

*HOMOSEXUALITY AMONG BLACK SOUTH  
AFRICANS: A PSYCHOSOCIAL ONTOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVE*

BY

SHERIN BICKRUM

(B.Sc. Hons (UDW), MA-Counselling Psychology (UNIV OF  
CALIFORNIA), MFCC (UNIV OF CALIFORNIA), M.Sc. (UDW)

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## *DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS*

The definitions below apply to terminology used in the context of this study. The intention, in offering standard definitions, is to contribute to the clarity of this presentation.

Africans - descendants of native South Africans

Indians - fourth and fifth generation South Africans, of Indian descent

Coloured - South Africans of mixed ethnicity, usually as a result of interrelationships between white and African ancestors

blacks - a political term, referring to previously disenfranchised race groups (i.e., other than white, race groups)

homosexual - individual who is attracted (i.e., physically, emotionally, etc.) to same-sex individual/s

gay - male who is homosexual

lesbian - female who is homosexual

## Abstract

This study attempts to provide pertinent insights into the experiencing of black South Africans who are gay or lesbian. The aims of the investigation were to provide more holistic information on the gay and lesbian worldview in general; to provide a conceptualisation of the ontology of black gay and lesbian individuals in South Africa within a psychosocial context, and to explore the effects of a dual oppressive system related to race and sexual identity.

Of 150 questionnaires distributed to black gays and lesbians, 23 were completed. Although frequency tables were utilised to organise the responses to the 73 items on the questionnaire, a phenomenological approach was adopted in interpreting responses. Within this paradigm, the initial focus was on the exposition of individual responses and thereafter, on the contextualisation of common themes in the perceptions of black gays and lesbians as a group.

The study generated pertinent insights into the experiences and perceptions of black gays and lesbians, related to the lifespan development processes (early childhood to ageing) and relevant socio-political factors. In this regard the study highlighted issues that need to be addressed by black gays and lesbians in their acknowledgement of sexual identity; concerns the participants experienced as children; issues regarding relationships, parenting and old age, and the influence of religious, legal, social and political factors on their worldview. Among the most significant findings generated by this investigation, is that of the adoption of society's homonegative attitudes by gays and lesbians themselves at almost every level of their psychosocial development. Respondents also tended to emphasise oppression with regard to being gay or lesbian, than with being black.

Recommendations for future research have been identified for the purposes of generating further insights into the experiencing of black gays and lesbians in South Africa.

## CHAPTER ONE

### MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE

The proposed study involves an exploration of the experiencing and perceptions of black gay and lesbian individuals in South Africa with the aim of generating a conceptualisation of some of the ontological dynamics and issues relevant to this ethnic and non-ethnic minority. This is to be contextualised within a psychosocial framework.

The area of homosexuality among black persons has, until very recently, received only a negligible amount of research interest internationally, and almost none in South Africa. A literature review of all the SAPSE recognised journals (Psychological Abstracts, 1984- 1990) relating to homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbianism and male homosexuality revealed that only approximately 0,52% of these articles addressed the subject of homosexuality amongst blacks. A review of South African journals for this period, surprisingly, revealed a complete absence of research in this area.

In terms of the number of gay and lesbian persons of all race groups that appear to be 'out' in South Africa, for example, it may be perceived that the scant research attention given to this area is justified. However, research exploring the incidence of homosexuality across several population groups (racial, language, as well as among children of gay and lesbian, and non-gay and lesbian parents), consistently reported that between 10% and 15% of any population is homosexual (Bozett, 1987; Fassinger, 1991; Pennington, 1987). With regard to the demographics of South Africa, this figure suggests that the gay and lesbian population of this country is currently approximately three times larger than its so-called Indian population. A perusal of articles published in the most recent editions of *The South African Journal of Psychology*, however, revealed that the latter population group has received significant and consistent research attention, as compared to the country's homosexual population. Thus, a major problem relating to homosexuality, specifically in South Africa, is that a group comprising approximately 10% to 15% of its population, may be perceived either as a hidden minority or, worse still, as insignificant, by researchers.

A second problem relating to the gay and lesbian population in psychological literature relates pertinently to the issue of race. As noted earlier, only 0,52% of all articles relating to homosexuality, dealt with the issues and dynamics of black persons in this subculture. By contrast, approximately 90% of these studies dealt with homosexuality among white persons. In the South African context, homosexuality appears to be inadvertently associated with a white male. Informal interviews conducted telephonically or face to face with thirty counsellors (including psychotherapists, Life Line counsellors, counsellors from private and public AIDS training and testing agencies and social- workers) from the greater Durban region provided strong support for this notion.

Of those interviewed, only one individual had encountered black, gay clients. This person reported that all the black clients were HIV+ and appeared to have acknowledged their homosexuality only as a result of the perceived seriousness of their circumstances.

Statistics for 1991, from the Life Line Coastal Region office revealed that none of the 170 calls made by gay (N= 119) and lesbian (N= 51) callers appeared to have been made by black persons. Given the privilege of anonymity extended to Life Line callers, this trend generates serious questions. Looking at the facts that between 10% and 15% of any population is supposedly gay or lesbian (Fassinger, 1991) and that black South Africans comprise approximately 87% of the country's population, the incongruity between Life Line's statistics and the country's demographics is surprising and may be questioned. Could it be that the 10% to 15% projection does not apply to black South Africans? More pertinently, if the 10% to 15% projection does apply, what might be the circumstances leading to such intense closeting of sexual identity? What circumstances must exist to preclude individuals who experience a dual oppression (relating to sexual identity and race) from reaching out to skilled personnel? Do families perhaps fulfil this role? The issue of homosexuality among black South Africans generates an enormous number of questions for which only intensive research may provide some of the answers.

It is from these answers that a conceptualisation of the black gay or lesbian person may be formulated and thereafter hypotheses and further research issues generated.

At this point in time, it may be important to understand who the black gay or lesbian person is; his or her psychological, social, phenomenological, political and other dimensions of development.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

1. To provide more holistic information on the gay and lesbian worldview in general (many of the present studies tend to focus on deficiencies rather than on aspects of growth).
2. To provide a conceptualisation of the ontology of black gay and lesbian individuals in South Africa within a psychosocial context.
3. To explore the effects of a dual oppressive system related to race and sexual identity among black gay and lesbian individuals.

#### KEY QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED IN THIS STUDY

1. What are some of the issues that needed to be addressed by black gays or lesbians in their acknowledgement of sexual identity?
2. What are some of the developmental concerns experienced by black gay and lesbian persons since their childhood?
3. What are the unique issues (e.g., relationships, parenting, old- age) faced, or anticipated by black gay and lesbian individuals in their adulthood and later life?
4. How have social factors (e.g. religion, legislation, politics) influenced the perceptions and experiences of black gays and lesbians?

## CHAPTER TWO

### UNDERSTANDING HOMOSEXUALITY

#### 2.1. THE DEFINITION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Gadpaille (1989) described homosexuality as "the obligatory erotic interaction between persons of the same sex despite the availability of willing opposite sex partners" (p.1086).

A broader, more inclusive, definition of homosexuality is offered by Lehman (1978) in her specific reference to women. She described the homosexual woman as one who prefers women on many levels: psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and sometimes at a political level. This individual may form lasting emotional and sexual bonds with another woman or women, or satisfying friendships with other women which are never acted out sexually.

The inadequacy of the assumption that homosexuality may be defined simply as the sexual attraction between members of the same sex, is reiterated by Gochros (1989). She believed that differences in defining homosexuality are generated by the following premises:

1. thoughts, feelings and emotions are not behaviours;
2. thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours can and do frequently change;
3. contradictory feelings may be experienced simultaneously;
4. thoughts feelings, emotions and behaviours are not necessarily influenced by biological antecedents but are also influenced significantly by social, cultural and religious values.

As an example, she asked whether individuals creating sexual fantasies or who experience erotic thoughts or romantic feelings around a movie hero or heroine, could necessarily be defined as unfaithful? Thus, Gochros, in her attempt to explore the constitution or definition of homosexuality asked, rather than labelled, whether homosexuality is: A sexual thought ? A physiological response ? A behavioural act ? A lifestyle ?

The complexity of defining homosexuality is similarly evidenced in Golden's model of sexual orientation formation (1987 as cited by Rothblum, 1994a).

Within this context, the multidimensionality is reflected in components of sexual identity (e.g. I am lesbian), sexual behaviour (e.g. I have sex with women) and community participation (e.g. I am a member of the lesbian community).

Rothblum, surmising the implications of the multidimensionality of homosexuality, stated that individuals considering themselves to be homosexual may have same gender partners yet not participate at a community level of involvement or belonging. Similarly, individuals considering themselves bisexual may be concurrently engaging in opposite gender relationships, yet not disclose this information to friends or acquaintances of the gay and lesbian population for fear of being alienated from the community level of involvement or belonging.

Rothblum's belief appears to be that the synonymous use of sex and gender may be confused with sexual activity *per se*, thus contributing to this confusion of the concept of sexual orientation. Gonsoirek and Weinrich (1991) stated that the difficulty in defining who is, or who is not, homosexual may relate to various behaviours and individual lifestyles having being confused with sexual orientation.

Citing the work of Shively and De Cocco (1977 in Gonsoirek and Weinrich, 1991) they described sexual identity as comprising four components: biological sex (pertaining to the genetic basis of sexuality); gender identity (psychological dimension of being male or female); social sex role (in alignment with culturally created behaviours defined as being appropriate for males and for females, in that context); sexual orientation (the erotic and affectional attraction/leaning towards same and/or opposite sex persons). Gonsoirek and Weinrich stressed that the first three components of sexual identity are not necessarily related to sexual orientation itself although they tend to be confused with the latter concept.

According to these authors, 'gay' and 'lesbian' are commonly used words to define individuals who define themselves as homosexual. 'Homosexual', they claimed, tends to suggest diagnosis and pathology. 'Straight', they found, is a term used more popularly by gay and lesbian individuals to describe heterosexual individuals.

Fassinger (1991) added that the preference for 'gay', as opposed to 'homosexual', is that the former is seen to encompass many aspects of preference and emphasises positive attitudes, whereas the latter tends to focus primarily on the sexuality dimension. This view is supported by Bozett and Sussman (1990). Fassinger noted that 'gay women' prefer referring to themselves as 'lesbians', to gain greater visibility. However, several authors preferred to view 'lesbian' as more than a 'gay woman' (Lehman, 1978; Rothblum, 1994b; Sophie, 1982). In contrast to the finding of Gonsoirek and Weinrich (1991), Fassinger found that 'straight', as a description of heterosexual individuals by gays and lesbians, is less favoured than 'non-gay', since the former inherently alludes to the deviancy or 'crooked' nature of gay and lesbian individuals.

Gonsoirek and Weinrich (1991) also noted the confusion between terms such as 'sexual preference' and 'lifestyle', used to contextualise homosexuality. In their view, the use of 'sexual preference' creates the false notion of a conscious or deliberate choice to be homosexual. 'Lifestyle', they claimed, suggests a unanimity in living that underscores the diversity reflected within the gay and lesbian populations. It also minimises the many parallels between the lives of individuals who are homosexual and those who are heterosexual.

This confusion is vividly illustrated if the Gonsoirek and Weinrich conceptualisation is compared with that of Fassinger (1991). The latter, citing the definition of Klein and Sepekoff-Wolf (1985), described sexual orientation as "a complex web of behaviours, emotions, fantasies, attitudes, self-identification and sexual and lifestyle preferences regarding one's choice of intimate partners" (p.158).

Gonsoirek and Weinrich, in their definition of who is homosexual, included individuals (gays and lesbians) who historically may have had heterosexual experiences. This definition is supported by the finding of a cross-cultural study conducted by Weinberg and Williams (1974), in which 36% to 59% of self-identified gay individuals had experienced heterosexual intercourse. Further support emerges from studies conducted by Bell and Weinberg (1978) and Reinish, Sanders and Ziemba-Davis (1989) who discovered that approximately 74% of a population of lesbians reported having engaged in heterosexual intercourse.

The difficulty in ascribing a specific definition to homosexuality or homosexual behaviours is again reflected in Weeks' (1990) premise that "it is difficult to fit homosexuality into any preconceived mould" (p.108).

He stated that there is not a single homosexuality, (i.e. 'the' homosexual or 'the' heterosexual, for that matter) but homosexualities. Weeks stated that the attempt to socially categorise homosexuality, is an attempt to create the notion of uniformity, which apparently is unrealistic. He identified at least three qualitatively different lifestyles/contexts where homosexual behaviour may be manifested but may not necessarily lead to the development of homosexual identity. One kind of homosexuality described by Weeks is the 'casual encounter'. This may occur under various circumstances, including the need for experimentation, drunken encounters, or even a passing phase. The essential notion conveyed by Weeks in this context is that homosexual behaviour is not a behaviour exclusive to, or the prerogative of, a particular type of individual.

A second kind of homosexuality identified by Weeks describes a relationship between two same gender persons which could be deeply emotional, may or may not involve sexual behaviour and which is without the commitment of a couple relationship. These individuals may not regard themselves as homosexual or consider this identity appropriate. Weeks added that this relationship was in fact prevalent and widely accepted during the Victorian Era. This situation also appears typical with regard to men in ancient Greece (Hans Licht, 1956).

Situational homosexual behaviours were identified by Weeks as a third form of sexual behaviour that did not necessarily have to be integrated within the sexual identity of individuals. In this instance, he referred to schoolboy homosexuality and that which occurred among inmates of prisons, monasteries, the army, and similar institutions.

A more definitive, though somewhat more simplistic, description of what may be considered homosexual is proposed by Whitam and Mathy (1986).

They defined homosexual persons as those who are exclusively or nearly exclusively attracted to persons of the same sex. The authors referred to 'gay' as the word that is used widely in English speaking countries to describe these individuals. They added, that in the seventies, the word 'gay' had come to convey more than was conveyed by the word 'homosexual'. In this sense 'gay', is seen as a term of political empowerment.

## 2.2 *THE KINSEY REPORT*

The current conceptualisations of what constitutes the label of homosexuality, like most definitions, or attempts at definitions, appear to be based on the Kinsey reports (Kinsey, Wardell, Pomeroy and Martin, 1948 and 1953, cited in Gochros, 1989; Rothblum, 1994a and Whitam and Mathy, 1986). Findings contained in these reports were based on ratings on the Kinsey Scale, a seven point scale measuring exclusive heterosexuality at one end (0); bisexuality (i.e. equally homosexual and heterosexual) in the middle (3) and exclusive homosexuality (6) at the other end. This study, based on white American males suggested that at least 25% of this population between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five, were more than incidentally homosexual for at least three years. Seventeen per cent of this population were found to be bisexual, 10% predominantly homosexual and incidentally heterosexual and approximately 4% exclusively homosexual throughout their lifespan.

There are several limitations noted in both the Kinsey et al. methodology and findings, including the apparent inability to differentiate between the emotional/psychological dimensions, such as 'love', versus the predominantly physical dimension of erotic or sexual relationship. A further limitation is that their findings were based on a specific sample, at a specific point in time (Gonsoirek and Weinrich, 1991).

The assessment of individuals at a point in their development appears to further discount the notions that changes in sexual orientation may occur over time. Gochros (1989) stated that some individuals may become aware of homosexual responses in early adolescence or pre-adolescence while others become aware of them much later in their lives or after specific traumatic events or crises such as divorce or death of one's spouse. An obvious gap in the Kinsey et al. study appears to be its exclusive focus on a male, Eurocentric sample. The inability of this momentous study to focus on homosexuality in minority populations of the country appears to be a critical limitation in its generalisability or usefulness beyond the white male population. Despite these and several other shortcomings in the methodology of the Kinsey et al. study, it continues to remain the benchmark by which the degree of homosexuality is measured (Gochros, 1989 : Rothblum, 1994a).

### 2.3. INCIDENCE OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Based on the Kinsey et al. study of 1948, it would appear that approximately 10% to 15% of the population of white males (albeit USA citizens) are homosexual. This statistic will hold if only the numbers of predominantly and exclusively homosexual subjects, as determined by a rating of '5' or '6' on the Kinsey scale, are considered. A similar incidence has been reported by several researchers across qualitatively different population groups, both within and outside the USA (Atkinson and Hackett, 1988; Fassinger, 1991; Walters and Simoni, 1993). According to results based on available studies, Gonsoirek and Weinrich (1991) noted that the current incidence of homosexuality in the USA ranged from 4% to 17%. Gadpaille (1989) noted from the data generated by the Kinsey et al. study and other surveys in Western countries, that between 1% to 3% of women reported being exclusively homosexual, while 3% to 8% were 'mostly homosexual'.

Given the stigmatisation of homosexuality, however, he concluded that a true estimate of women who were exclusively homosexual was more likely to be in the 2% to 4% range.

The projected incidence of homosexuality by several researchers appears to have significant implications for the perception of the normalcy of the homosexual orientation and lifestyle (i.e. within the context of the statistical model of normalcy). Considering that an approximately similar incidence was reported scientifically by Kinsey et al., a logical expectation would be the promulgation of the normalcy of the homosexual orientation. To demonstrate the incredulity of conceptualising homosexuality as a deviancy or irregularity, the following apt comparisons with minority population groups may be considered. Atkinson, Sue and Morten (1989) reported that the Native American population of the USA is approximately one million (i.e. 0,4% of the population, based on Kapit's (1991) estimation of the USA population of two hundred and forty seven million). The population of individuals of Indian origin in South Africa is approximately 3% (Kapit, 1991). Ironically, none of these ethnic populations, or several of the other ethnic or non-ethnic minority populations is considered deviant, irregular or abnormal. Yet, a population comprising between 10% and 15% has been, until recently, termed as such, both socially and psychologically.

There is documented evidence of discrimination and maltreatment of these former groups, both in the USA and South Africa (Atkinson, Sue and Morten, 1989; New Nation History, 1992), but without the diagnosis of deviancy afforded to other significantly large minority groups. Gonsoirek and Weinrich (1991), in fact surmised that the gay and lesbian population, as a group, may easily be the first, second or third largest minority group of the USA. If this is the case, then the concept of normal distribution has been overdrawn to apply selectively with what may be considered 'appropriate' by society, and not to 'normalcy' as it is understood.

#### 2.4. HOMOSEXUALITY FROM A PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-I), published by the APA in early 1960, classified homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disturbance and defined it as a sexual deviation involving pathological behaviour. The revised version of this manual, published in 1968, deleted the classification of sociopathic personality disturbance, but retained its diagnosis of homosexuality as a sexual deviation.

Gay activism, involving immense lobbying and protest, together with the support of many psychologists (i.e. a 58% majority), influenced the APA Board of Trustees to remove the diagnosis of mental illness previously ascribed to homosexuality (Gadpaille, 1989). Gadpaille added, however, that a subsequent survey in 1977 conducted by the Journal, "Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality", indicated that 69% of 2500 participating psychologists viewed homosexuality as "a pathological adaptation as opposed to a normal variation" (p.1086).

Rothblum (1994a) cited research by Time in 1978, which mentioned that the majority of the APA members, who participated in the above poll, considered homosexual persons, in addition to being pathological, to be less happy and less able to engage in "mature and loving relationships, than heterosexuals" (Rothblum, 1994a, p.213).

The third edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III), published in 1980, in spite of the dissatisfaction expressed by a significant number of APA members, no longer carried homosexuality as a diagnostic category. Instead "ego-dystonic homosexuality", under the general category of Psychosexual Disorders, was entered.

This disorder described individuals who experienced intrinsic difficulties or concerns with their orientation of homosexuality.

It excluded extrinsic concerns (i.e. such as the individual's conflict between his or her homosexuality and society, for example). According to Fassinger (1991), this label continued to emphasise individual rather than social antecedents of stress and thus undermined the role of external discrimination and the internalised oppression experienced by this population.

The third revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III-R) does not list ego-dystonic homosexuality. Diagnosis pertaining to homosexuality appears to have been reduced to a single category (i.e. under sexual disorders not otherwise specified) that describes marked distress about one's sexual orientation.

The Synopsis of Psychiatry (Kaplan, Sadock and Grebbs, 1994), which provides complementary theoretical information and detail to the DSM-IV, describes homosexuality as an 'alternate lifestyle' rather than a pathological disorder (p. 658). It further surmises that the expression of homosexuality, rather than its presence, is a matter of choice. Kaplan et al. (1994) define 'homosexual' as a term "used most often to describe a person's overt behaviour, sexual orientation and sense of personal or sexual identity" (p.658). The terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' are also defined in this text and are seen by the authors to describe the combined self, and the perceived and social identities of individuals who are homosexual. They stated further that the latter terms suggest that these individuals have some sense of being part of the social group that is similarly labelled.

