

Sexuality, Singleness and the Dream of Marriage in South Africa

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In contemporary South African Pentecostal Charismatic Christian (PCC) Churches such as His People and Grace Bible Church in Johannesburg (SA) very specific formations of sexual relationships are promoted, which emphasize that no sexual relations are allowed outside marriage and people may only enter into heterosexual marriages between Christians, ideally people who are members of the same church. These churches shape the ‘allowed’ sexual relations of members both outside and inside marriage, including the structure of the family, how many children couples should have and how the husbands and wives should interact with one another. This paper examines the message of marriage which these churches promote, what technologies of power are used to ensure that this message is adhered to and the consequent contestations and conflicts which emerge in the work space, the family and the cultural engagements of women who try to follow this teaching closely. Given the patriarchal nature of Southern African cultures and the importance of the extended family these women find it very difficult to get married to ‘suitable’ men who will accept their success and drive towards establishing their individuality. Their families often marginalize them for not marrying, having children and maintaining cultural practices, leaving them feeling isolated and alone.