handed out the questionnaires. Only black Christian women between the ages of eighteen and twenty four received questionnaires to fill out. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, the respondents' anonymity was guaranteed. I found in due course that this was not necessary as the respondents were open and honest and most of them wrote their names on the questionnaires. The qualitative questions in this questionnaire were once more processed in a spreadsheet programme, while the quantitative questions were transcribed and sorted under relevant headings.

¹ See Addendum 1 (refer to page 139)

² See Addendum 2 for the resultant statistical analysis (refer to page 140)

³ See Addendum 3 (refer to page 141)

1.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 contains the orientation and background to the study, the research question and the aims of this study.

Chapter 2 includes the literature study undertaken for this study and explores the concept of feminist theology, the specific methodologies feminists use and the epistemological paradigms applied in this study.

In **chapter 3** the research findings are discussed, while **chapter 4** deals with the problem of sex and sexuality in the patriarchal context of culture, home and church. **Chapter 5** explores feminist responses to the problem of sex and sexuality.

Chapter 6 is devoted to suggestions towards a healthier sexuality for young adult women and men, based on the findings of the research and the research undertaken into the issue of sexuality. I also explore how an ethics of accountability and integratedness can find application in the wider context of church and society.

Chapter 7 takes a look at the achievement of the aims and summarises the findings of the study. I finally end the study with a reflection on the research done and express my feelings towards the problems and solutions suggested.