Ruth Fassinger (1991), while acknowledging this positive trend after what she described as "decades of discriminatory treatment of gay and lesbian people by the mental health system", stated that it does not necessarily imply a shift in the attitudes of several mental health practitioners (p.165). Citing research conducted by Stein in 1988, and the APA in 1990, she referred to the heterosexual bias, heterosexist assumptions, misinformation or lack of information, and homophobia of mental health professionals.

Despite the attempt to eliminate homosexuality as a diagnostic category in 1973, the professional, psychological standpoint as reflected in *The Textbook of Comprehensive Psychiatry* (1989) and *Synopsis of Psychiatry* (1994), allude to the perception of homosexuality as a 'condition', or at the very least, a deviancy from the norm (i.e. heterosexuality). The following paragraph, contained in the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* (1989), appears to suggest this.

"The justified effort to remove the burden of social stigmatisation from homosexuality has resulted in a deplorably unscientific politicisation of the issue of psychopathology in homosexual object choice. People who conceptualise all forms of homosexual activity as normal variants of the human sexual repertoire can appear as enlightened, scientific champions of equal individual rights; but those individuals who see any manifestation of homosexuality as a consequence of pathological psychosexual development, are often attacked as oppressors who are against homosexual human rights. A 'diagnosis' of homosexuality as a treatable form of disordered development is overlain with such social and moral implications that the basic scientific questions are lost" (Gadpaille, 1989, p.1086).

Although this cry for a scientific approach appears absent in the discourse on homosexuality presented in the *Synopsis of Psychiatry* (Kaplan, Sadock and Grebbs, 1994), the label of deviancy and abnormality and a tendency to still view homosexuality (vs. heterosexuality) as a psychiatric or psychological condition seems apparent. Beyond a brief introduction which describes homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle and embraces a conglomeration of liberal terminology to describe this 'lifestyle' (i.e. sexual orientation, personal or social identity, social group, etc.), the major part of this discourse focuses on sociological and biological factors that are theorised to be determinants of homosexuality. Although theories may postulate or reflect concepts in several ways, those in the *Synopsis of Psychiatry* text (often used in conjunction with the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual*), are described in a language that tends to sanction the deviancy or pathology notion of homosexuality. For example, under the heading of 'Psychological Factors', there is mention of Freud's theory of "an arrest of psychosexual development", "castration fears", "maternal engulfment", "strong fixation on the mother", "lack of effective fathering", "fixation or regression at the narcissistic stage of development", etc. (1994, p.659).

The psychodynamics of homosexuality in women are described in a similar vein as the "girl's inability to relinquish her fixation on her mother as a love object." (1994, p.659). In proposing the role of social and familial antecedents to homosexuality, Gadpaille (1989) similarly focused on the predominant pattern among male homosexual psychiatric patients. He described these individuals as having close-binding seductive mothers who undermine or dominate their passive, distant and hostile fathers.

Citing a more recent study by the American Psychological Association Task Force in 1991, Rothblum(1994a) reported similar negative perceptions by mental health professionals.

She observed that biased or inadequate practice existed in understanding, evaluating and facilitating interventions within a broad range of aspects pertaining to gay and lesbian issues like relationships, identity development, parenting, etc.

Additionally, religious prejudice towards homosexuality is given scientific legitimacy based upon work and views expressed by professionals in the psychological and psychiatric fields (Strommen, 1990). He supported this view by referring to the study conducted in 1987 by Pope, Tabachnick and Keith-Spiegel, in which more than one in five of these professionals regarded homosexuality as a mental illness, despite the fact that it was no longer classified as a disorder in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual. However, a more blatant contradiction or denial of the normalcy of homosexuality is evidenced in Kaplan, Sadock and Grebbs' (1994) discourse on 'normal sexuality'. Significantly, 'homosexuality' is included in this section, although, as discussed earlier, with apparent reservations. However, 'love and intimacy', within the context of 'normal sexuality', is perceived as "mature heterosexual love... marked by the intimacy that is a special attribute of the relationship between a man and woman." (p.661). Such discourses which appear to vacillate between their apparent support for, and then rejection or denial of, the normalcy of homosexuality are succinctly debased by Altman's assertion that "for too long have homosexuals allowed themselves to be defined by a heterosexual world which, at worst, persecutes them and at best, tolerates them" (Altman, 1993, p.17).

Psychological conversion programmes, focused on the sexual reorientation of individuals who are homosexual, appear to be reminiscent of such an approach. According to Haldeman (1994), psychotherapeutic approaches to the conversion of sexual orientation, are based on the assumption that homoeroticism is an undesirable condition.

In this regard, psychoanalysts such as Bieber et al. (1962, in Haldeman, 1994), have hypothesised that homosexuality results from arrested normal development, pathological attachment patterns in early development or faulty learning. More recent conversion therapists such as Nicolosi have approached conversion from the belief that the gay lifestyle can never be healthy (1991 in Haldeman, 1994).

Despite several such hypotheses and approaches towards reorientation, Haldeman (1994) maintained that neither the psychological underpinnings regarding the pathology of homosexuality, nor the effectiveness of conversion to heterosexuality, has been supported or validated.

The consequence of these psychotherapeutic approaches, however, is that they tend to increase the internalisation of the negativity of homosexuality in individuals who are homosexual, thereby undermining their own self-image and self-esteem (Coleman, 1990). According to Sophie (1987), it is such attitudes from the mental health arena that result in the extreme wariness of homosexual persons in seeking therapy and health care.

From the perspective of the APA's evolving appraisal of homosexuality since DSM-II, the following view, expressed by Huggins and Forrester (1977), appears to be reiterated by current researchers in the field: "Unfortunately, the damage created by the 'sickness' label has not been eliminated. The public at large still views this entire minority group as sick. Many gay men perceive themselves as sick, and in a self-fulfilling prophecy process, they become sick. The sickness label has been, and is, used by some legislators as the reason for denying civil rights to homosexuals" (p.134).

## 2.5. CONCLUSION

Understanding homosexuality, at this point in history, does not appear to be as simplistic as is conveyed by the definition of the attraction between same-sex individuals. It appears to be based very much on the viewpoint or perspective on homosexuality adopted by the researchers concerned.

Having explored a few of the perspectives in this chapter, the following chapter focuses on anthropological and historical perspectives regarding homosexuality.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### HOMOSEXUALITY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter focuses on the history of homosexuality from early anthropological records through to the initiation of the Gay Liberation Movement to the current South African scenario. An attempt has been made to offer a multicultural perspective inclusive of religious, legal and social trends. This, however, has been restricted by the paucity of available information in this country. Further, the expansive scope of the area that may be covered in this chapter naturally limits this discussion to the more salient events and issues related to the history of homosexuality. The intention in offering a historical perspective is to provide an understanding of the conceptualisation of, and attitudes towards, this orientation over time, to document the emergence of the liberation movement and to trace its progression within a black South African context.

#### 3.1. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The constancy and normalcy of homosexuality from early times and across cultures is described in Westermarck's (1901 in Cory, 1956) discourse on homosexual love. His view was that, although homosexuality was understood primarily as intercourse between two same-sex individuals, it was practised commonly within customary and cultural contexts, for, among others, ecologically logical reasons.

He described prominent homosexual practices across continental cultures. Among the Kadiak, a native American tribe, for example, effeminate sons were reared as girls and later married to wealthy men. The title then given to them was achnuchik or shoopan. Among the native American Chukchi, a young male was allowed to relinquish his sexual and gender identity and immerse himself in typically female role behaviours and nuances (including the wearing of female attire and long hair).

This individual frequently took on a female partner whose role was equivalent to that of the male partner.

This change of gender was encouraged particularly by the shamans (i.e. spiritual healers) of the culture and it was often accompanied by future shamanship.

Greenberg (1988) wrote that anthropological exploration about the origins of homosexual behaviour in modern American Societies tended to focus on the relationship between religious function and transvestism, rather than on cowardice. In one respect, the transvestite priest or shaman has been seen by some scholars to represent an androgynous God who symbolises the unity which surpasses sex differences. Greenberg (1988) added that the transsexual role was, at one stage, associated with that of healer across various cultures (e.g., among the Maori, Samoan, Mangaian). In another proposal, transvestites have been viewed as bridges between the earlier matriarchy and later patriarchy. Expanding on this theory, Greenberg explained that women shamans, as a result of diminishing power, were replaced by men who at first had to impersonate women. Greenberg maintained that institutionalised gender transformation in those societies appears to have been relatively stable until destruction by European contact.

Transgenderal homosexuality was also seen to have less prestigious origins. According to Greenberg (1988), those who feared fighting became 'bajasas' and wore women's clothing. This, among the Toradjus of the Celebes, appeared to have been a socially acceptable role. This role, given the name 'berdache' also existed in North American societies. It described Native American men who cross dressed and engaged in homosexual relationships. In the Persian culture, 'bardag' described a young male slave who played a receptive role in the homosexual relationship (Greenberg, 1988).

The response to 'berdaches' was mixed, depending on the culture to which they belonged. According to Greenberg (1988), the Chippewas revered them as great geniuses; the Yuma and Crow allowed them to perform special rituals; the Sioux and Fox afforded them extraordinary privileges; other native American cultures attributed spiritual powers to the berdaches.

However, there were also cultures who accepted berdaches without holding them in unusually high esteem.

On the other hand, there existed negative attitudes (i.e. scorn, dislike, contempt) towards the berdaches by several cultures. These included the Papago, the Cocopa, the Klamath and the Choctaws, among others (Greenberg 1988). In the islands of Bali, Tahiti, Bataks and Sumatra, homosexuality was found to be practised openly and often made into a profession by some persons.

Westermarck (1901 in Cory, 1956) noted that, in the Kimberly District of West Australia, native persons who were unable to find wives at a marriageable age were presented with a 'boy-wife' or chookadoo. The latter was initiated into this role at the age of five or ten due to the lack of available women, most of whom, it appeared, were monopolised by the older and more powerful male members of the tribe.

Westermarck's discourse, described the constancy of homosexual practices and homosexual love across all the continents. Although the greater focus is on male homosexual practices, he also referred to homosexual practice amongst women. In the latter context, he cited research describing homosexual practices among eastern Eskimos, Hottentots, Hereros, Zanzibaris, Egyptians and Indians. With women, however, homosexuality, in most cases, appeared to be practised more secretly than by men in those cultures. Unfortunately, more information on practices pertinent to women was not available.

Although inherent in his writings are the implications of the rejection or disapproval of homosexual practices by at least certain segments of the societies or cultures, Westermarck concluded emphatically that no country or class of society is free from homosexuality. He deduced that homosexual practice is sometimes the result of instinctive preferences or sometimes the result of external conditions uncondusive to heterosexual intercourse.

According to Licht (1956), homosexuality in the earlier twentieth century Greek context appeared to have been integrated into its social infrastructure. In this sense specific terminology had been used to define this type of sexuality and its developmental dynamics.

The word pederasty (i.e. pez=boy; eros = to love), most frequently used in this culture to refer to homosexuality, was initially used to suggest the spiritual and sensual affection for a boy (sexually matured), although in the twentieth century it was seen to be denigrating. There were also several expressions coined to describe men who were attracted to boys. Locality specific terminology described men in various roles in homosexual relationships.

Licht stated that on the island of Crete, for example, a male lover, before the onset of a relationship would be referred to as erastes, and, as a wooer or friend, would be called philetor. The object of the affection (i.e. the young boy), would be called eromenos during the courtship. Kleinos would describe the boy-lover of a celebrated person.

Homosexual love for young men was also expressed ostentatiously in Greek poetry, dialogue and art. According to Licht, paedophilia represented a significant way in which young males were reared. Among the Dorians, a state expectation fostered the trend that every man was to find a young male as his favourite. On the other hand, a boy was blamed if he failed to find an older male lover. Licht summarised the ancient Greek situation as follows :

“The Greek love of boys is a peculiarity of character based upon aesthetic and religious foundation. Its objective is , with the assistance of the state, to arrive at the power to maintain the same at the fountain head of civic and personal virtue. It is not hostile to marriage but supplements it as an important factor in education. We can also speak of a decided bisexuality among the Greeks” (Licht,1956, p.298).

Cory's (1956) comment on homosexuality in Greece was that since this form of love thrived and was widely accepted in one of the great cultures of the past, it could also find a place in modern cultures.

### 3.2. WESTERN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of exploring this perspective was to examine the historical development of attitudes towards homosexuality.

Ideally, this section should have included multicultural information including African and Indian perspectives, among others, since a significant number of the respondents in the current study has that ancestry. However, this intention was limited by the unavailability of literature. Furthermore, the respondents were westernised individuals who had spent all their lives in urban, westernised areas of South Africa.

Weeks' (1990) exploration of "The Construct of Homosexuality" is based on his premise that the social context (i.e. society) not only defines and labels, but contributes to the construction and perception of homosexuality as a deviance. Greenberg (1988) added that the tendency for western researchers to focus on the reasons for the disapproval of homosexual behaviour, rather than the understanding of why homosexual behaviours occur, contributes to the societal perception of the deviancy of homosexuality. According to Weeks' research of the issue, the development of homosexuality or heterosexuality is affected by "historically conditioned familial influences channelling the sexual possibilities that exist in a young child." (1990, p.97). In attempting to explain the various historical sources of social stigmatisation of homosexuality, Weeks traced and explored the moral, legal and medical regulation of sexuality, specifically in Europe. It appeared to him that other cultures had successfully integrated at least forms, or aspects, of homosexual behaviour into their sexual norms (e.g., the homosexuality in ancient Greece or the transvestite roles in some of the more tribalistic societies).

In western society, however, Christianity, at different points in time, appears to have introduced various taboos discriminating against men and women who were homosexual. Weeks noted that legislation before 1885 was directed primarily against sodomy and against a series of specific sexual acts, rather than against a particular type of person (i.e. prosecution for homosexual stereotyped sexual behaviour as opposed to prosecution for being homosexual).

The primary reason for this enforcement appeared to be in support or propagation of reproductive sex in marriage. This hypothesis was supported by Davies (1979) who believed that the taboos associated with homosexuality lay in its emphasis on the separation of categories rather than on what it entailed.

He explained that homosexuality, by “destroying” the definition of the two sexes “who are defined in relation to each other,” represented the “breaking down of fundamental categories of human experiences.” (p.382). This notion is reiterated in Greenberg’s (1988) citation of the view of Blackstone, a leading eighteenth century jurist, who referred to homosexuality as a crime against nature.

The morality crusades, coupled with the emergence of a distinct homosexual culture at the end of the seventeenth century, appear to have influenced the convictions of persons for homosexual behaviours. Weeks pointed out that in 1806 there were more executions for sodomy than murder and that in 1810, four of every five people convicted of sodomy were hanged. Weinberg (1972) similarly reported punitive penalties prescribed in the USA for those found to commit homosexual acts.

Attempts to rescind the death penalty in this regard, were unsuccessful. The death penalty was again reaffirmed in 1826. It was finally removed in 1861 and replaced by sentences which ranged from ten years to life imprisonment. Lesbianism, for unclear reasons, appeared to be ignored by the criminal justice system.

While homosexual behaviour in male persons was legally vilified, there appeared to be a lack of clear definition or awareness of what homosexual identity might in fact have entailed. In the latter nineteenth century, there appeared to be renewed focus on social purity campaigns and the dangers of “unbridled male desire” (Davies,1979, p.106). At this stage both homosexuality and prostitution were seen as consequences of “undifferentiated” male desire (Davies,1979, p.106). Davies (1979) cited the following quotation from Jewish religious texts:

“God has given them up to shameful passions.

Their women have exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural and their men in turn giving up natural relations with women burn with lust for one another; males behave indecently with males and are paid in their own persons the fitting wage of such perversion” (Romans 1 : 26 - 27 in Davies, 1979). He stated that such beliefs are similar to those reflected in the Old and New Testaments of Christianity.

Greenberg (1988) also reported the perceptions of physicians of the eighteenth century, who saw homosexuality as a manifestation of physiological degeneration.

As a result of the perpetuation of these negative viewpoints by the religious, medical, legal and other significant social institutions, homosexuality was dealt with in the harshest of manners (Altman, 1993; Davies, 1979; Greenberg, 1988; Weeks 1990). This included imprisonment, religious penitence, sterilisation and picketing among other punitive measures. Altman (1993) referred to the fact that homosexual men in Germany were sent to the Nazi gas chambers.

In France, during 1960-1970, the implementation of penalties against indecent exposure and sexual relationships with minors intensified (Greenberg, 1988). Greenberg also noted that although decriminalisation of homosexual behaviour was instituted in the UK in 1967, three times as many prosecutions occurred since the charges of indecency were made easier.

The consequence of the implementation of these measures and their debilitating effects was that a growing awareness among homosexual persons was generated, accompanied by more resistance, self-definition, organisation and control. In this way more impetus was gained in developing distinctive homosexual identities (Weeks, 1990) and in driving the need for a Gay Liberation Movement.

### 3.3. THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT

By the 1950's, larger cities in the USA appeared more tolerant of same-sex couples cohabiting and sustaining homosexual networks. Tolerance, however, rather than implying the acceptance of homosexuality, seemed to manifest as repression of the open identity of homosexual individuals.

Johnson, a researcher of the 1950's, is cited by Greenberg (1988) as observing that during this period the lesbian identity was seen to be a criminal identity.

This implied that many of those who wanted to live out their lives as homosexuals were forced into hiding. The film industry in Hollywood also tended to avoid the subject of homosexuality (Greenberg, 1988).

The legal acceptance of homosexuality appears to have effectively begun in 1961 in the USA, where the introduction of the Illinois Penal Code resulted in a number of States decriminalising relations in private between consenting adults (Greenberg, 1988). However, legal tolerance did not imply that the mental health arena embraced homosexuality as normal or as socially acceptable behaviour. Homosexuality remained as a pathology in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM II) until the publication of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual III (DSM III), published in 1980. By 1986, homosexuality remained illegal in twenty-four of the fifty States in the USA as well as in the District of Columbia (Greenberg 1988).

The Gay Liberation Movement appeared to gain impetus towards the 1970's following two conflicts between college students and the community in Greenwich Village, New York. These situations resulted in the Stonewall Riot on 27 June 1968 (Altman, 1993; Greenberg, 1988). This event saw a surge in the emergence of gay liberation groups which resulted in an overwhelming expression of assertiveness and self-confidence via protests, marches and demonstrations. However, as gay militancy emerged so did police militancy. This involved the more frequent raiding of bars used by male and female homosexual individuals. The charges involved loitering, disorderly conduct, unlawful assembly and soliciting, among others (Altman, 1993).

Nevertheless, meetings convened by radical gay persons with the intention of developing further strategies for liberation were well attended (Altman, 1993). Although the attempt to win student body support through a demonstration at New York University did not appear to be successful, the University did take note and added a course entitled 'Homosexuality: A Contemporary View' to their curriculum.

The cry "out of the closet and into the streets" coined in the USA in 1969, spread through most of the west (Europe, Canada, Australasia and parts of Latin America) and influenced a significant number of gay people (Altman, 1993). Although the Stonewall uprising is seen to have triggered the Gay Liberation Movement in the USA and initiated its inception at a global level, Altman alluded to the ongoing struggle towards liberation rather than the "point of liberation" (p.125) in his discourse on 'Homosexual Oppression and Liberation'.

Altman wrote that the Gay Liberation Movement bears parallels to the Black Movement in the USA in that, like the latter, there is a need to assert common identity (i.e. by refusing to feel shame or guilt at their identity) and to develop a new sense of community.

#### 3.4. THE GAY MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

The documentation of the Gay and Lesbian Movement in South Africa appears to be sparse. Documentation of the Black Gay and Lesbian experience has been particularly minimal.

Nyathi (Drum, 1992), the first president of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Witwatersrand (GLOW) asserted that the presence of homosexuality on the African continent, as recounted by oral history documents, existed long before white people ever arrived on the continent. According to Gevisser and Cameron (1993), however, the roots of the homosexual sub-culture in South Africa appeared to be traced to the mid-fifties.

The focus appears to have been more on white middle class males who more overtly identified themselves with homosexual sub-culture, and the coloured “moffie drag” sub-culture of Cape Town, than on the much larger population who engaged in homosexual relationships but identified with the sub-culture less self-consciously or not at all.

Gevisser and Cameron (1993) noted that by the mid 1950's two major stereotypes, that of the child molester and drag queen, were accentuated by the media. They cited the sensational focus of *Drum*, one of the oldest South African magazines produced by a primarily black African team for a black African audience, and that of the *Golden City Post*, on the coloured subcultures of ‘drag queen’ competitions. There is also reference, during this period (23 July 1956, *Daily News Natal*) to the arrest of thirty men on Durban's Esplanade, a popular location for the socialisation of gay men, on charges of indecent assault. In substantiating this charge, the judge is quoted as pronouncing these individuals a menace to society, likely to corrupt unsuspecting, decent-living young men (Gevisser and Cameron, 1993).

According to Isaacs and McKendrick (1992), the decline of the momentum of the 1950's and 1960's with regard to the gay scene, could be linked to the apartheid policy of the geographical separation of the races (e.g., forced removals from the District Six Area) and the architectural modifications to the Harbour and Station Areas, which forced many of the gay meeting places to be relocated. Privatisation of clubs, which was marked by the introduction of membership fees making them inaccessible to many black people, and the enforcement of racial segregation by police raids in clubs, bars and discotheques, limited the meeting of people of different races and could consequently be seen to undermine and hinder the collectivism of gay people.

The mobilisation of gays and lesbians in South Africa is seen to have occurred more significantly in the late eighties (Reddy, 1993). At this time some gay and lesbian groups were seen to align themselves politically with the principles advocated by recognised democratic movements.

One of the earliest gay groups, still in existence in South Africa, is the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA). Most of the volunteers of this organisation, as well as the people that utilised its twenty-four hour AIDS related counselling service, were seen to be predominantly white and male (Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992).

The period around 1988 saw the emergence of gay movements, for example, GLOW and OLGA (the Organisation of Gay and Lesbian Activists) which were more sensitive to the needs of both black and white gays and lesbians and which aligned themselves more closely to progressive political ideologies and democratic movements (Drum, 1992; Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992).

The accomplishment of the first Gay Pride Parade in South Africa occurred in 1990 (Gevisser, 1994). Gevisser noted that the organisers felt compelled to ask the participants who feared exposure, to cover their heads with paper bags. The purpose of gay marches is to draw attention to the social and legal discrimination suffered by gays and lesbians (Nyathi, cited in Drum, 1992). In this sense, marches serve as a form of celebration and a form of defiance against discrimination and physical and verbal abuse directed at their sexual identity.

The emergence of significantly multiracial gay groups, the organisation of marches as well as the growing momentum of democratic movements in South Africa appear to have been significant antecedents to inspiring and initiating the formation of up to fifty organisations, including community and student groups, which openly acknowledge their sexual orientation (Wotherspoon and Faro, 1991). Gevisser (1995), in fact, even noted this open identification in a religious gay group, the congregation of Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church (HUMCC) of Hillbrow, Gauteng.

However, the emergence of gay groups is not necessarily seen as a sufficient condition for the acknowledgement and appreciation of the gay and lesbian population as an integral unit of South African society. In this regard, Krouse (1993) asserted that "the development of lesbian and gay issues are part of the development of the country.

The majority of the people who look at the gay scene think we are functioning in a netherworld that belongs to only us, that our issues are exclusive to us and that we are unable to integrate ourselves into the forward movement of the country. That is perfectly untrue, even at the most grassroots level” (Krouse, 1993 in De Waal, 1993, p.3).

#### 3.4.1. THE SOUTH AFRICAN LEGAL SYSTEM AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Wotherspoon and Faro(1991) noted that, between 1971 and 1981, charges pertaining to homosexual acts against gays and lesbians in the country were brought against seven hundred and fifty persons, of which four hundred and forty eight resulted in convictions. Bezuidenhout(1994) studied the attitudes of gay men towards the South African Police and found that both victims and non-victims expressed a negative attitude towards the police and legal system. The study, based on the distribution of questionnaires to 1900 subscribers of Exit, a gay magazine, revealed that the criminalisation of homosexual behaviour under certain circumstances and the utilisation of ‘traps’ by police to apprehend gay persons, influenced these attitudes in respondents.

Brummer(1994) reported several instances of verbal and physical harassment of homosexual persons by police. Although it was believed that the assurance given by Safety and Security Executive, Jesse Duarte, would lead to the discontinuation of such attitudes and behaviours by the police following the April 1994 election, groups such as GLOW are convinced that the harassment continued. To this end, examples were given of the delayed intervention by police to reports of anti-gay violence (Brummer, 1994).

Despite the media coverage of punitive events or its propagation of negative stereotypes of homosexual behaviours, Gevisser and Cameron (1993) asserted that homosexual subcultures recently existed relatively unharmed in the major South African cities. Mike Gordon, the co-ordinator of the Kwa Zulu-Natal Gay Community (KZNGC) concurred with this view (Yoganathan, 1994).

He reported that the police harassment of couples at gay venues had decreased significantly and that only isolated cases of such harassment still occurred (Yoganathan, 1994).

The legal system, however, despite the introduction of the Bill of Rights outlawing discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation, tends to be viewed sceptically or negatively by gays and lesbians. According to Bezuidenhout(1994), these negative attitudes are generated by the unfair treatment of gay victims by judges and the acquittal, or lenient sentencing, of those involved in anti-gay crimes. Scepticism towards the legal system in its promotion and protection of gay and lesbian rights, is expressed by Neophytou (in Ismail, 1994), a lesbian mother and author. She felt that “with the new constitution there are wonderful rights for homosexuals. But it has to be tested in the courts of law” (p.13).

Although the ANC, in May 1992, included the clause “the right not to be discriminated against or subjected to harassment because of sexual orientation” in its Bill of Rights and have now included this clause in the new constitution, leeway to legally justify discrimination against gays and lesbians still appears to exist. Botha (in Rose, 1995), lobbyist on behalf of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE), identified at least two such laws which were seen as discriminatory towards homosexual persons. In a letter (dated 16/11/93) to the Task Groups on the Identification and Repeal of Legislation Impeding Free Political Activity and on Discriminatory Legislation, he challenged the inclusion of the Sexual Offences Act 23 (Section 20) of 1957, which deemed that acts committed by men at a party (defined as an occasion where more than two persons are present) and which are calculated to stimulate sexual passion or to give sexual gratification, constitute an offence. This section was seen as discriminatory in that it criminalised the actions only between males persons, on the grounds merely that it is committed between males. It was also described as a gross invasion of privacy for which no corresponding crime in respect of heterosexuals existed.

Section 14(1)(b) of this act was also challenged on the grounds that the age of consent was inconsistently assigned for homosexual and heterosexual persons. In this regard, the homosexual prohibition included “committing or attempting to commit with an under-age boy or girl any immoral or indecent act.”

The heterosexual prohibition cited the age of consent specifically at sixteen. In this regard, the Task Groups were requested to uniformly set the age of consent at sixteen.

The Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights Charter, drawn up by organisations representing the country's gay and lesbian community, addressed the rights of gays and lesbians to marry, adopt children and serve in the police and defence force (Gordon, 1994 in Yoganathan, 1994). In addition, the efforts of forty two Gay and Lesbian organisations, in identifying and articulating fundamental human rights for gays and lesbians, was evidenced in the submission of a comprehensive Bill of Rights for Gays and Lesbians, to the Constitutional Assembly on 20/2/95 (Rose, 1995).

Perhaps the law is beginning to respond to the call by the gay and lesbian community for the acknowledgement of their human rights. The 11-17 August, 1995 edition of the Weekly Mail and Guardian reported the first official adoption by a gay couple through the Johannesburg Child Welfare (Duvenhage, 1995). Previously, gay or lesbian couples could foster children under limited circumstances but were banned from adopting children.

Commenting on the adoption, which appears to have been supported strongly by the Constitution's outlawing of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, a spokesperson for the Johannesburg Child Welfare stated that the couple had fulfilled “the same qualities heterosexual parents were expected to meet” (Duvenhage, 1995, p.6).

However, the spokesperson is also reported to have added that “a two parent male and female family is a much better role model for the child” (Duvenhage, 1995, p.6).

### 3.4.2. THE MEDIA AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES

The role of the media in reporting and influencing social attitudes of South Africans towards gays and lesbians appears to have increased just prior and subsequent to the April 1994 elections. In addition to the greater availability and accessibility to gay magazines such as Outright, Exit and Magazine, all South African television channels, the mainstream newspapers and magazines, and both commercial and art film institutions have in some way contributed to increasing the awareness of gay concerns by attempts to focus on discrimination, harassment or bias towards the gay and lesbian community.

The year 1994 (23/6/94 - 21/7/94) saw the hosting of the first Gay and Lesbian film festival in South Africa, run in major cities by the Ster-Kinekor cinema group. The annual provincial film festivals have also appeared to increase their menu of films that have relevance for the gay and lesbian community in South Africa.

Television, just prior to the April 1994 elections, and currently, periodically focused on gay and lesbian issues in talk-shows (e.g. several shows hosted by Felicia Mabuzo-Suttle), feature programmes, news programmes (e.g., Agenda) and documentary programmes. Such programmes have to date been screened on Television 1, the former CCV and NNTV and on the M-Net channels. The gay and lesbian issue has also been carried to the forum of magazine programmes such as Impressions, a programme on the former CCV channel, targeted at South Africans of Indian ancestry.

From among the mainstream newspapers, the Weekly Mail and Guardian appears to have consistently carried articles related to gay and lesbian issues.

After the April 1994 elections particularly, it has tended to carry at least one article per week related to the crises faced by gay and lesbian individuals, developments in the area of gay and lesbian empowerment, reviews of books on homosexuality and even a full length advertisement soliciting public views on marriages of gay and lesbian individuals. Several of the other newspapers, including the Sowetan, Sunday Nation, Daily News, Sunday Times and Natal on Saturday, have carried occasional articles highlighting issues relevant to the gay and lesbian community or articles intended to conscientise and educate the mainstream population on gay and lesbian issues.

The support of most mainstream newspapers was evidenced following the abusive, discriminatory remarks made by the Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, on human rights for gays and lesbians. For example, the Sunday Times, in an article titled "Gays Bashed Again", cited the President's reference to gay and lesbian people as "lower than pigs and dogs" and referred to Mr. Mugabe's "attack on homosexuals" (Sunday Times, August, 1995, p.12).

In response to Mr. Mugabe's rejection and oppression of homosexuality, Yoganathan (1995) ran a feature page in the 2/9/95 edition of the Saturday paper, Natal on Saturday. This included a caricature of Mr. Mugabe admonishing pigs, articles titled "Homosexuals Fight For Their Rights" and "New South Africa, Same Old Prejudices" and a section by Jaron Murphy, on the views of members of the South African public on the President's condemnation of homosexuality.

The views reported by Murphy appear to have included the spectrum of acceptance and supportiveness, neutral to prescriptive to totally judgmental attitudes, and condemnation of homosexuality and homosexual individuals.

Among the more positive responses in this section were comments such as:

- “Homosexuals are human beings. They’d make much better parents than what’s around these days.”
- “They should be allowed to own property, marry whoever they want to and adopt children like everyone else.”

Prescriptive views typically conveyed the judgement that although homosexuality was ‘wrong’, constitutional rights should be extended to homosexuals. These rights, however, should not include the right to marry or adopt children.”

The more negative views were that homosexuality was:

- “immoral”
- “an abomination of the laws of nature”
- “not right”

Others in this category felt that:

- homosexuals should be gotten “rid of”
- “be treated like criminals”
- “They’re mad.”

The above-mentioned views included those expressed by men and women from all racial groups in South Africa.

Unfortunately, physical and psychological gay bashing also appears rife and is prevalent on South African campuses. King and Wilson (1995) cited such occurrences at universities of Natal-Durban, Grahamstown and Rhodes. Interestingly, the University of Zululand was found to be more tolerant and to have a relatively active gay community. Nevertheless, prescriptive or homophobic views, as expressed in the above paragraphs, have been more frequently and tenaciously challenged by members of the public.

This is illustrated in the following letters to the editors of the Outright and Big Blue magazines and The Natal on Saturday newspaper, and the responses of the editors.

1

re: *"SEXUAL ORIENTATION" CLAUSE*

I hereby strongly object to the legislation of immoral and unnatural sexual lifestyles under chapter three paragraph 8.2 of the interim constitution. The phrase "SEXUAL ORIENTATION" must be deleted from our present constitution and must NOT be included in the New Constitution that is being drafted.

Homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, pederasty, etc., are all "SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS" which are socially harmful and immoral. As such they do not deserve any constitutional protection.

Yours Truly

Dear Maddie

A certain group of individuals has been circulating this letter and asking people to sign it in support of their views concerning the Sexual Orientation Clause in the new Constitution.

I, as a homosexual individual, take great exception to this letter. It is undemocratic to the extreme. It would be folly for the Constitutional Assembly (or whoever is responsible for the drafting of our constitution) to take such a blatant disregard for human rights seriously.

No person, group or organisation has the right to determine another's sexual orientation. It is each individual's right to live his/ her life according to his/ her norms and values. For too long we (who are referred to as immoral) have been sitting back and listening to a bunch of hypocrites decide our lifestyle. This led to many homosexual people being closeted in their fear of coming out and being free.

We have come from an era of injustice - and it would seem that many people are still entrenched in the ideologies of the past. They feel that they need to dictate to others the way they should live.

They have a driving need to alienate people based on their own sexual tastes - and, as far as I am concerned, to hell with the whole lot of them. It is no one's concern what I (or any other homosexual individual or heterosexual for that matter) do in the privacy of our bedrooms. If it is sinful - let God be the judge of that.

Under no circumstances should we allow a myopic bunch of individuals to infringe on the rights of others to further their own little purposes.

I cannot understand how any sexual preference can be "socially harmful" unless it is practised openly in the streets in front of a whole audience of people. Many of us, in the homosexual community are decent people, with decent lives and responsible positions in society. We all understand the norms and values of society. And we accept that as any adult, it is our duty to be just as responsible about sex as the next person. How can the choice of how to live one's life completely as it was meant to be, be immoral? So what if my sexual preference is different from the next person's. I like cheese, the other may like chocolate. It's a personal choice. And the immorality of the issue is having a bunch of supposed "do-gooders" trying to preach to others about the way they should live. Maybe the church would be better serving the society we live in if they go about doing church business and staying out of politics - especially sexual politics. Why is it that it is the church that is so pre-occupied with the whole sex issue? Do these people not have lives? It is almost inconceivable to me that a group of church leaders sat down, read the draft constitution and decided: "Gees! Let's do something about those queers!"

It is exactly this intolerance towards homosexuality that leads to suicides, gay bashing and other injustices that gay people have to endure.

There is one line in the letter that requires special mention: "*As such, they DO NOT DESERVE any CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION.*"

I would like to use very strong words to describe exactly what these people can do with that line and the rest of the letter.

Have these people missed the point completely - when I, a homosexual man, voted on April 27, 1994, I voted for a party I knew would provide me with Constitutional protection. It is my right. I voted for that right. And no narrow-minded, imbecilic, immoral, holier-than-thou will take that away from me or the rest of the homosexual community. Everyone else in South Africa is free, why shouldn't gay people enjoy this freedom as well?

A society that bows down to the pressures of narrow-minded, uninformed people is an unjust society. If anyone supports the call to take away the Sexual Orientation Clause because they truly believe that they will help perpetuate a democratic society, I have one thing to say to them: I think not! Mind your own business and check the skeletons in your closet because ours are empty.

Yours Sincerely

Mr. Sean A. Eagle

ED'S NOTE: I heartily endorse what you have said and thank you for your efforts. I have taken the liberty of passing this information on to Kevan Both, our National Lobbyist.

(OUTRIGHT, May 1995)

EDITOR OF BIG BLUE: I suggest that these individuals read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on which our Constitution is based. They might learn something.

(BIG BLUE, MAY 1995)

2

### *ARE GAYS MORE EQUAL?*

SO CALLED gay people already have the same rights as anyone else. They have the right to use the same banks, cinemas, transport. They vote, join clubs, form organisations, run for parliament, go to school, university and work. They travel, buy houses and businesses, write books or teach.

The only right they do not have is the right to endanger public health by practising sexual acts involving exposure to disease.

This right applies to all men and women, regardless of age, race, colour, nationality, religion, political persuasion, or sexual orientation.

Is it fair that gay men and women whose sexual preferences endanger public health should be more equal than others?

JENNY CHRISTMAS (Mrs)

Kranskop

(NATAL ON SATURDAY, JULY 1, 1995)

Two responses to this letter were:

a.

SO WHERE IS MY RIGHT TO PRIVACY?

STAY OUT OF MY BEDROOM, PLEASE

In response to a letter in Natal on Saturday last week which posed the question, "Are Gays more Equal?", my answer is "no".

Nor have we asked or assumed that we are more equal than the rest of the planet. We want the same rights as everyone else and we have refused to accept an inclusion in the Constitution under Minority Rights. We are not a -minority (check the closets).

I agree we share almost every right so far with straight or heterosexual people - however, one thing is clear.

We do not share the right to privacy as straights/ heterosexuals do. I do not think it is anyone's business to concern themselves about what I do in the privacy of my bedroom.

This brings me to another point: the writer suggested the sexual preferences of gays endanger public health. How? I don't see gay men with the HIV virus ejaculating in the street. It is sexual contact that causes the spread of the virus, not touching or kissing or walking in the street. It is a fact that the HIV virus is more rife in the heterosexual community than it is in the homosexual community.

It is frightening that there are people out there who still believe that gay or homosexual people are a threat to public health.

I mean really, lady! Isn't it time to concern yourself about more important things than worry about how gay people practise their sexuality.

I've always believed that if one does not know everything about something - one does not make a fool of oneself by writing in a newspaper.

SEAN A. EAGLE

DURBAN

(NATAL ON SATURDAY, JULY 8, 1995)

b.

A plethora of rights are still denied to gays

In Natal on Saturday last week (June 1), Jenny Christmas gave a list of rights that gays have but she did not mention the rights they do not have, such as no legal marriage, no children by adoption and no artificial insemination (in the case of lesbians). Surely a legal family life is a right for all?

The author also says that gay and lesbian "sexual preferences endanger public health". I always understood that all sexually transmitted diseases could be transmitted by all sexually active people, regardless of their sexual orientation.

So, I don't understand the above statement by the writer. Can someone please explain it to me.

ADELAIDE RHEAD

DURBAN

(NATAL ON SATURDAY, JULY 8, 1995)

### 3.4.3. THE BLACK - WHITE ISSUE

The perceived non-focus on black needs in well established gay organisations such as GASA (Gay Association of South Africa) has resulted in the creation of several other support groups which are seen to extend their concern beyond the need of the white, gay male (Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992; Wotherspoon and Faro, 1991).

The perception of differences between black and white gays and lesbians, however, and the perceived lack of support for issues concerning black gays and lesbians, seem to be ongoing.

According to Wotherspoon and Faro (1991), predominantly white groups have more funds and are better organised than black groups which barely survive financially. White gays and lesbians were also seen to have more affluent lifestyles than their black counterparts in townships who even lack the social space for meetings.

Blacks also face the issue of a lack of transport in order to commute to the many gay and lesbian social amenities, usually located in city centres (Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992) and suburbs (Bev Ditsie, 1995).

Wotherspoon and Faro (1991), from their exploration of the black-white gay issue, reported that *Exit*, a gay magazine, had cited a series of articles about the discriminatory door policy towards black gay men at a leading club in Cape Town. Of note, in this regard, is the comment of a black, gay male that even if he did get through the door of the club, he would have been an "unwelcome guest" (Wotherspoon and Faro, 1991, p.9). Notably, Wotherspoon and Faro have also reported the perception by blacks, specifically of 'coloured' background, that white gays and lesbians had little time for blacks and, therefore, there was little point in pursuing any contact with white, gay men.

In support of these views and perceptions, Ditsie (1995) has referred to the subtle race and class distinctions that have "always existed" (p.29).

While similar views, including the perception that many white gay men engage black men for sex but will not engage into meaningful relationships with them or acknowledge their presence at clubs or other social venues, have been stated publicly, during May, 1995 at some of the Kwa Zulu-Natal Gay Community forums, and shared with the writer by several black gay men, it was not possible to procure documented information in this regard at the time of the study.

This issue, however, will be explored in more detail in the Results and Discussion chapter of this thesis.

### 3.5. CONCLUSION

Prominent black gay activists such as Ditsie, Gordon, Nkoli, Eagle and Nyathi, among others, attest, through their writings, to the increasing developments with regard to the articulation, organisation and militancy of the gay community in South Africa. Ditsie, following her call for the acknowledgement and recognition of the human rights of lesbians at the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing, China in September, 1995, was described as being the first self-confessed lesbian ever to address the Convention in this regard (TV 1 News, 14/9/1995).

In historically tracing the ontogenesis of homosexuality, it is evident that significant positive trends have been established at the legal, social and religious levels. The progress within the South African context also appears to have been notable. However, what becomes apparent is the need for greater involvement of all gays and lesbians in the struggle for the acknowledgement of their human rights and dignity at every level of society. In this sense, black gays and lesbians are urged to challenge the internalised homophobia that conditions them into accepting and adopting heterosexual stereotypes (Nkoli, in Gevisser 1990) and their invisibility in the gay and lesbian community and in society at large (Ditse, 1995; Gevisser, 1990, 1994, 1995).

Altman (1993) succinctly articulated this by stating that the real oppression suffered is psychological. In this sense, there is a need "to integrate sexuality into a total lifestyle, rather than living the traditional divided life of the gay world. Redefinition for the homosexual, as for the black, is a necessary part of liberation" (p.141).

The following chapter will focus more pertinently on the internalised oppression experienced by gays and lesbians and, explore the processes of coming out and identity development.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SELF- IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

For many individuals, the awareness that they are homosexual appears to be a significant, though merely an initial, step in the complex process of developing their self-identity; this in a world culture that tends to propagate a heterosexist norm at almost every critical level of functioning (i.e. legal, religious, psychological, etc.).

The process of self-identity attained in gay and lesbian individuals, in a very general sense, involves dealing with the negativity perpetuated by the mainstream culture (the heterosexist culture at a societal and familial level); dealing with the negativity towards homosexuality that is integrated or internalised as part of the homosexual person's belief system; acknowledging one's sexual identity at an individual level to progressively more macro levels, to ultimately working towards a synergistic conceptualisation of self in relation to significant others and others in society.

This chapter focuses on the external and internal dynamics that obstruct, hinder or contribute to the process of self- identity development in gay and lesbian individuals. Specific focus will be given to the concepts of homophobia (or homonegativity), coming out and identity development.

#### 4.2. HOMOPHOBIA

Weinberg(1972) coined the term homophobia to describe the feeling of dread in heterosexuals towards homosexuals, and the feeling of self-loathing in homosexual individuals.

Homophobia has been similarly defined by Bozett and Sussman (1990) as an irrational fear of homosexuality in oneself and others. Kaplan, Sadock and Grebbs (1994) described homophobia as the fear of, or negative attitude towards, homosexuals and homosexuality.

They saw this as different from the concept of 'heterosexism' which describes a belief that heterosexual relationships are preferable to all other forms of relationships. Fassinger's (1991) definition of homophobia included the attitude of hatred by family, friends and society towards gay and lesbian people. Homophobia, according to Clark (1987), is contrived on the basis of negatively prejudging homosexuality, even though insufficient evidence exists in this regard and even though significant evidence exists to the contrary.

Atkinson and Hackett(1988) found that a more useful definition of homophobia included not only the fear of contact with gay and lesbian persons, but a range of negative reactions such as hostility, scorn and disgust towards gays and lesbians, by both homosexual and non-homosexual persons.

While acknowledging that the introduction of the term homophobia played a significant role in facilitating social-science discourses about gays and lesbians in the 1970's, Shildo (1994) believes that it is inappropriate. Her dissatisfaction lies in its contextualisation as a 'phobia', and as such she surmised, "a defensive basis for negative attitudes towards homosexuality"(p.177).

According to Shildo, a term such as homonegativism provides a more neutral and a more inclusive definition of a spectrum of negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Riddle (1978a) identified four levels of homophobia or homonegative attitudes. She described repulsion at the first level. This attitude is based on the perception that homosexuality is a crime against nature.

It implies total rejection of, and disgust towards, gay or lesbian orientation. Some of the perceptions at this level are that individuals in same sex relationships are immoral, sick and wicked and, that any means of changing this orientation, no matter how inhumane or disrespectful, is justifiable.

Pity, identified by Riddle as a second homophobic attitude, was seen to be synonymous with heterosexual chauvinism. It hinges on the view of the superiority of heterosexism and supports the attempt to reinforce and encourage such an orientation. It thrives on the premise that those who are gay or lesbian should be pitied.

Tolerance, refers to a homophobic perception that homosexuality is merely a phase that individuals are experiencing and that there is a possibility for them to outgrow a homosexual orientation. Tolerance, in a reductionistic sense, views homosexuality as similar to an adolescent phase of development, according to Riddle. This attitude presupposes that individuals who are homosexual are less mature than those who are heterosexual and that they, similar to adolescents, 'grow out' of this stage.

Acceptance, is identified as a fourth homophobic attitude by Riddle. Despite its seemingly embracing connotation, it implies that there is something to accept. It tends to undermine or ignore the stress and pain involved in the concealment of sexual orientation.

Acceptance denotes a feigning of acceptance of the individual, in the absence of any behaviour that would indicate or draw awareness to other than a heterosexual orientation.

Atkinson and Hackett (1988), cited a study by Herek (1984), comparing persons in the USA with favourable and negative attitudes towards gay and lesbian individuals. This study identified several commonalities among those participants with homophobic attitudes. Those individuals were less likely to have had personal contact with gay or lesbian persons; less likely to label self as gay or lesbian; more likely to live in rural areas and small towns in the USA; were older and less educated; more likely to subscribe to conservative religious views; hold more limiting definitions of gender roles; have more negative attitudes towards sexuality in general and were more likely to be authoritarian.

Atkinson and Hackett also cited the finding of Dunbar, Brown and Amoroso in a study completed in 1984, which revealed that homophobic persons were more likely to hold both racist and sexist views, thereby displaying a tendency to support oppressive stereotypes.

#### 4.2.1. INTERNALISED HOMOPHOBIA

Coleman (1990) believed that internalised homophobia (or internalised homonegativity) is a dynamic that is dealt with universally by gay and lesbian individuals, irrespective of where they may be at, developmentally. Shildo (1994) also maintained that since homonegativity is extremely prevalent in society, internalised homophobia may be viewed as a normative developmental experience for individuals who are homosexual.

Internalised homophobia refers to the integration or internalisation by the gay or lesbian person of the negative attitudes and assumptions held by the mainstream culture, that is the heterosexist culture at both the societal and familial levels (Coleman, 1990).

The internalisation of these negative attitudes into one's self-concept, according to Maylon (1982, in Shildo, 1994), contributes to the fragmentation of the sexual and affectional components, and thus impedes the developmental process. In this regard, Coleman (1990) proposed that internalised homophobia is extremely threatening to homosexual identity development and thus the value ascribed to self, that is, self-esteem.

Isaacs and McHendrick (1992) saw internalised homophobia as an ongoing crisis of homosexual self-oppression, while Essence (1991) observed it to be parallel with post traumatic stress. In this respect, Isensee cited the similar symptoms of hypervigilance, anxiety, mistrust and withdrawal in response to rejection, discrimination and assaults experienced by the person who is homosexual.

In summary, the impact of homonegativity or homophobia, both by the heterosexual majority and by the gay and lesbian population is destructive to the self-concept and identity development process in the latter (Clark, 1987; Coleman, 1990; Isaacs and McHendrick, 1992; Isensee, 1991; Shildo, 1994). In this sense it tends to reframe the perception of being gay or lesbian into a traumatic, painful experience, associated with prejudice, misunderstanding, fear or a permanent state of crisis.

### 4.3. COMING OUT

#### 4.3.1. INTRODUCTION

Bozett and Sussman (1990) defined 'coming out' as a developmental process in which an individual develops a gay identity, acknowledges that identity to the self, and discloses it to others. Goodman (1977) described the process of telling one's parents, friends and children about one's sexual orientation as the "most difficult, most important and most freeing experience" (pp.148-9).

She equated the coming out process to the primary step of self-actualisation, whereby the total identity, including sexual identity, is owned by the gay or lesbian person irrespective of the opinions and behaviours of others in society.

In Vincke, Bolton, Max and Blank's (1993) view, coming out is the most viable means of reclaiming an essential facet of self that previously was concealed as a result of pressure, at various levels, to remain invisible. The positive political consequence of this process lies in it broadening the visibility of the gay base. On an individual level, there is the psychological benefit of increasing the congruity between the individual's public and private lives.

Haldeman (1994) wrote that, for gay men, coming out may be understood as an "internal evolution" and "a conscious recognition of what always has been" (p.222). For lesbians, he saw coming out linked to social and political construction, more similar to heterosexual women than to gay men. However, the coming out process for both gays and lesbians, may only be facilitated by the social support systems (i.e. friends, family, the gay and lesbian community, etc.) available to them.

While the abovementioned theorists, among several others, viewed coming out as a healthy developmental process, guiding the homosexual individual towards a synergy of internal and external self-identities, the other viewpoint is that it is a challenging, often traumatic experience.

In the latter regard, Huggins and Forrester (1977) observed that coming out involves challenging the legal, mental health and religious sanctioning systems which respectively ascribe to homosexuality the labels 'criminal', 'sick' and 'impure'.

They viewed coming out as a means to end the isolation caused by external discrimination and internal oppression. This view is reiterated by Fassinger (1991).

Isaacs and McHendrick (1992) saw coming out as a crisis, based primarily on the dynamic of loss, impending loss and the anticipation of hope and gain. They, nevertheless, viewed the several intrapsychic crises associated with coming out, as having the potential to facilitate personal growth and a greater fortitude against the negativity toward the homosexual culture, as projected by the mainstream heterosexist culture.

#### 4.3.2. LEVELS OF COMING OUT

'Closet' is a term frequently linked, in an antagonistic sense, to the coming out process. It refers to the concealment of one's homosexual orientation at various levels. In this regard, Gochros (1989) surmised that various types of closets exist, each having the capacity to be restrictive and painful to its inhabitants.

Sophie (1982), Lehman (1978) and several other theorists linked this premise of being closeted at different levels to the proposal that coming out occurs at several levels. At the most basic level, coming out refers to one's self-recognition as a lesbian or gay person (Sophie, 1982). At the next level, coming out pertains to the revelation of one's homosexuality to others. These include friends, siblings, parents, work colleagues, employers, the gay and lesbian community, the spouse or children, in some cases, and the community at large. In attempting to developmentally contextualise the coming out process, Lehman (1978) proposed the following sequence:

coming out to self: the process of discovering and accepting one's homosexual orientation;

coming out sexually: relating to the expression of intimacy with a same-sex person;

coming out to friends and/ or family;

coming out publicly: making one's homosexual orientation a general, known fact;

coming out politically: becoming involved in one or more political groups, such as the lesbian feminism movement, the gay movement, the women's movement, etc., with the primary intention of changing the status of homosexuality in society.

Browning, Reynolds and Dworkin (1991) referred to the self-recognition process as identity development and the coming out to others, as identity management.

#### 4.3.3. COMING OUT TO SELF

Browning et al. refer to coming out as necessitating the construction and adaptation of a non-traditional identity; the restructuring and reorganising of one's personal history, and adapting one's relationships with others and society.

While acknowledging that premature self-labelling may have adverse consequences for the person who is coming to terms with his or her homosexuality, Sophie (1982), more specifically in her reference to lesbians, suggested that self-denial or suppression of the feelings were likely to have even more detrimental consequences for the individual. Referring to the research undertaken by Greene in 1976, in a comparison between lesbians who considered themselves to be happy, and those who considered themselves to be unhappy, Sophie cited that the former had expressed more positivity towards their orientation, and moved more quickly through the coming out process, than their unhappy counterparts. A similar finding has been noted by Bradford, Ryan and Rothblum (1994), in respect of homosexual individuals who had acknowledged their sexual identity, and those who had not.

Individuals denying their homosexual identity, according to Huggins and Forrester (1977) and Sophie (1982), tend to isolate themselves from the gay and lesbian community and appear to still hold negative stereotypes, for example, gay men are effeminate and limp-wristed; lesbians are more masculine, etc. The consequence of this is a lack of support or validity for the individual or the relationship from at least the gay community and, ultimately, stress on the individual or relationship.

Shildo (1994), from her analysis of gay and lesbian identity models, concluded that the initial step of coming out to self involves the neutralisation of internalised homophobia (and thus resolution of the various defence mechanisms, symptoms and pathologies attributed to this state) followed by the development of a positive gay or lesbian identity.

Severe internalised homophobia may thus contribute significantly to a resistance in acknowledging and identifying oneself as a gay or lesbian person.

The intrapsychic conflicts and crises in this regard will be discussed in more detail, later in this chapter, within the context of gay and lesbian identity development.

#### 4.3.4. COMING OUT TO OTHERS

Revealing or disclosing one's gay or lesbian identity appears to be regulated by unique factors associated with the different levels of coming out or the different subsystems in the gay or lesbian person's life.

A more common factor thought to contribute to the reluctance to, or avoidance of, self-disclosure pertains to the fact that an individual's homosexual identity, as opposed to ethnic identity and other non-ethnic identities (e.g. disability, being elderly, etc.) can be concealed.

Given the negativity of attitudes towards homosexuality, it may be perceived to be less traumatic to pretend to identify with the mainstream or dominant heterosexual culture than the former (Atkinson and Hackett, 1988; Beane, 1981; Goodman, 1977; Huggins and Forester, 1977). Research in the area, however, strongly suggests that the longer this incongruity is acted out, the more damage is inflicted on the self-esteem (Beane, 1981; Sophie, 1982; Strommen, 1990; Vincke et al., 1993). In this regard, internalised homophobia appears to be reinforced and much energy is consumed in the process of keeping public and private lives separate (Goodman, 1977; Vincke et al., 1993).

The pervasive nature of the discrimination, misinformation and stereotyping in heterosexist societies, which includes most of the western world, may contribute very significantly to the reluctance of individuals to disclose their gay or lesbian identity to any subsystem of the macro society (Atkinson and Hackett, 1988; Huggins and Forrester, 1977; Sophie, 1982).

The following beliefs about homosexual individuals emerged from a study by Levitt and Klassen (1974 in Huggins and Forrester, 1977), of three thousand and eighteen USA citizens:

they act like the opposite sex: supported by 68% of respondents;  
 they have unusually high sex drives: supported by 58.5% of the respondents;  
 homosexuality is a sickness which can be cured: supported by 61.9% of the respondents.

Atkinson and Hackett (1988), in their reference to the same study, noted that 70% of the USA participants felt that homosexuality was wrong even if relationships were based on love.

They also noted that the majority of participants held the belief that individuals who were homosexual were dangerous as teachers and youth leaders and that homosexuality was equivalent to social corruption.

Citing a follow up survey among USA citizens (1977 Gallup poll), Atkinson and Hackett noted a significantly more positive attitude among 56% of the respondents.

For example, there appeared to be consensus that gay people should have access to equal job opportunities. However, many of these attitudes have been seen by Atkinson and Hackett (1988) to be conditional and tempered by the prejudgement of homosexuality as less desirable, to undesirable, in several situations.

In this respect, the resistance to having gay and lesbian individuals as elementary teachers (opposed by 65%), medical doctors (opposed by 44%), clergy (opposed by 54%) and allowing gay or lesbian persons to adopt children (supported by 14%), was evidence of such prejudgement.

Atkinson and Hackett (1988), from their review of studies on attitudes towards the gay and lesbian population, suggested that intensification of these negative attitudes occurred following attention towards the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

In this regard, reference to the "gay plague" as punishment for "immoral behaviour", has been cited (Atkinson and Hackett, 1988, p.100). This attitude persists despite the significant increase in heterosexual transmission and high HIV+ incidence among intravenous drug users (Vincke et al., 1993). According to Stommen (1990), AIDS has contributed to intensifying social prejudice and hostility towards gay and lesbian persons. Atkinson and Hackett (1988) have noted that the irony, however, with regard to many of the homonegative attitudes and perceptions, is that only 25%-30% of USA citizens, as revealed by Herek (1986), claimed to know a gay or lesbian individual.

Follow up studies by Herek (1994), revealed that heterosexuals who had contact-experience with gay or lesbian individuals were more likely to hold favourable attitudes than those who had not.

Herek noted, furthermore, that heterosexual persons with more positive attitudes were more likely to initiate or foster contact with gay or lesbian persons. These attitudes in turn, he noted, tended to facilitate the voluntary disclosure of identity by the latter.

Herek's (1994) interest in variables, such as interpersonal contact, that influence homonegative, or positive attitudes, has resulted in his intensive research in this area. For such research, he constructed the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) scale and utilised this tool to identify the primary correlates of heterosexual attitudes, among other investigations.

In addition to associating the ATLG scores with the extent and quality of interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian persons, he explored the relationship between the former and attitudes about gender and family roles, religiosity and political ideology.

He found that homonegativity was more prevalent in heterosexuals who were more accepting of traditional gender roles, who were more politically conservative and who were highly religious or who believed in more fundamental or conservative religions, values and teachings.

In elaborating on the correlate of religiosity, Herek (1994) paid particular attention to the impact that an intrinsic orientation to religion (i.e. driven by the need for an internal framework or purpose) and an extrinsic orientation (i.e. where a more conformative, non-discriminative purpose for religion exists) may have on homonegativity.

Whereas in past research the variable of extrinsic religiosity as opposed to internal religiosity, was significantly related to white anti-black attitudes, the pattern with regard to religiosity and homonegativity was different.

Religious orientation, whether it was intrinsic or extrinsic, was noted by Herek (1994) to elicit anti-gay attitudes in these respondents.

Another very significant manifestation of societal homophobia hindering the gay or lesbian person from identity disclosure relates to anti-gay violence, the relative immunity of the perpetrators from persecution and thus, the 'justified' perception of the criminalisation of homosexual behaviour (Bezuidenhout, 1994; Fassinger, 1991; Herek, 1994). Fassinger (1991), from a review of recent studies, noted that approximately 92% of gay and lesbian persons reported being verbally abused or threatened over their homosexuality.

She added that over 33% of the survivors of violence, associated this abuse with their sexual orientation. The perpetrators of such abuse included informal groups, family members, organised hate groups and law enforcement personnel.

According to Fassinger, even survivors of this anti-gay harassment and violence are exposed to the judgmental, blaming and other negative attitudes by medical caregivers, lawyers and police.

These and other psychosocial factors identified in influencing negativity in the perceptions and attitudes towards homosexuality and individuals who are homosexual constitute what Huggins and Forrester (1977) refer to as society's sanctioning system. The process through which this is seen to occur is described by the authors, as follows:

- beliefs are perceived and internalised as facts;
- these beliefs lead to the establishment of attitudes which in the case of homosexuality, leads to perceptions of dangers;
- action is initiated to protect society or the self from the perceived danger.

The negative attitudes towards homosexuality, inherent in the mainstream society, tend to filter to the microunits of society (i.e. family, friends, the workplace, etc.) and perpetuate negative attitudes at these levels (Goodman, 1977; Herek, 1994; Huggins and Forrester, 1977; Strommen, 1990).

The gay and lesbian individual has to manage specific crises in addition to the more generic negative attitudes, at each of these levels, before sexual identity disclosure may occur. The most crucial consequence that appears to be anticipated is that of rejection by parents, siblings and friends. The risk of losing love appears to be an imminent threat to disclosure (Huggins and Forrester, 1977; Strommen, 1990).

#### 4.3.5. COMING OUT TO FAMILY

At the level of family, specifically, several factors have been noted to hinder or procrastinate the decision regarding disclosure. According to Huggins and Forrester (1977), an anticipation of stress in the family, in the event of identity disclosure, may be maintained by the following attitudes and beliefs held by the family of the gay or lesbian person:

- expectations that offsprings will marry and have children and that they will have grandchildren;
- anxiety around the belief that mothers are to blame for their son's homosexuality or, that parents, in some way, contribute to the homosexuality of their offspring;
- a fear of influencing other siblings in the family to be gay or lesbian (i.e. in this case should the gay or lesbian child leave home?);
- how can the sexual identity of the gay or lesbian person be concealed, or under what circumstances should it be revealed to relatives, friends of family, neighbours, the broader community, etc.?

- is homosexuality a problem related to mental health and is there a perception that the individual may be 'cured' of his/her homosexuality?

Huggins and

Forrester (1977) noted that parents' beliefs in respect of whether their offspring may or may not be happy as a gay or lesbian person), may reinforce or enhance their disapproval.

Strommen's (1990) perspective on coming out to family, however, is based on the premise that the traumatic elements of this process are similar for the gay and lesbian individual and for his or her family. The negativity generated towards homosexuality since the advent of the AIDS epidemic and its link to homosexuality, the social stigma attached to its perceived unnaturalness and illegitimacy, and the tendency for mental health professionals to label homosexuality as mentally and physically abnormal, have contributed to the common perception in both the gay or lesbian individual and his or her family of the undesirability of this sexual orientation.

Strommen also identified that factors such as high religiosity, the presence of younger children in the family and a knowledge of the family's own stereotypes of, and prejudices towards, homosexuality may deter the individual from disclosing his or her sexual identity to the family.

An interesting factor impacting on the coming out process is that of counterfeit secrecy (Sophie, 1982). Coined by Ponce (1978), it refers to the parents' attempt to deny their awareness or knowledge of their offspring's homosexuality, and their pretence that the individual is heterosexual. In addition to delaying the process of acceptance for parents, this attitude is seen to promote closeted behaviour in the offspring (i.e. blocking or hindering the coming out process) (Sophie, 1982).

Some of the implications of this circumstance is that the individual, if he or she is living with a partner, is inclined to pretend that the level of their relationship is merely friendship, or, holidays or visits to parents may have to be made alone.

Sophie(1982), from her review of available literature on parenting, noted that women tended to be more open about their sexual orientation with mothers and siblings, than their fathers. Some parental reactions noted by Sophie are the referral of the child to a therapist or religious person; disallowing them to continue living at home or even committing them to a psychiatric institution.

In extreme cases, they have been labelled as “dead” or have been physically beaten or prayed for (Galana and Covina, 1977, in Sophie, 1982).

On the other hand, given time to process their offspring’s sexual identity, parents have also been reported as developing positive open relationships with the former (Sophie, 1982).

#### 4.3.6. COMING OUT FOR ADOLESCENTS

Coming out for gay and lesbian adolescents at the family level has been identified as being more difficult than for adults, since the former tend to be more economically and emotionally dependent on parents (Browning, Reynolds and Dworkin, 1991). This dependency is seen to intensify the fear of being rejected and alienated by parents. At this stage, the adolescent is also seen to have limited knowledge of, or access to, the gay and lesbian community for support, limited, or no, access to gay or lesbian role-models, and have usually not learnt to cope with social discrimination.

While gay or lesbian adolescents of racially oppressed groups may learn from their parents how to deal with racism, for example, coping with heterosexism and homophobia appears to be a unique challenge for this population (Browning et al., 1991; Savin-Williams, 1990).

#### 4.3.7. COMING OUT IN THE CONTEXT OF HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Coming out in the context of a relationship or marriage with an individual of the opposite sex may be a particularly challenging decision for a gay or lesbian individual (Coleman, 1990; Gochros, 1989; Huggins and Forrester, 1977; Ross, 1990; Strommen, 1990). In this regard, an individual may want to retain his or her marriage or relationship or may want to keep the relationship intact but continue extramarital contact with a gay or lesbian partner.

Having children in a relationship may intensify the crises associated with disclosure (Coleman, 1990).

Dissolution of a marriage tends to also imply a dissolution of role identities (i.e., husband, wife, breadwinner, father, mother) and the issue of impending loss, in these respects (Goodman, 1977; Huggins and Forrester, 1977). More practically, a gay or lesbian parent's decision to come out may occur only once he or she is assured of parental rights against possible opposition from the spouse and parents-in-law, among others (Coleman, 1990; Sophie, 1982).

Disclosure of gay or lesbian identity to a spouse may, as in coming out to other significant family and friends, carry with it a sense of guilt and thus a need to bear responsibility for the reactions of the former (Gochros, 1989).

Strommen (1990), however, identified that coming out to a spouse could generate, in the latter, a sense of guilt from feeling that they are responsible for, or have contributed to the development of a gay or lesbian identity.

#### 4.3.8. COMING OUT TO FRIENDS

Huggins and Forrester (1977) identified that a primary threat to disclosure to friends was the anticipation of negative attitudes or stereotypic expectations from the latter. In this regard, there may be the expectation that same-sex friends would fear attraction or even seduction, by the gay or lesbian individual. Or, friends of gay and lesbian individuals may fear that their association with gay or lesbian persons might suggest to others a perception that they are also homosexual. The authors reported, however, that friends more often tended to be supportive of gays and lesbians who disclosed their sexual identity to them.

This particular aspect of coming out, however, appears to be seriously neglected by researchers in the field.

#### 4.3.9. COMING OUT IN THE WORKPLACE

Disclosure of one's gay or lesbian identity to colleagues or employers carries with it the perceived risk of being fired, ridiculed, undermined or losing promotions (Browning et al., 1991; Huggins and Forrester, 1977; Sophie, 1982). Browning et al. have suggested, particularly with regard to lesbians, that coming out has implications for both the individual's choice of a career as well as for how her identity is managed in that career (i.e., hidden, selectively disclosed or open).

Such myths and homonegative attitudes that suggest that gay men and lesbian women are unsuitable for child-rearing careers (e.g., teaching, child-care, etc.), may increase the risk to disclosure, particularly if gay and lesbian individuals hold these positions (Browning et al., 1991; Shannon and Woods, 1991).

#### 4.3.10. CONCLUSION

The review of available literature suggests that the coming out to siblings and grandparents has been given negligible research attention as compared with the other subsystems discussed in this chapter. Coming out to the gay and lesbian community appears to be mentioned more in passing, rather than being given serious attention. This aspect is, nevertheless, discussed in the subsequent section of this chapter, under the heading of 'Identity Development'.

In this section, the focus has been largely on factors associated with the individual's coming out process, only. However, cognisance must also be taken of the notion that coming out, with regard to significant others acknowledging and supporting the process in gay and lesbian individuals, occurs at the level of each subsystem with which the gay or lesbian individual interacts with (Strommen, 1990).

#### 4.4. MODELS OF SELF-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

##### 4.4.1. Introduction

Several researchers in the field have explored theories and proposed antecedents for the “condition” of homosexuality (Gadpaille, 1989). These appear especially noticeable in papers that propose ‘cures’, or see homosexuality as a problem. It appears that the more progressive trend, however, is to focus on development rather than focus on the reductionistic view of merely establishing the antecedents or cures of homosexuality. Gay and lesbian persons consider it an indignation that the theory of homosexuality is explored at all, having asked whether studies have ever focused on the ‘causes’ of heterosexuality. It is in this respect that this section focuses on development in men or women who are gay or lesbian. As the focus of the topic is “Homosexuality among Black South Africans” a serious attempt has been made to concurrently explore theories of racial and sexual identity development. A significant difficulty in this attempt has been the noticeable absence of the dimensions of racial and sexual identity development in the contributions of major life theorists. Where these dimensions have been described, they appear to be viewed as a ‘fixation’ or ‘retardation’ at a point in development, rather than as processes in the entire developmental continuum.

Isaacs and McKendrick (1992) noted that developmentalists have generally overlooked literature that is relevant to sexual identity. Referring to Erikson’s conceptualisation of the life stages, for example, they have noted that nowhere in his model of development has Erikson integrated the stages of homosexual identity development. Thus, the authors deduced that Erikson’s view of homosexuality is that it is an arrested form of sexual development, since the latter viewed sexual growth as culminating in heterosexual marriage.

Racial identity development has also demanded definition and exploration as the awareness and consequences of an oppressive eurocentric society heightened among those in these circumstances.

From about the sixties, the trends of denial or of minimising the significance of the dimensions of racial and sexual identity were seriously challenged. Some of the early contributors to sexual identity development have been Plummer (1975), Ponce (1978) and Cass (1979,1984). The dimension of racial identity development has been explored and conceptualised initially by Cross (1972) and Jackson (1975) and later enhanced by Atkinson, Sue and Morten (1989), among other contributors.

The attempts to conceptualise the dimensions of racial and sexual identity concurrently or as integrated dimensions within a developmental continuum, however, have been barely explored. This again pertains specifically to groups outside the eurocentric, heterocentric paradigm. Many of the models which have been proposed with regard to the dimensions of racial and sexual identity have tended to focus isolatedly on one of these dimensions.

#### 4.4.2. Models of Homosexual Identity Development

Several models for homosexual identity development, focusing primarily on sexual identity development, have been proposed since the seventies (Cass,1979,1984; Plummer, 1975; Ponce, 1978; Troiden, 1988). Although these paradigms differ with regard to the number of stages in identity ontogenesis, detail and some dimensions around which hypotheses are contextualised, the processes they describe suggest similar crises, tasks and patterns of progression. The proposed models tend to espouse the generic trends of a mostly unidirectional progression through suppression, denial, confusion or ambivalence and ultimately, self-affirmation (i.e., integration and commitment).

##### 4.4.2.1. Plummer's Model of Homosexual Identity Formation

Plummer (1975) conceptualised homosexual identity formation as one dimension of the greater process of adopting and practising homosexuality as a way of life. These steps are linked to developmental stages from childhood to post-adolescence.

According to Plummer, this process comprises the apparently consecutive stages of Sensitisation, Signification and Disorientation, the Coming Out stage and Stabilisation.

During Sensitisation, which is seen to occur during childhood, gender inappropriate leanings (i.e., the socialisation dimension), emotional attachments to same-sex persons and same-sex genital activities appear to be experiences which sensitise the individual to the possibility of a homosexual orientation.

Signification and Disorientation are seen by Plummer to occur during adolescence. This is marked by a conscious awareness of the possibility of one's homosexuality. Disorientation is used by Plummer to describe the anxiety and confusion resulting from interests, activities, and feelings related to this awareness.

The Coming Out stage is seen to occur when the homosexual role and the self-identity become more emergent. This occurs through contact with other individuals who are homosexual, through acknowledgement of self as homosexual and through the adoption of homosexual roles.

Stabilisation, Plummer's fourth stage, occurs when the individual is comfortable with his sexual orientation and is fundamentally committed to living it as a way of life.

Although Plummer's conceptualisation offered an initial framework for understanding the identity development of persons who are homosexual, several limitations appear inherent in this model. These, expressed by Troiden (1988), are the observations that Plummer's model focuses primarily on males while neglecting to address identity development in women who are homosexual; that it does not define 'homosexual identity'; does not address the relationship between identity development and self-concept; and that his conceptualisation is essentially theoretical as it has not been tested against the experiences of persons who are homosexual.

In view of the fact that 'gay' or 'lesbian' as opposed to 'homosexual', is seen to espouse a more holistic conceptualisation of the individual (than merely a sexual identity dimension), (Fassinger, 1991), Plummer's failure to clearly define homosexuality creates ambivalence around whether his paradigm focuses on the sexual dimension only, or the several dimensions seen to constitute homosexuality. What also limits the usefulness of this model is the contextualisation of the first three stages of sexual identity development within specific ontogenic stages (i.e. childhood, adolescence and mid-to late-adolescence, respectively). Added to this appears to be the assumptions of the sequential progression from stage one through to stage four and that stabilisation represents a sense of resolution with regard to identity attainment. This contributes to undermining the concept of the dynamic, or of the unique, differentiation process for different persons, and of the impact of macro influences (psychosocial, familial, political) on identity development .

#### 4.4.2.2. Troiden's Model of Homosexual Identity Development.

In response to the limitations evident in the Plummer model, Troiden (1988) undertook a study of identity acquisition in a sample of one hundred and fifty men who described themselves as homosexual. The findings of this study, he stated, provided empirical support for Plummer's theoretical model. Troiden's model included the stages of sensitisation, dissociation and signification, coming out and commitment. The difference in Troiden's model lay in his conceptualisation of the dissociation and commitment stages.

Dissociation, according to Troiden, involves "the conscious partitioning of sexual feelings or activity from sexual identity" (p.38). The significance of this stage lies in it unintentionally enhancing the awareness of having homosexual feelings.

Unfortunately, Troiden's (1988) paper discussing identity acquisition does not provide sufficient information on the dimensions of the self-concept and self-identity in homosexual persons .

In his own analysis, however, he acknowledged the limitations of his proposal in failing to provide a clear definition of homosexuality, in neglecting to distinguish between the dimensions of self-concept and identity and restricting his focus to only men (Troiden, 1988). Again the impact of race or gender on identity development or the impact of macro issues in influencing this dimension, appear to have been overlooked.

#### 4.4.2.3. Ponse's Model of Homosexual Identity Development in Women

Ponse's (1978) model was based on her study of the experiences of seventy-five women who described themselves as lesbians. This sample included women who were not overt in their expression of their homosexual identity. Ponse proposed, to a greater extent than many of the earlier researchers, a definition and an exploration of lesbian identity development.

According to Ponse, five stages possibly precede the assumption of a lesbian identity. They are:

- the subjective sense of being different from heterosexuals (i.e. this may be identified as the emotional or sexual preference for other women);
- an understanding of the significance of their sexual feelings or romantic feelings;
- assumption of a lesbian identity;
- seeking the company of similarly inclined women;
- involvement in a sexual or emotional lesbian relationship.

Ponse's contribution at this point related to her exploration of identity development in women and her efforts to offer a broader definition to the conceptualisation of identity. In this sense, she defined lesbian identity in relation to activity. Ponse described four combinations of identity-activity dimensions:

- lesbian identity with lesbian activity;
- lesbian identity without lesbian activity (e.g., celibacy, heterosexual activity);
- lesbian activity without lesbian identity;
- heterosexual identity with heterosexual activity.

Ponse also stated that identity-activity shifts were possible. However, she explained that sexuality (coupled with activity) was merely a single dimension of the totality of lesbianism.

In her exploration of identity development, Ponse also differentiated between the concepts of primary and elective lesbians and women with idiosyncratic identities. Primary lesbian describes an individual who recalled having same sex attractions before puberty and who had experienced rare or no heterosexual attractions. Women who reported heterosexual experiences or who were aware of homosexual feelings later in their development, are described by Ponse as elective lesbians. Individuals who see themselves as heterosexual or bisexual, but who pursue significant same sex relationships are referred to as idiosyncratic lesbians.

Ponse's contribution to identity exploration represents a significant milestone with regard to increasing an awareness and understanding of this process in lesbians or those who have embraced homosexuality as a way of life. Her broader, more dynamic definition of lesbian behaviour and inherent assumptions of a continuum including homosexual and heterosexual polarities also attest to the relevance and significance of her contribution.

As with the theoretical models discussed thus far, the impact of race and ethnicity and the influence of other macro issues appear to be unexplored or given no specific mention. Troiden's (1988) criticism of Pense's theory of lesbian identity development is that it does not explore how identity is assumed. Her theory rather details the range of identities and roles available to women in the lesbian community. Furthermore, generalisation on lesbian identity development has been based on a relatively small sample size (N=75). This is seen as a limitation by Troiden, more specifically in light of the fact that the finding based on this sample incorporates the range of four combinations of identity-activity identified by Pense.

#### 4.4.2.4. The Cass model of Homosexuality Formation

Cass's (1979,1984) contribution to the area of identity development was her attempt to address two significant limitations evident in prior models of this nature. The first of these was a proposal of a six stage paradigm outlining the developmental phases experienced by individuals who were homosexual, around sixteen dimensions which were seen to impact differentially on the cognitive, behavioural and affective levels at each stage. The second was an attempt to test the accuracy and generalisability of the proposed process of identity acquisition. A summary of the Cass model is presented below.

Stage 1: Identity Confusion. At this stage the individual is seen to challenge previously held assumptions regarding his or her sexual orientation and to begin to perceive the possibility of his or her homosexuality. Subsequently, this stage is characterised by feelings of bewilderment and turmoil. Cass proposed that, in order for this person to cope with the incongruency and lowered self-value, he or she may consider the possibility of adopting a homosexual identity.

Stage 2: Identity Comparison. At this stage the possibility of being homosexual is accepted by the individual who begins to feel increasingly isolated from those whom he or she perceives not to be homosexual.

The characteristic feeling at this stage is that of alienation, as the individual is increasingly aware of differences between self and non-homosexual others. If foreclosure does not occur at this stage, the individual, in an attempt to reduce alienation, may embark on making contact with other homosexual persons.

Stage 3: Identity Tolerance. This stage is characterised by an increasing commitment to a homosexual identity. Here, contact with others who are homosexual is sought, primarily to fulfil social, sexual and emotional needs. However, Cass viewed this trend as indicative of a tolerance of the homosexual image, rather than as an acceptance of it.

The perceptions of the positive or negative quality of encounters and relationships, during this stage, are seen by Cass to be antecedent to different forms of behaviour or attitudes manifested by the individual. Disclosure of his or her identity to non-homosexuals is seen to be restricted. The presentation of a heterosexual image, may still prevail. The feelings characteristic of this stage are described by Cass to be those of ambivalence.

Stage 4: Identity Acceptance. This stage is seen to herald the onset of public disclosure and of increasing private disclosure. A more positive view of homosexuality is held by the individual, probably stemming from increased contact and immersion in the homosexual subculture. Cass maintained, however, that a tendency to feign heterosexuality for the purpose of avoiding possible negative reactions to one's actual homosexual identity, may occur at crucial times. According to Cass, this stage encompasses a period of relative identity stability and consolidation in which the individual has resolved the questions of "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?".

Stage 5: Identity Pride. During this stage, the individual becomes intensely loyal to the homosexual subculture and experiences feelings of pride towards his or her identity. This is in contrast to the fierce rejection and anger towards non-homosexual persons, institutions and values. Consistent, prolonged negativity may result in foreclosure at this stage of identity formation.

Stage 6: Identity Synthesis. Individuals who have achieved resolution on the intense negative perception of, and reaction to, the heterosexual society may make the transition to this final stage of identity formation. Here sexual orientation is conceptualised as a single aspect of a more integrated identity. Disclosure appears to be a non-issue, as a homosexual lifestyle is openly embraced. Cass theorised that the anger and pride of previous stages, although retained, are encompassed in a lesser emotional context. The feelings associated with Identity Synthesis are essentially those of peace and stability. They facilitate closure of the homosexual identity formation process.

Cass's model, according to Fassinger (1991), attempts to conceptualise "a central process of self-identification unique to the gay population" (p.168). In this way the model is seen to contribute heuristically to both the client's and therapist's understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals and in identifying factors which facilitate or undermine the process of homosexual identity formation.

While the clinical usefulness of the Cass model has been supported, limitations with regard to its generalisability, its lack of focus on parallel developmental processes or on a broader psychosocial context, have been noted by Fassinger (1991). In this respect the model appears incognisant of diversity in terms of race or ethnicity, age, class, occupation or other such psychological or socio-political factors.

Troiden noted that, although Cass's model had been based on research findings conducted on a sizeable sample (N=166) of both gay and

lesbian individuals, there exist diffuse boundaries between the Identity Confusion and the Identity Comparison stages and between the Identity Pride and Identity Synthesis stages. He also proposed that Identity Tolerance and Identity Acceptance, rather than reflecting two distinct stages, may rather be conceptualised as the beginning and end of a single stage, respectively. Troiden added that this model neglected to mention the role of childhood genital, emotional and social experiences in contributing to the differential feelings and perceptions of individuals in the Identity Confusion stage.

The possibility that individuals may manifest a more flexible identity orientation also appears to have been undermined in the Cass model. This assumption of eventual closure of identity formation (associated with the assumption of feelings of peace and stability in Identity Synthesis) seems to further limit the applicability of this model and oversimplify the ontological experiencing of individuals assumed to be in flow with their true sexual identity. Troiden stated that disclosure (associated with Identity Synthesis) more accurately represents identity management than it does identity development since it indicates the extent of overt commitment to homosexuality as a way of life.

#### 4.4.2.5. *Troiden's Ideal Typical Model*

In his proposal of this second model for homosexual identity formation, Troiden attempted to bridge, among other gaps, the limitations evident in prior models as well as in his initial paradigm of identity formation.

Stage 1: Sensitisation. This stage, seen to occur before puberty, has been based on Plummer's initial stage of identity formation. According to Troiden, there appears to be an unconditional acceptance of heterosexuality, if at all a curiosity exists about sexual status. However, the social experiences acquired during this phase lend impetus to an emerging perception of a possible homosexual identity.

This sensitisation is seen to stem from perceived differences between self and same sex peers and the consequent feelings of generalised marginality from the mainstream.

The relevance of Sensitization, according to Troiden, lies in the perception of, and meaning attributed to, the psychological, social and sexual nature of childhood experiences rather than the experiences in themselves.

Stage 2: Identity Confusion. This stage, occurring typically during adolescence, describes the individual both reflecting on the possibility of being homosexual and confronting the dissonance against his or her previously held heterosexual self-image. Identity confusion is seen as the result of feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty. Troiden described it further as a state of 'limbo' whereby the perception of being heterosexual is challenged and the perception of self as homosexual has yet to be acknowledged and consolidated within the self-concept.

The crisis at this stage is exacerbated by, among other factors, an altered perception of self, the lack of information or misinformation about homosexuality and the negativity and negative stereotyping associated with homosexuality and homosexual behaviour.

Troiden referred to several mechanisms or strategies, as he termed them, that were used by gay or lesbian individuals during this stage, to cope with its characteristic confusion. These include:

- denial: denying being homosexual.
- repair: attempts to eliminate homosexual feelings and behaviour, usually with professional help.

- avoidance: inhibition of behaviours and feelings associated with homosexuality; limited opposite sex behaviour to prevent significant others from suspecting a possible homosexual identity; limiting self-exposure to information for fear of confirmation of homosexuality.
- antihomosexual postures: undermining homosexuality by attacking or ridiculing homosexuals.
- heterosexual immersion: engaging in heterosexual relationships at varying levels of intimacy to disprove the possibility of being homosexual.
- escapism: avoidance of confronting the possibility of being homosexual by engaging in substance abuse.
- redefinition/ neutralisation: the claim of being bisexual; passing off the perception of homosexuality or of homosexual experiences as once-off experiences.
- acceptance: an acknowledgement that behaviours, feelings and fantasies may be homosexual and an attempt to seek out more information in order to learn about their sexual preference.

Troiden believed that acceptance gradually counteracts the isolation that comes from perceiving one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours to be dissonant with those of others. In this sense he saw acceptance as facilitating the realisation that homosexual individuals exist as a social category and that this provides a label for the differences experienced by the individual.

**Stage 3: Identity Assumption.** This phase of identity formation is seen to occur during or after late adolescence. A significant number of individuals may progress through to this stage despite the use of denial and avoidance strategies of the Confusion stage.

The tasks of this stage revolve around self-definition and how to identify the self to other homosexual persons in terms of regular association, sexual experience and exploration of the homosexual subculture.

These tasks, seen as a part of the coming out process, are viewed by Troiden as a part of the larger process of identity disclosure.

Troiden differentiated between the self-definition process in men and women. His review of research in the area indicated that homosexual men are more likely to acquire self-definition within the contexts of social and sexual experiencing (e.g., bars, parties). Women, on the other hand, tend to acquire self-definition as homosexual persons within the contexts of intense emotional relationships with other women. This situation, according to Troiden, appears to be true for only a relatively small number of men who are homosexual. He added that a minority of individuals are able to arrive at self-definition in the absence of contact or affiliation with other same-sex persons. The model stresses that homosexual identity, in the initial phase of this stage, is reflected by tolerance or 'putting up with', rather than acceptance. Positive experiencing and contact with other homosexual persons appears to facilitate identity formation at this stage.

According to Troiden, a major crisis at this stage is that of confronting and dealing with both the internalisation stigma and perception of external stigma, and a homosexual identity. Troiden identified the following stigma-evasion strategies utilised by individuals in the Identity Assumption stage:

- capitulation: avoidance of homosexual activity as a result of internalised negative perceptions of the stigma associated with homosexuality.
- minstrelisation: homosexuality is expressed in a stereotyped, gender inappropriate manner, not in keeping with what is expected by the mainstream culture.
- passing: recent homosexual self-definition but allowing the self to be perceived as heterosexual by significant others and acquaintances in daily life.

- group alignment: affiliation by active involvement in the homosexual community and avoidance of heterosexual settings. The sense of belonging acquired through this involvement facilitates feelings of emotional and social support. However, belonging to the homosexual subculture may also imply a sense of 'not belonging' and self-exclusion from the heterosexual culture.

Towards the end of this stage, there appears to be a positive acceptance of being homosexual, with selective disclosure.

Stage 4: Commitment. Troiden's final stage is characterised by self-acceptance and a comfortableness with adopting homosexuality as a way of life. It also heralds the formation of relationships (encompassing emotional and sexual components) and a commitment to same-sex partners. At this stage the individual attempts disclosure to non-homosexuals. Troiden identified the following shifts in strategy that support the Commitment stage processes:

- covering: although there is acknowledgement of one's homosexuality, attempts are made to keep it from the broader public. This may be done to evade stigmatisation by heterosexuals.
- blending: acting in gender appropriate ways though neither confirming nor denying one's homosexuality to non-homosexuals.
- convert: confronting the negative stigma of homosexuality by attempting to inform the general public on homosexuality and increasing the awareness of the broader community to the contributions made by the homosexual community to society at large.

Troiden emphasised that the above strategy may be situationally determined rather than represent a specific means or strategy of coping. Its purpose is seen to be heuristic in that by facilitating identity disclosure, progression into the Commitment phase is supported.

He added that commitment may exist to different degrees and may vary at any time as a result of the individual's reaction to social and psychological contingencies. Troiden's summation of identity formation is that "homosexual identity is emergent-never fully determined in a fixed or absolute sense" (p.58).

Troiden's model, having been developed in order to address the questions and gaps evident in earlier models, does appear to capture the continuity and fluidity of homosexual identity development. The identification of strategies and mechanisms of coping at each stage further attest to the conceptualisation of identity development as a dynamic process.

His attempt to conceptualise gay and lesbian identity development in an integrated model does provide a more inclusive paradigm, as compared to earlier models. However, this also tends to oversimplify and generalise the process in a system where gender differences, at a socio-political and psychological level, are pronounced in western society (in the USA, for example, women in comparison to men, are seen as a non-ethnic minority). By this token, non-reference to the issues of race and ethnicity on homosexual identity development, in a society where non-eurocentric cultures are considered as minorities, does limit the cross-cultural or holistic applicability of Troiden's model.

#### 4.4.2.6. *The Isaacs and McKendrick Model*

Isaacs and McKendrick (1992) viewed existent models of homosexual identity development as supporting the notion that sexual identity is distinct from ego identity. This, they believed, perpetuates the conceptualisation of homosexual identity development along a primarily sexual dimension rather than one which espouses a more dynamic system, reflecting external and internal dimensions. In their model of homosexual identity development, they have attempted to espouse the latter premise and have attempted to provide a paradigm for understanding the range of human sexuality in general.

They base this model on extensive research of relevant literature and on the data generated by both their clinical experience and a survey conducted amongst male homosexual South Africans.

The identity development in men who are homosexual is viewed as a complex, ongoing process, occurring through a series of cumulative experiences. Generically, the six stages of identity development proposed by Isaacs and McKendrick (1992) include the progression from diffuse identity to eventual consolidation of identity.

Each stage is conceptualised within an age range (which the authors emphasised is relatively arbitrary) and describes development along the dimensions of fantasies, sexual behaviour, reality base and implications for self-esteem or congruency.

Stage 1: Identity Diffusion (Birth-9 years). At this stage the relationship between the homosexual person and his caretakers is seen to have contributed to predisposing the former towards patterns of sexual identity, sexual role preference and sex role orientation (other than early feelings of same sex attraction which are experienced at approximately four to five years of age).

At the Identity Diffusion stage, fantasy is viewed as primitive. It is manifested in the experimentation with objects and others and is seen as the first spontaneous clue to the onset of sexuality. The individual appears to react to feedback from external sources (i.e. adult and peer groups) rather than to a sense of morality, which is probably not fully developed as yet. Perceived disapproval and ostracism from the adult or peer group, for what is considered to be inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour by them, is seen to result in the individual's sense of self being undermined and the process of his emerging sexual identity threatened.

Stage 2: Identity Challenge (approximately 10-15 years). This stage is marked by the onset of puberty and the trend towards a more enquiring, information processing orientation. The fantasy at this level is described as being more developed and is seen to encompass the semantic, cognitive and behavioural dimensions.

Fantasy is also accompanied by accidental or deliberate sensual arousal (e.g. masturbation, wet dreams) directed to same- sex individuals or erotic objects.

A sense of emerging morality is characteristic at this stage, influencing an introjection of guilt and shame for what is perceived as a 'wrong' private world.

This stage is marked by incongruence since the child's experience of and exposure to prevailing norms of sexual ethics, male and female roles and behaviours and adult heterosexual models are unaligned to his internal world and experiencing.

Stage 3: Identity Exploration (approximately 16-19 years). By this stage, fantasy evolves into testing out behaviours and sexual exploration (including through books and the media) within the context of bisexual behaviour. The authors describe this dynamically as a vacillation between internalised morality and the internal sexual experiencing of the individual. Such internal incongruency, reinforced by sexual exploration with males and females, perpetuates the confusion for the individual who perceives himself to be neither male, female nor homosexual. This confusion also extends to the question of how to express internal sexuality needs in an oppressive heterosexual mainstream culture. The pseudohomosexuality characterising this stage is seen to hinder the individual's acknowledgement of his feelings.

The hostile heterosexual world may, for this individual, influence a flooding of sexual images, often leading to a confusion with intense sexual desire.

Isaacs and McKendrick described the identity exploration stage as the 'closet' stage of homosexual identity development, where the possibility of being homosexual is denied.

Stage 4: Beginning Identity Achievement (approximately 19-25 years). At this stage, fantasy is seen to be more consolidated and coupled to an intense need to experience sexual stimuli (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) and for intimacy.

Ontologically, the individual achieves greater independence as an adult and thereby is less and less dependant on family relationships. At this point there is also an introspection regarding the individual's inner reality and subsequently a trend with regard to identifying with, or introducing oneself into, the gay subculture. The need for intimacy at this stage motivates individuals to seek out partners who fulfil their projection of an ideal fantasy image. The latter is based on several psychosocial dimensions including sexuality and personality dimensions.

- This stage may be characterised by identity confusion, emanating from the replacement of homoerotic images with female object fantasy. The confusion inherent during this stage tends to undermine the process of identity development and contributes to feelings of guilt and fear. This is manifested as identity confusion and powerlessness in the individual.

Stage 5: Identity Commitment (approximately 19-65 years-Late adolescence to late adulthood). This stage may incorporate developmental aspects of the previous four stages. It appears to be regulated by introspection around being homosexual. In this context, an individual is seen to explore his 'coming out' process, the cognitive changes perceived to be experienced, the implications of accepting his identity, self-acceptance, response to the public and self-labelling. This stage is also described as a testing out period, marked by the search for role models and sexual expressions of intimacy.

Several periods of identity 'intolerance' may also be experienced at this stage, leading to a possible full blown identity crisis if congruence is not achieved between patterns of homosexual behaviour and internal conflict or if resistance to the homosexual subculture exists.

Stage 6: Identity Consolidation (19-65 years-Late adolescence to late adulthood). During this period, the individual attempts to engage in a relationship that is characterised by both romantic and domestic dimensions. However, this may not necessarily imply a full acceptance of self as having a homosexual identity. Behaviour patterns are explored and examined within a variety of socio-political and psychological contexts (e.g. the homosexual subculture, sexuality, relationships, family, AIDS, politics).

In summary, the authors stressed the fluid, dynamic nature of their paradigm aligned with the significance of recognising the 'process' and 'diversity' of identity.

#### Evaluation of the Isaacs-McKendrick model

The Isaacs-McKendrick (1992) conceptualisation of identity ontogenesis, based on self-reports and research, is significant in that it is the first model of homosexual identity formation developed on a South African population. The concept of 'crisis' in exploring the transitions to subsequent stages appears to also be an interesting reframing of what could be otherwise viewed as 'obstacles' to identity formation. The attempts to view the process of identity development parallel to heterosexual identity development processes, as well as the inclusion of the bisexuality dimension in this model augurs well for the argument of the normalcy of a sexual preference, seen merely to be alternate to the mainstream.

However, despite their exploration of the family morality and the sexuality dimension of identity development, the emphasis on sexual ontogenesis and fixation appears to be most prominent.

Hence, identity development for the homosexual person appears to be described by Isaacs and McKendrick as a consequence of crises primarily around sexual issues that are alternate to the mainstream rather than as crises around a complex combination of several psychosocial and cultural variables.

This appears to inadvertently reinforce the popular notion of a homosexual identity revolving around a primarily sexual dimension. The latter stages of this model tend to mention self-commitment and the influence of significant others, though in a very vague manner.

The contextualisation of homosexual identity within a psychosocial, Eriksonian type framework appears to challenge Erikson's exclusion of homosexual identity development in his paradigm, and the neglect of this area, in general, by major life theorists. Yet, the Isaacs-McKendrick model tends to oversimplify this process by conceptualising it within a linear, ontological paradigm (i.e. birth- childhood-adolescence- adult life stages). In this regard, age-frames may be seen as lesser antecedents or determinants to initiating identity formation, than other crucial psychosocial influences which mediate on the extent to which an individual may or may not acknowledge or nurture his identity in an oppressive heterosexual mainstream. Thus, more in-depth focus on broader psychosocial factors in this developmental plan may have enhanced its usefulness beyond the understanding of the ontogenesis of sexuality, primarily.

The authors' failure to include the issue of gender (i.e. by not including women in their sample) and race, the latter particularly within a South African context, where a dualistically legislated oppression (race and sexual preference) existed at the time of their study, tends to limit the usefulness of this model for the broader society.

#### 4.4.2.7. *The Minority Identity Development Model*

One model of development which may contribute to a more holistic conceptualisation of identity development is that proposed by Atkinson, Morten and Sue (1989). This model appears to be significantly more cognisant of diversity across race/ethnicity, sexual preference/identity or different ability (pertaining to the differently abled).

It was proposed primarily for application in the therapeutic context, addressing identity development trends in the experiencing of ethnic (i.e., non-eurocentric or non-mainstream race groups) and non-ethnic (i.e., gays, lesbians, women, differently abled ) minorities.

The Minority Identity Development (MID) model defines five stages of development that minority, oppressed or disenfranchised groups experience as they attempt to understand themselves and establish their identities in terms of their perceptions of self and others within a minority culture and of others in the dominant or mainstream culture. This model provides a schema for understanding identity development within five stages and along dimensions of attitude to self, others in the same minority, others in other minority cultures and attitudes to members of the dominant culture. Although they are presented as differential stages within the same model, it is intended that they are viewed as overlapping stages, blending along a continuum rather than as linear processes.

Stage 1: Conformity. During this stage, individuals view themselves as deficient of the desirable characteristics espoused by the mainstream culture.

Distinguishing physical and cultural characteristics are seen as a source of shame. Fellow minority group members, as well as those of other minority groups, are viewed according to the negative stereotypes held by the dominant culture. Members of the dominant culture are admired, respected, imitated and often viewed as role models.

Stage 2: Dissonance. Dominant values of the mainstream culture and stereotypes of the minority come into question. Previously depreciated cultural values of the minority group begin to be considered more positively. With increasing openness to, and awareness of, the strengths of minority culture, the individual tends to challenge (though more at a subconscious level) his or her self-depreciating attitudes and typically experiences alternate feelings of shame and pride in self.

Dominant views of minority strengths and weaknesses begin to be questioned as new contradictory information is received. Cultural values of the minority group begin to have appeal. There is an increasing awareness that not all of the cultural values of the dominant group are beneficial to him or her. Members of the dominant group are viewed with growing mistrust.

Stage 3: Resistance and Immersion. At this stage, total endorsement of minority values and total rejection of mainstream society and culture occurs. The individual actively seeks out information on history and culture that would enhance his or her sense of identity and self-worth in the minority group. There also appears to be a strong sense of identification with, and commitment to, the same and other minority groups. Members of these groups are admired, respected and viewed as ideal models. Cultural values of the same minority group are accepted without question.

There appears to be a total rejection of the dominant culture. A sense of distrust and dislike for all members of the dominant groups seems to prevail at this stage.

Stage 4: Introspection. This stage is characterised by feelings of discontentment and discomfort with the rigid views held in the previous stage. The individual begins to feel more comfortable with his or her own sense of identity. Conflict between the need for greater individual autonomy and for allegiance to the minority group is evident.

Attitudes towards positive minority identity are maintained but concerns regarding personal autonomy and the indiscriminate negativity towards the entire dominant culture, are prevalent. In the latter regard particularly, there tends to be growing insight that not everything in the dominant culture is negative and a tendency to acknowledge its positive contributions.

Stage 5: Synergetic Articulation and Awareness. Here, conflicts and discomforts of the Introspection stage are more resolved, allowing greater individual control and flexibility. Cultural values of minority and majority groups are appraised more objectively on the basis of experience gained in the earlier stages of identity development. The desire, at this point, to eliminate all forms of oppression, becomes an important motivator.

The individual experiences a strong sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and autonomy as a result of having established his or her identity as an individual member of a minority group and as a member of the dominant or mainstream culture.

#### Overview of the Minority Identity Development Model

An interesting observation regarding the Minority Identity Development model is that its developmental team members, viz., Atkinson, Morten and Sue, have brought diverse minority and dominant cultural perspectives into conceptualisation. This paradigm is modelled closely on tenets of the Black Identity Transformation paradigms by Cross (1972) and Jackson (1975).

However, the Minority Identity Development model has broadened the applicability of the earlier, primarily racially oriented models to facilitate an understanding of identity development in both ethnic and non-ethnic groups. It thus provides a schema for understanding the simultaneous influence and impact of belonging to more than one minority culture. In this way it allows for a better conceptualisation of the nature of the conflict, ambiguity, confusion or synergy, experienced by individuals who are homosexual and belong to the mainstream racial culture and those who belong to the minority racial culture which is perceived to have less significance or value within the mainstream.

This model tends to further address a broader psychosocial context than earlier models by describing transformation as it relates to self versus other facets of the macro environment (i.e., others of the same minority; members of different minorities as well as those of the dominant culture). Its perspective provides an excellent bridge to enhancing the broader applicability of the homosexual identity development models discussed thus far, while acknowledging the reality of the diversity therein.

What appears to be lacking in this model, however, is the inclusion of the family/ significant others context. In this regard, the impact of relationships of the individual to the members of this inner circle may contribute to a greater appreciation of his or her experiencing.

An interesting concept of the MID is its tendency, through its generalisation across cultures, to 'normalise' the experience of minority group members. Here, the processes underpinning homosexuality, for example, are allocated the same 'different' status as those seen to describe any other racial or non-ethnic minority.

#### 4.4.2.8. Morales' Conceptualisation of Identity Formation in the Minority Gay and Lesbian Population

While the Atkinson et al. model of minority identity development offers a broad context from which to understand the interplay of several ontological dimensions within minority populations, its ability to simultaneously express the holistic experiencing of individuals who may belong to more than one minority group at a time appears to be unaddressed.

Morales' attempt to provide a more cogent understanding of the identity formation process is contextualised within the framework of the family unit.

His rationale for this approach is based on the premise that the family context, reflecting the community norms, is the primary system of shaping and reinforcing the individual's value system. However, his belief is that much of the information available about human sexuality tends to be about the mainstream (commonly described as the white mainstream) population. Attitudes, beliefs and cultural values towards sexuality that exist within other diverse cultures play a significant role in shaping how individuals view or act out their sexuality. Within this perspective is allowed an understanding of the conflicts of dual or multiple minority membership relating to being gay or lesbian within a non- mainstream ethnic minority.

From his review of the little available research in this area of exploring the unique circumstances of such persons, Morales cited a study by Cory and LeRoy (1963 in Morales, 1990) which indicated that gay blacks and Puerto Ricans (i.e., in a USA context) were given the lowest social status in contrast to other ethnic or sexual minority groups. A study by Herdin (1969 in Morales, 1990) of twelve black male suicides, revealed that 33% of these persons resorted to suicide as a means of dissociating from their feelings of inferiority and rejection as a consequence of their relationship with white male partners.

Other findings cited by Morales (Espin, 1987 in Morales, 1990) revealed the tendency for Cuban lesbian women to prefer the company of white lesbian women to heterosexual Cubans. These women also tended to hold the perception that sexual identity, unlike racial identity, could be concealed and, therefore, was more stressful to deal with if one chose to hide one's homosexual identity.

Morales' conceptualisation of minority identity formation, focusing on five different stages, is based on the premise that the coming out process for gay and lesbian persons may be ongoing and reoccurring in various facets of their lives (i.e., coming out to friends, family, community, employer, etc.).

He perceived this to be dissimilar to the Atkinson et al. model (1989) and the Cass (1984) model of identity development in which the stages of Synergetic Articulation and Identity Synthesis, respectively, were viewed by him to signify closure to the identity development or formation process.

Stage 1: Denial of Conflicts. There tends to be a minimisation by the individual of the discrimination experienced as a member of an ethnic minority. Sexual orientation, which may or may not be defined at this stage, is perceived to have limited implications for the individual's lifestyle. This denial may undermine his or her perception of how environmental stressors impact negatively on functioning and of the value of a dual or multiple identity.

Stage 2: Bisexual versus Gay or Lesbian. There appears to be a preference for some ethnic minority gay and lesbian persons to identify themselves as bisexual rather than as homosexual. The resultant impact here may be a sense of hopelessness arising from ongoing feelings of conflict or incongruency.

Stage 3: Conflicts in Allegiances. At this stage there appears to be a concurrent awareness of belonging to both an ethnic and a non-ethnic minority (i.e., regarding sexuality) and a need to keep these lifestyles separate. Apprehension regarding preference in allegiance towards a particular community or the self-perception of betraying one community over the other, may be evidenced.

Stage 4: Establishing Priorities in Allegiances. At this stage the primary identification centres around the ethnic community, coupled with the resentment at the lack of integration between the gay and lesbian subculture and the former. Evidenced, are anger and rage, linked to perceptions and experiences of rejection by the gay community, based on ethnicity.

Stage 5: Integration of Ethnic and Sexual Identities. The need to integrate identities and develop a multicultural worldview appears to be central to this state. However, an awareness of the limited options available to gay and lesbian individuals of colour (i.e., within the contexts of the family, work and broader society) may result in feelings of alienation and, consequently, anxiety for the individual.

The progression in Morales' stages is rationalised in terms of decreasing anxiety and tension through the effective management of the perception of differences by dual or multiple identity status holders. He stated that more evident changes in cognition and lifestyle facilitate greater integration of the dual or multiple identities, a greater self-understanding and a better developed or developing multicultural perspective.

The limitation in Morale's model appears to lie in its simultaneous exploration and contextualisation of the developmental processes of two or more minorities (within which exist several diverse minorities), based on limited research.

The tendency thus appears to be towards greater reductionism and specificity at the expense of a more inclusive, holistic and generalisable model of minority identity formation.

An implicit awareness of this limitation, as well as of the possible value of previous identity models (discussed thus far) appears to be reflected by his recommendation that the models of Atkinson, Morten and Sue (1989) and of Cass (1984) be integrated and applied within the Minority Identity Formation stages.

#### 4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter, focusing on the ontogenesis of homosexual identity, has explored the concept and consequences of homophobia, the dynamics of the coming out process, and different models of identity development.

The following chapter shifts the focus from self-identity development to the broader lifespan ontogenesis in which is explored the periods of adulthood and old-age. More specifically, attention is given to the aspects of relationships, parenting and ageing, as they pertain to homosexual persons.

## CHAPTER 5

### ADULTHOOD AND OLD AGE

In exploring the ontology of gay and lesbian persons, the previous chapter has focused internally on the process of identity formation. In this chapter, the focus shifts to aspects of lifespan development. Ideally, this should include an exploration of life stages from infancy to old age. Besides this being a mammoth task to undertake, literature, pertaining to the developmental stages of infancy up to adolescence, is unavailable. It is for these reasons that the present chapter explores aspects of lifespan development only from adulthood to old age. The aspects of relationships, parenting and ageing are explored within these developmental periods. In order to bridge the gap in the literature with regard to the developmental periods up to and including adolescence, these areas have been explored during the actual fieldwork of the current investigation.

#### 5.1. RELATIONSHIPS

##### 5.1.1. INTRODUCTION

Much of the available literature on gay and lesbian relationships tends to be presented descriptively with a strong experiential focus (i.e., case histories, observations, encounters, etc.) as opposed to the presentation of empirical data. This chapter focuses briefly on the dynamics of gay and lesbian relationships and the unique issues they generate for these individuals.

The need to develop a significant relationship that encompasses emotional and physical intimacy is seen to be as true for individuals who are homosexual as it is for heterosexuals (Meyer, 1990). In exploring the basis for permanent and semi-permanent relationships among twenty four gays who had sustained relationships for between four to six years, Meyer concluded that these individuals, having been reared in heterosexual households, are subjected to the same socialisation process that contributes to creating expectations of at least a semi-permanent relationship. However, few role models exist for gay and lesbian individuals to learn how to maintain long term relationships.

Berzon (1992) identified three significant factors that undermined the establishment of long term relationships among homosexual individuals (specifically women) and contributed to the escalation of conflict in several areas of functioning. These included the expectation of failure, lack of legal and social support or support systems and the lack of visibility of long term relationships.

Furthermore, society, according to Goodman(1977), has not institutionalised homosexual relationships and, therefore, there is more pressure on these individuals to explore their own needs and emotionality in relating to their same sex-partner or partners.

In this sense, Goodman saw a need for homosexual persons, particularly lesbians, to move away from the heterosexual or patriarchal model of a monogamous relationship and explore other forms of relationships that meet more of the natural needs of these individuals. The patriarchal relationship as defined by Brown (1977) is based on the vertical relationship (i.e., men over women, white over black, rich over poor, heterosexual over homosexual) and as such perpetuates prejudices and the devaluation of the hierarchically 'lower' groups in favour of the 'higher' groups. In the context of lesbian relationships, for example, modelling of heterosexual relationships (as it appears to be the only model available to gay and lesbian individuals), led to the adoption of the butch (masculine or dominant) and femme (feminine or submissive) roles (Goodman, 1977; Lehman, 1978; Rothblum, 1994b).

The tendency towards non-monogamy, as it is described by Fassinger (1991), is viewed as a political statement regarding the disclaimer of ownership of one's partner, in contrast to what she described as the patriarchal context of monogamy. However, non-monogamy does not merely imply several casual, sexually based relationships. Rather it is seen to espouse the need for shared power and equity in the relationship and an evaluation of conventional roles (Browning, Reynolds, Dworkin, 1991).

According to Sophie (1987), the feminist movement has contributed to this process in lesbians more especially by providing positive role models and a sense of solidarity and support. This view is similarly reflected in Lehman's (1978) contention that gay and women's movements have encouraged both homosexual men and women to redefine themselves as persons, and not as halves of a relationship to be completed by an opposite.

The consequence of this redefinition, according to Lehman, is that women, increasingly, are beginning to define themselves as having the rational, aggressive and nurturing, emotional traits.

### 5.1.2. DEFINING PARTICIPANTS IN A GAY OR LESBIAN RELATIONSHIP.

Redefinition, according to Berzon (1992), also has implications for semantic redefinition. She maintained that the labels used to describe partners in a heterosexual relationship (husband and wife), have several inherent connotations for social roles and behaviours. These relate to, amongst others, the assumptions of commitment, the operation of the partners as a single unit, assumptions of their functions and functioning in daily life and the assumption that they are expected to spend the rest of their lives together. In gay and lesbian relationships, there is far more ambiguity in what is the expected norm for partners in a relationship. While terms such as husband and wife appear to espouse clarity, Berzon also identified its intention to conceal, rather than reveal, the true nature of relationships by being a "communication short-cut", or reductionistic in nature.

In a brief study, in which seventeen participants were asked to note every term they had used or heard to describe the individuals in a gay lesbian relationship, Berzon noted that no consensus existed on a suitable term. The terms proposed, included:-

- Lover : This was felt to be too sexualised and connoting a transitory or frivolous relationship.
- Partner: Although this was perceived to be more acceptable than the above, it has connotations of a business relationship rather than a romantic one.
- Significant Other: It was felt that this sounded more like a diagnosis than a term of endearment.
- Companion: Perceived to be too neutral and to suggest connotations of an attendant summoned to take care of a feeble person.

- Better Or Other Half: This was seen to have strong sexist connotations and associated with the male in a heterosexual couple.
- Boyfriend/Girlfriend: Perceived to be appropriate for teenagers but not for those over twenty years.
- Spouse: Seen as neutral, full of the implication of entitlement, but somewhat serious.
- Lifemate: Perceived to define an indefinite lifetime.

Berzon believed that the resolution of this semantic dilemma is difficult, since, as members of a minority group (more especially one towards which much negativity exists), gay and lesbian individuals are "very much at the mercy of the power of labelling" (p.22). She explained that when contact is casual, people tend to relate more to the label than the person, and that the result, generally, is "overdefinition" (p.22). For example, although her tendency was to use "lover" most often, to the homonegative person, she is referred to as "dyke, pure and simple", "an oddity, a joke, a threat, an object of derision" (p.22). Thus, gay and lesbian persons, are often compelled to utilise a term that best fits a particular situation. Berzon's challenge is for gay and lesbian individuals to change this pattern and thereby take a step in asserting the legitimacy of gay and lesbian existence.

### 5.1.3. THE SPECTRUM OF GAY AND LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Lehman (1978) identified the following forms of relationships that may exist among homosexual individuals. Although her focus has been directed to relationships between lesbians, the patterns appear to be also relevant for men who are homosexual.

### The Monogamous Relationship

This is the closest equivalent to heterosexual marriages. This may or may not include a wedding ceremony but generally would involve the pooling of incomes and a commitment to live together and share many years.

### The Non -Monogamous Relationship

This, according to Lehman, comes closest to the heterosexual idea of 'open marriage'. The individuals involved may define their relationship as primary, but retain the freedom to develop sexual and/or non-sexual relationships with others. She noted, however, that while similar relationships reduced the pressure on partners to fulfil all the needs of the other, it created a context within which intense jealousy could develop.

### The Affair

This is described by Lehman as a relationship between two women, which is primarily, or exclusively sexual in nature. She noted that such relationships tend to be satisfactory if the individuals engaged in it are comfortable with the idea that no one person can meet all their needs.

### Friendships

Many relationships have a special focus on friendships, which may or may not include sexual intimacy. For some persons, the combination of friendships and affairs may be satisfactory, while for others, friendships may be complimentary to a more involved relationship, or relationships. Lehman noted that the fear of sexual intimacy from the individual or partner in a relationship can impair the homosexual person's ability to sustain friendships while being in a monogamous relationship.

## Groups

Lehman found that several individuals chose to live communally, with a group of other same-sex persons in the same household. In such a set-up, sexual intimacy may or may not occur between group members.

She viewed this as a good means of obtaining multiple viewpoints and a strong emotional support structure, provided that the individuals involved were compatible.

Despite the initiative by the gay and lesbian community to explore relationship models other than those ascribed to by heterosexual individuals, several parallels, in terms of the needs, dynamics and context exist between the two groups.

Kurdek (1994) noted that the first and most basic of these was the involvement in steady relationships, many with the intention of a lifelong partnership. Based on a survey conducted by Cochran (1990 in Kurdek 1994), he reported that between 40% and 60% of gays and between 45% and 80% of lesbians were involved in steady relationships. A comparison with the trends in heterosexual relationships, in this regard, would have been interesting. Unfortunately, no figures are given for heterosexual couples.

Secondly, he found that for both homosexual and heterosexual couples, relationship satisfaction was negatively related to dysfunctional beliefs about relationships and negative affect, and positively related to social support and expressiveness. These findings are based on Kurdek's study of the nature and correlates of relationship quality involving eighty gay couples, fifty-three lesbian couples and five hundred and eighty-three heterosexual couples who were matched in terms of race, educational level, income level and demography. The third commonality identified by Kurdek related to the influence of individual factors (e.g., age, personality, characteristics) in contributing to relation satisfaction.

George and Behrendt (1987, in Shannon and Woods, 1991) have summarised the commonalities between homosexual and heterosexual couples by stating that couples in a healthy relationship have similar characteristics of commitment to each other, engage in sharing feelings, respect for each other, intimacy and the capacity to resolve conflicts.

According to Shannon and Woods (1991), the conflicts and stressors experienced by both groups tend to be similarly correlated. Some of the common issues here include communication problems, sexual issues, financial issues, intimacy issues (fusion versus distancing), those related to the presence or lack of a support system and problems related to differences in values, amongst others.

However, in gay and lesbian couples, these concerns may be magnified by the introjection of heterosexual norms and the oppressive attitudes towards homosexuality (Goodman 1977; Berzon 1992).

#### 5.1.4. ***FACTORS IMPACTING ON GAY AND LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS***

The internalisation and integration of heterosexual norms and oppressive attitudes by gays and lesbians has been noted to have destructive effects on their relationships within several contexts.

Goodman (1977) identified one such consequence as that leading to self-hate, doubt and guilt. Shannon and Woods (1991) have expanded on this notion of 'value' ascribed to being homosexual by partners. They found that a discrepancy in the 'outness' (extent to which the individuals identified themselves and were open about their homosexuality) between partners was a potential source of stress and conflict in a relationship. In this regard, the more closeted partner may find the openness of the other to be potentially threatening.

The extent to which partners are 'out' has been found to have significant consequences for their self-esteem, which in turn has implications for the dynamics or quality of the relationship shared (Shannon and Woods, 1991; Weinberg and Williams, 1974).

The lack of positive role models for gays and lesbians in relationships appears to create the space for the exploration of relationships which may more naturally accommodate the specific needs of gays and lesbians (Fassinger, 1991; Goodman, 1977). However, the deficit has also led to the adoption of stereotypic heterosexual roles, which appear to compromise the unique needs of gay and lesbian individuals (Rothblum, 1994b; Shannon and Woods 1991).

In this respect, subscription by women to the 'butch' and 'femme' roles to emulate the stereotypic male and female roles and traits within heterosexual relationships of the 1960's and 1970's, and the subscription of gay men to the stereotypic heterosexual notions of being aggressive, dominant, controlled, independent and always competent, tend to undermine the potential of developing intimate, loving relationships. Shannon and Woods (1991) noted the obvious difficulty of gay men sustaining a healthy relationship if partners in a relationship were in constant competition with each other.

The stereotype of men being always competent in terms of sexual performance is a further destructive factor to a healthy relationship, since a partner's esteem may be dependent on the other's perception of his masculinity (i.e., as defined by sexual competence). As with 'butch' and 'femme' roles, Shannon and Woods (1991) noted that sexual interaction based on masculinity and femininity stereotypes limits the quality of interaction and creates stressful expectations for both partners. The facts that about one third of lesbians have been married previously to a heterosexual spouse and approximately 90% have had sexual or intimate relationships with men (Nichols, 1987) and that approximately 10% of gays were previously married to heterosexual partners, 59% had had some romantic attachment with the women and that 48% were found to have had sexual relationships with the latter (Saghir and Robin, 1973 in Ross 1990), appear to have significance for the subsequent homosexual relationships that these individuals enter into.

Nichols (1987) found that lesbian women who had been married previously tended to come out in their late twenties, thirties, or later. By this time, they were socially conditioned to conceptualising the family in terms of the husband and wife and to seeing the male role in the relationship as being responsible for protection, physical strength and physical pressure. This conception may contribute to the awareness of a deficit in the current relationship. It may also trigger issues relating to identity (i.e., whether the individual is really lesbian, bisexual or not homosexual at all). Within the context of a homosexual relationship, such dynamics, according to Nichols (1987), are experienced as being stressful.

Sexual inhibitions, associated more commonly with women, have also been identified as a pertinent concern in homosexual relationships.

Goodman (1977) believed that societal taboos associated with masturbation may be inhibiting in these relationships. Consequently, dysfunctional sexual relations related to fear and shame about the body of self and others, would impact negatively on a relationship. The socialising of females leading them to subscribe to the premises of monogamy, sexual intimacy in relation to men only, or sexual interaction for the purpose of child bearing, is also believed by Goodman to perpetuate sexual inhibitions or dysfunction in lesbian relationships.

Nichols (1987) proposed that sexual inhibitions manifesting in homosexual relationships may be related to the individual's need to identify as heterosexual by suppressing genital sexuality. Lehman (1978) wrote that because of the acceptedness of close friendships between females, lesbians, for example, may have learnt to negate sexual feelings in this regard. While this may be so, Loulan (1987) proposed that the mixed messages about sexuality that are given to females in society, combined with the negativity towards lesbians, may become internalised by lesbians. This resultant negativity, manifesting in attitudes of guilt and shame, may hinder the positive expression of sexuality in these individuals. Issues of guilt and shame, particularly if individuals have been survivors of sexual abuse (i.e., spousal abuse, incest), seem to be given prominence by some authors (Nichols, 1981; Goodman 1977; Lehman 1978).

Nichols (1987) found that substance abuse (i.e., alcohol and drug dependency) among individuals who were survivors of incest, often resulted in co-dependency within the individual's homosexual relationship. These related more specifically to concerns of boundary issues, enmeshment and control in homosexual relationships. Kaufman, Harrison and Hyde (1984) identified that the distress accorded to relationships, where such dynamics prevail, is characterised by "excessive closeness", "extreme and intense ambivalence" and "a failure to establish emotional, territorial, temporal and cognitive space for each individual" (p.530). This phenomenon has been termed dyadic fusion. Decker (1984) explained that when this occurs, partners of gay or lesbian relationships form a symbiotic unit and close off themselves from outsiders. However, a persistence of this fusion further into the relationship is likely to lead to loss of ego boundaries, the dissolution of self and consequently have negative consequences for positive expression and interactions at several levels. In the specific context of lesbian relationships, Kaufman et al. identified the need, in similar situations, for the restoration of intimacy by the creation of distance and personal space between the partners.

Browning, Reynolds and Dworkin (1991) similarly identified the threat to healthy lesbian relationships related to what they termed "fusion" and an imbalance between "intimacy" and "autonomy" (p.185).

Dependency on substances, by both men and women, has been reported by several researchers to be related to low self-esteem, internalised homophobia and, consequently, problematic relationships (Browning et al., 1991; Nichols, 1987; Shannon and Woods, 1991). Coleman (1990) identified several studies which pointed to the high incidence of alcohol and drug abuse among lesbians. Shannon and Woods (1991), from their review of literature in the field, reported that substance abuse is more prevalent among members of the gay community than the general population. They proposed that this may be related to the fact that gay bars tend to be the major, and sometimes only, socialisation venue for gay men.

The lack of rituals in the cycle of developing intimate relationships has been identified by several authors as stressful and devaluing to gay and lesbian relationships (Berzon, 1992; Clark, 1987; Huggins and Forrester, 1977; Nichols, 1987). In this respect, events such as courting, engagements, weddings, separation (or divorce in some cases), death or the birth of a baby, for gay and lesbians, do not appear to be accorded the same significance or support as is accorded to the same events relating to heterosexual relationships (Nichols, 1987). As an example, Clark (1987) reported that any romantically affectionate display of emotion is tolerated if displayed by two individuals of the opposite sex in a public place but viewed as offensive if this same behaviour is displayed by two men or two women.

The Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has been identified by several authors to impact on the relationship acquisition and maintenance of especially gay men (Shannon and Woods, 1991). Although not confined to individuals who are homosexual, the strong association between AIDS and homosexuality that is perpetuated societally, has forced the gay person to be cognisant of the experiences of any potential partner that could predispose him to the HIV and the possibility of developing AIDS. The advent of AIDS has effected the need for several adjustments regarding sexual practices and initiated the now "commonplace" need to confront the loss of friends and lovers (Shannon and Woods, 1991, p.209).

### 5.1.5. CONCLUSION

The information presented in the above chapter is based more on reviews of literature and case studies than on formal, empirical research. The available literature tended to also ignore relationship issues as they may pertain to blacks or other minority groups. The information, nevertheless, clearly highlights the notion that an understanding of the stressors, conflicts or dynamics of the gay or lesbian relationships, may only be initiated by being aware of the spectrum of issues and concerns salient to the gay and lesbian lifestyle. In the light of the above-mentioned limitations, however, the current investigation has apportioned significant attention to the aspect of relationships among black homosexual South Africans.

## 5.2 PARENTING

### 5.2.1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional conceptualisation of parenthood involves that of a pair of heterosexual adults who give birth to an offspring as a consequence of their sexual union which is generally sanctioned by marriage. Bozett(1987) maintained that such a perspective is erroneous since, in the USA alone, less than one-third of the families that have children fit this nuclear family notion. In this respect, Ricketts and Achtenberg(1990) have reported an even lower estimate of 7% of families that fit this picture.

From a heterosexual perspective, parenting may be achieved through several means, including adoption, fostering, alternative fertilisation (e.g., artificial insemination) and conception out of wedlock. From a homosexual perspective, similar options are sought.

Gottman(1990) remarked that the terms 'lesbian mother' and 'gay father' are perceived as confusing and contradictory due to the incorrect beliefs that children are only conceived by heterosexuals and that homosexuals, since they relate only to same-sex individuals, do not have children. Bigner and Bozett(1990) added that the term 'gay father' appears contradictory in that it conveys homosexuality and heterosexuality simultaneously.

This relates to the fact that 'father' is seen to have a heterosexual connotation and that the stereotype of 'gay' emphasises an anti-family orientation.

Ariel and Stearns(1992) identified several erroneous assumptions that perpetuate the notion of the inability of the gay or lesbian individual to become a parent. The first assumption is that homosexuality is a state of 'compulsory childlessness', given the relationship between two same-sex partners. Secondly, the gay or lesbian individual, previously in a heterosexual relationship, is unlikely to receive legal status as a primary parent. The punitive nature of the legal system, in this regard, has been highlighted by several of the researchers in this field (Huggins and Forrester,1977; Neophytou, 1994).

There is also the stereotypic assumption, noted Ariel and Stearns(1992), that supports the perception that gays and lesbians lead self-centred lives with neither the space nor desire for children. The authors also proposed that gay or lesbian parenting may be prejudged to be a pathological motive for wanting to recruit children into an aberrant lifestyle or even to abuse them.

### 5.2.2. INCIDENCE

Despite the prevalence of such beliefs and their possible internalisation by members of the gay and lesbian population, several surveys conducted primarily in the USA, indicate that significant parenting is evident among gay and lesbian individuals and couples. Hoefler(1978 in Pennington, 1987) estimated the total number of lesbian mothers in the USA to be between four hundred thousand and three million. Surveys by the Task Force on Sexuality (1974 in Gottman, 1990) and Schulenberg(1985 in Gottman, 1990), figured that more than one and a half million lesbians were mothers and more than one million gays were fathers.

Bozett (1987) estimated that between one to three million gays in the USA were natural fathers. Bigner and Bozett (1990), on the basis of several studies undertaken in this regard, postulated that approximately 20% to 25% of gays are fathers. Cramer(1986) surmised that 18% of the lesbian population of the USA were mothers.

Patterson(1984) hypothesised that gay and lesbian parents in the USA numbered approximately fourteen million. Schulenberg(1985, in Gottman 1990) reported that at least six million children have gay or lesbian parents.

Despite the significant numbers of gay and lesbian parents estimated by researchers, as with the Kinsey study(1948 in Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992), it is more likely that these figures are an under-representation, given the secrecy around gay and lesbian identity disclosure. However, several authors indicated the increasing tendency for gay and lesbian individuals to become parents (Ariel and Stearns, 1992; Bigner and Bozett, 1990; Pies, 1990; Gottman, 1990).

### 5.2.3. WHY DO GAYS AND LESBIANS WANT TO BECOME PARENTS?

The reasons for homosexual persons, specifically women, wanting to be parents appear to be similar to those for heterosexuals (Coleman,1990; Pies, 1990). Pies summarised these as: “They want children. They may have always wanted to be pregnant and bear a child. They may have had a memorable childhood that they may want to recreate for another young person. Or perhaps they may have had a miserable and unhappy childhood and they want to do it differently for another child. Some want to share the experience of parenting with their life partner, others hope that having a child will put back a spark in the relationship. Still others want to have a child for reasons that they cannot explain; they simply know this is something they want to do”(Pies, 1990, p.138).

A review of the research exploring the motivation of gay men to become fathers has been undertaken by Bigner and Bozett (1990). The most common reasons identified include the following:

- an individual may consciously decide to become a father for many of the reasons that heterosexual men have;
- dissatisfaction with the gay lifestyle may prompt an individual’s desire to become a parent;

- coping with a feeling of loneliness.

Parenting by gays and lesbians may arise as a result of custody (generally after separation from the heterosexual spouse); biological birthing by a willing female of choice; the option to be non-biological parents through adoption, fostering or artificial insemination.

According to Pies (1990), an increasing number of lesbians are becoming parents after having 'come out'. The choice of options may be considered individually, between partners within the context of a relationship, with a male or female friend or a family of friends.

As with heterosexual parenting, through contexts other than those of the heterosexual marriage scenario discussed earlier, the families of gay and lesbian parents are referred to as non-traditional or alternative families (Bozett, 1987; Pies, 1990).

#### 5.2.4. CHALLENGES FACING GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS

Many of the challenges identified in heterosexual parenting appear to be true for parenting by gay and lesbian individuals and couples. However, several concerns and tasks, in addition to those identified for the former group, have been noted for gay and lesbian parents. The first of these may often relate to the internalised homophobia of the individual seeking to parent (i.e., in questioning his or her right to parent a child). A second unique concern relates to the discrimination to which the child could be exposed, as a result of the attitudes towards the sexual orientation of his or her parent (Pies, 1990).

McCandlish (1987) stated that the family unit of the couple and child may not have a legal existence and that both partners generally have unequal status as parents. Pies (1990) also noted that partners may express different levels of interest in their desire to parent and that this conflict may result in a significant source of tension for the couple. Ariel and Stearns (1992) added that this situation could be exacerbated by anger or resentment towards the partner of the gay or lesbian parent who may be scapegoated as the cause of separation from the heterosexual partner.

The decision to parent has also been observed to hinder the crucial coming out process for the gay or lesbian individual or couple (Coleman, 1990; Gottman, 1990). In this regard, a concern that the child may face discrimination or a fear by the gay or lesbian parent that he or she may lose custody to the heterosexual spouse or even a third party (i.e., grandparents, fostering) may deter disclosure and, consequently, the positive benefits to the personal well-being (Coleman, 1990; Fassinger, 1991; Gottman, 1990; Huggins and Forrester, 1977; Ricketts and Achtenberg, 1990).

Gottman (1990) noted that custody courts often based their decisions, in the above regard, on the premise that the parent's homosexuality may harm the development of the child or make them homosexual. She noted, however, that this practice occurs in the absence of evidence to support this fact.

In drawing attention to this trend, Gottman (1990) cited summaries of several legal cases from 1967 to 1982, where reference is made by judges to "the likelihood of serious adjustment problems"; "we are dealing with a four year old.....just cannot take the chance that something untoward should happen to it"; and a concern that children "might develop a propensity towards homosexuality themselves" (pp. 178-179). Gottman noted that, based on all of these and several other negative assumptions about homosexual parents, custody was awarded unconditionally to the heterosexual spouse, the foster parents or relatives. Where visitation rights were granted to the homosexual parent, there were severe restrictions placed by the court.

Another challenge facing gay and lesbian parents, specifically the non-biological parents, is the lack of legal status defining the partners' relationship to each other and the child (Ariel and Stearns, 1992). Thus, in the event of death of the biological parent, custody is often delegated to the parents of the deceased or to other heterosexual parties rather than the partner of the deceased. Even in the event of separation of the partners, there appears to be no legal rights afforded to the non-biological parent (Ariel and Stearns, 1992; Patterson, 1992; Ricketts and Achtenberg, 1990). Neophytou (1994), on this point, commented that the lack of legal acknowledgement of lesbian couples and families in South Africa, implied the absence of a legal system for the mediation of separations, for the negotiation of visitation rights or ensuring the support functions of the non-biological parent.

Gottman (1990) observed that gay and lesbian parents tended to be increasingly open about their sexual identity, and confrontative about custody disputes when they did occur. Pies noted that legal agreements between the biological and non-biological parent, defining the specific nature of the agreement between the parties around custody issues, may be one means of promoting what is to be in the best interest of the child. However, she noted, whether such contracts will be perceived to be valid by the courts has yet to be tested. Pies (1990) identified that a critical concern to the non-biological parent was whether such a contract would be recognised if the couple separated or what would occur if the partner (the biological parent) insisted on sole custody of the child. Her observation of legal proceedings in the above regard is that legal contracts are decided on the basis of the unique circumstances of each case but still influenced by social attitudes to the gay and lesbian population and "widespread misunderstanding" by significant legal personnel regarding gay and lesbian parenting.

Neophytou (1994) noted that, although South Africa is the first country in the world to have a Bill of Rights outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation, there is yet no legal acknowledgement of same-sex couples or gay and lesbian families in the country.

Fostering by gay and lesbian couples or individuals is also seen to be a more challenging parenting option than it is for their heterosexual counterparts (Fassinger, 1991; Pies, 1990; Ricketts and Achtenberg, 1990). These processes have been identified as being judgmental and evaluative of both the parenting capabilities and the sexuality of hopeful gay and lesbian parents (Ricketts and Achtenberg, 1990). Again, such options of parenting have been governed by the negative societal attitudes and misrepresentation of gay and lesbian parenting by personnel in this area.

The option of biological birthing (i.e., artificial insemination) for the gay or lesbian parent is identified as a further factor that poses significantly more challenge than it would for a heterosexual parent. Pies (1990) noted that the consideration of this option is done very consciously and requires considerable planning and co-ordination by the parties involved.

Some of the issues in this regard pertain to the intrusive impact of the artificial insemination process on the intimacy and privacy of the participants; the choice and rights of donors or of the biological parents and a consideration of how to involve the families of origin of the couple or the individual in the process (Ariel and Stearns, 1992; Bigner and Bozett, 1990).

Besides the specific challenges to gay and lesbian parenthood, a major difference between gay and lesbian parenting and heterosexual parenting is that the former is frequently associated with the lack, or loss of a support system of grandparents, aunts and uncles, amongst others (Martins, 1993; McCandish, 1987).

Within the South African context, a similar scenario for gay and lesbian parents is described by Neophytou (1994). She stated that little support is offered by societal institutions, specifically churches, as few recognise or “condone” lesbianism (1994, p. 27). In this regard, lesbians who opt to parent or who are parents, are expected to create their own support systems.

#### 5.2.5. SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FOR GAYS

For the gay person the challenge of parenting extends to identity concerns, acceptance of self, acceptance by family, legal issues pertaining to custody, fostering or adoption and acceptance by other men in the gay community.

Whereas parenting by heterosexual fathers tends to positively enhance their identities, the same attitude is rarely seen to be extended to gay fathers (Bozett, 1987). While Ariel and Stearns (1992) described the social environment in the case of the heterosexual father as more embracing and nurturing, Bozett (1987), indicated that gay fathers are recipients of more negative attitudes than even a single gay man. In this sense, their gay identity subjects them to the homonegative attitudes of the mainstream society while their status as fathers decreases their social acceptance by other gay men.

Bozett (1987) added that irrespective of whether or not children lived with their gay parent or parents, parental status tended to conflict with some of the following trends within the gay culture:

- members belonging to the overt gay cultures are mostly singles oriented and not committed in the same way as are spouses in a heterosexual relationship;
- unattached gay men, being usually financially independent, tend to have limited obligations to others and, therefore, tend to have more mobility (as compared with homosexual persons in relationships or with children).
- Bigner and Bozett (1990) noted that the gay father, on the other hand, may not have such a lifestyle unless his children are emancipated. They found, however, that the gay parents were less concerned with these limitations than were unattached gay men. The primary concerns of the former related to the quality of parenting and the relationships with their children, irrespective of their ages. Gay fathers were cognisant of, and concerned at, the absence of the feminine influence or of a female role model in their son's or daughter's rearing (Bozett, 1987).

The unique challenges of gay and lesbian parenting are cogently summarised by Ariel and Stearns (1990, p.98):

“On this frontier there are no guidelines based on tradition or expertise, and no official sanction from society. There is an absence of models, of affirmative points of reference, even of a language that adequately names the participants or communicates the experience.”

#### 5.2.6. CHALLENGES FACED BY LESBIANS IN PARENTING

McCandlish (1987) noted that, for lesbians, the chances of obtaining custody were only 15%. Thus, the decision to disclose sexual identity or to come out at the various levels presents a major task to the lesbian wanting to obtain custody of her own child. Talcin (1994), in *The Economic Times*, New Delhi (9/01/94), reported that a month before, in Virginia (USA), a lesbian mother lost custody of her own son to her mother. This was a result of the judge's pronouncement that the woman was an unfit mother because he felt that homosexuality was immoral.

McCandlish also identified that, as head of the household, the lesbian woman generally has less earning power and social status than her adult male counterparts. This was supported by a study by Turner, Scadden and Harris (1990) on ten single gay fathers and eleven single lesbian mothers which revealed that the mothers were more economically strained. In addition, they were found to experience greater difficulty in reconciling their sexual identity and parent roles, and reported poorer relationships with their ex-spouses.

Although artificial insemination appears to be a viable biological birthing option for lesbians, the process holds several challenges and tasks for them. Pies(1990) identified that since biological birthing is an option available to both partners in a lesbian relationship, a decision would need to be made about who would be first to conceive. This decision would also be influenced by the fact that the non-biological mother may not legally adopt the child or gain custody, in the event of separation of the partners (McCandlish, 1987; Pies, 1990).

An additional hindrance in the artificial insemination process may relate to the physician's choice not to perform the procedure, if it is known that the recipient is lesbian (McCandlish, 1987). Although not mentioned in the literature reviewed, a practical consideration involved in artificial insemination would be the cost of the process.

Pies (1990) found that concerns of whether or not the identity of the biological father should be known to the child, or whether withholding this fact would be psychologically damaging to the child, were also central to the artificial insemination option of biological birthing. She also noted that the risk of contacting HIV during the insemination process was a real concern to women. Whereas prior to the AIDS epidemic women preferred using gay men as donors, the high infection rate among gay men has led them to consider using unknown donors or approach heterosexual men in this regard.

#### 5.2.7. CHALLENGES FACING CHILDREN OF GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS

A study by Harris and Turner (1986) on the reactions of children to parental disclosure of their gay or lesbian identity revealed a greater tendency for positive than negative responses.

Some initial responses in this regard included closeness, confusion, not understanding, worrying, knowing all along, shame, disbelief, anger, shock and guilt. Similar findings were reported in a study by Bigner and Bozett (1990) on the responses of children of gay fathers. Wyers (1987), in a study comparing the impact of initial disclosure with current feelings of children of gay fathers, revealed a similar trend. Forty per cent of the fathers noted positive reactions from their children after their initial disclosure, while 25% reported negative reactions and 35% reported uncertainty. With regard to current feelings, Wyers reported that 50% of these children were positive about their father's gay identity, 5% were negative and 45% were uncertain.

One of the primary concerns noted in children of gay or lesbian parents related to questions of their own sexual orientation. Bozett (1987) identified such a concern particularly in adolescents who have had homosexual experiences. Pennington (1987) found that girls whose mothers were lesbian tended to be more concerned with the issue of their own orientation than boys with lesbian mothers. She felt that this may relate to the latter identifying less with their mothers than girls would. Ariel and Stearns have also found that female adolescents, of lesbian mothers, are concerned about their own sexual orientation and tend to view this in the context of their close relationships with their mothers. They stated further, that for some of these girls, their mother's sexuality was interpreted as a rejection of males and thus a rejection of their own heterosexual desires. In these cases, the authors noted a concern about their being criticised in their selection of male friends and their own sexual exploration. Bozett (1987) and Pennington (1987) emphasised the importance of gay and lesbian parents supporting and assuring children with regard to the normalcy of concerns they may have about their emerging sexuality or experiencing same-sex feelings (i.e., that homosexual experimentation, for example, is not uncommon among young people).

A second concern expressed by children of gay and lesbian parents relates to their peers' possible reactions and responses to the fact of their parents' homosexuality (Ariel and Stearns, 1992; Bigner and Bozett, 1990; Gottman, 1990; Pennington, 1987). It is in this regard that Pennington stated that when children are old enough to realise that same-sex relationships are not very socially acceptable, they become concerned that other children may discover the sexual identity of their parent and consequently isolate or ostracise them. Additionally, Bigner and Bozett (1990) noted that a central concern was that others may assume that they are also gay.

These views are supported by Ariel and Stearns (1992) who added that the adolescent who struggles with establishing his or her identity in the world is ordinarily concerned with the perceptions of the peer group. In the case of having a gay or lesbian parent, there is the added concern of peer group reactions and responses should the child or adolescent disclose his or her status in this regard. Thus, children need to decide on the viability of coming out as children of gay or lesbian parents, possible inhibitions about inviting friends home or dealing with insults and jokes regarding homosexuality in which the other children engage in (Ariel and Stearns, 1992).

Another concern of children living with their parent and their gay or lesbian partner relates to the discomfort of having two mothers or fathers (Pennington, 1987; Pies, 1990). Pies identified that this concern was evident in children since we are dealing with a culture-bound tradition that perpetuates the notion of only one same-sex parent per family. The addressing of this concern needs to occur at the level of educating family, friends and the community about the validity of the role of the non-biological parent.

Although available studies have highlighted these primary concerns of children of gay and lesbian parents, there nevertheless appears to be strong support for, and acknowledgement of, the parent's sexual identity. In cases where there appears to be rejection of the sexual identity of the parent, there still appears to be acceptance of the parent in the caregiving role (Bigner and Bozett, 1990; Bozett, 1987).

#### 5.2.8. FACTORS FACILITATING POSITIVE RESPONSES TO PARENT SEXUAL IDENTITY

Clark (1977), in his capacity as a clinical psychologist and gay parent, stated that it was important for the gay person not to conceal his identity from his offspring, since concealment implied a cause for shame and was likely to give the same message to the latter. This view is strongly supported by researchers of both gay and lesbian parenting who have found that a parent's own positive acceptance of identity facilitates positive acceptance of this identity by the children. Shame and confusion, in the same sense, are seen to influence similar responses in children (Miller, 1979; Bigner and Bozett, 1990).

Bozett (1987) identified that early disclosure was more conducive to the children's acceptance of parent sexual identity, as delayed disclosure allowed more space for society's homonegative values to be imbibed. Disclosure, when children were younger, as opposed to when they were older, is also recommended, as it is observed that when they are older they are more likely to understand and be sensitive to the stigma associated with homosexuality (Coleman, 1990; Gottman, 1990; Pennington, 1987).

Bozett (1987) found that stable, long-term relationships between gay and lesbian parents and their partners also facilitated the acceptance of their sexual identity and lifestyle by their children. On the other hand, Gottman (1990) observed that parental identity disclosure could be doubly traumatic for the child if this became evident to the latter at about the same time that the impending dissolution of the parental relationship is made evident.

#### 5.2.9. *EFFECTS OF GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTING*

Pennington (1987), from an extensive exploration of studies which evaluated the impact of lesbian parenting on children's development and well-being, concluded that children raised by parents who are homosexual are afforded equal opportunities for their development and well-being as are children of heterosexual parents. Bigner and Bozett (1990), as a result of their review of studies on children of gay fathers, similarly maintained that "there is no evidence of any kind that demonstrates that living with a homosexual parent has any significant negative effects on children" (p.162).

Although there appears to have been a significant number of formal studies exploring the effects of gay and lesbian parenting, several limitations in the design and methodology of these studies have limited their generalisability and usefulness in influencing positive attitudes in this regard. Gottman (1990) identified that such studies are based on relatively small samples, tend to lack statistical analyses, usually involve indirect observation and sometimes focus on poorly defined variables. Other problems identified by Gottman relate to unmatched variables between the experimental and control groups (except for the sexual identity of the parent) and the use of subjects over a wide age range.

However, despite these limitations, Gottman (1990) concluded that significant support existed for the following hypotheses:

- There are no significant differences reported on gender role measured between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual mothers;
- Children parented by lesbian mothers tend to exhibit socially sanctioned gender roles (or sex-typed behaviours).

Studies on the sexual orientation of children of gay and lesbian parents appear to be limited by similar methodological constraints as those relating to gender role and identity. However, findings tend to suggest that most children express a heterosexual orientation (Bozett, 1987; Miller, 1979).

The study by Miller (1979) on twenty-seven daughters and twenty-one sons of gay parents found that only one son was gay and three daughters, lesbian. Bozett (1981a, in Bozett, 1987), in a study exploring the sexual orientation of twenty five children of gay and lesbian parents, found that none was gay or lesbian, even though they were at an age where this could be ascertained. A follow up study by Bozett (1981b in Bozett, 1987) on nineteen children of gay and lesbian parents revealed that two sons were gay and one daughter was bisexual. Bigner and Bozett (1990), while having acknowledged the paucity of information in this area, maintained that there is consensus that homosexuality is not transmitted from parent to child by virtue of them both being in the same environment.

Harris and Turner (1986), in studying specific parenting behaviours of gay fathers in fact noted a tendency for the latter to develop traditional gender identity in their children by, for example, providing them with sex-typed toys. Similarly, Hoeffler (1981 in Coleman, 1990), who investigated the relationship between lesbian mothers and their children, found that these mothers tended to be less tolerant of crossdressing and more favoured towards girls developing an interest towards males. In keeping with this trend, Coleman (1990), from her review of studies in the field, revealed that lesbian mothers did not necessarily nurture the development of homosexuality in their children.

However, they tended to hold non-sexist views and ambitions for their children and stated no particular preference for their child's sexual orientation. She concluded that there is no support for the premise that a lesbian mother's sexual orientation has any debilitating effect on a child's development.

Studies of sexual orientation in children of lesbian parents tend also to show no clear link between the sexual identity of the parent and that of the child. In a study by Paul (1985 in Gottman, 1990) on a sample of sixteen women (average age of 22 years), 66% identified themselves as heterosexual and perceived sexual orientation to be open to fluctuation.

An intensive, comparative study of adult daughters of divorced lesbian mothers (N=35) and divorced heterosexual mothers who had remated (N=35) and who had not remated (N=35) was conducted by Gottman (1990) in order to provide more objective information on the relative influence of maternal sexual identity on gender identity, gender role, sexual orientation and social adjustment. The three groups were matched with regard to maternal marital status, number of subjects and the control of extraneous variables (i.e., the presence of a male role model; demographic, educational and socio-economic factors; number and ages of siblings, duration and quality of paternal visits and the previous relationships of the subjects). The dependent variables were assessed on psychometric instruments of adequate reliability and validity (i.e., The Personal Attributes Questionnaire, The Masculinity and Femininity Scales and a bipolar Masculinity-Femininity Scale). Data, according to Gottman, was analysed using several statistical techniques.

Gottman (1990), found no significant difference in sexual orientation between the two groups. Approximately 74% of the subjects of all groups scored high on heterosexuality. In addition, 33% of the 28% who scored high on homosexuality showed a tendency towards bisexuality. With regard to well-being, Gottman found that all three groups scored similarly in terms of leadership ability, self-reliance, interpersonal flexibility and self-confidence. What appeared to have an influence on these traits was whether brothers were present or absent in the home, rather than the maternal sexual identity. From this study, Gottman concluded that intimacy modelled in a home during the rearing of daughters positively influenced security and well-being regardless of the sex of the mother's partner.

Similar findings were reported by Patterson (1992) following her review of research on the personal and social development of children of gay and lesbian parents. In this regard, none of the studies reviewed (i.e., on sexual identity, personal development and social relationships among these children) suggested that the development of these children had been undermined, relative to that of children of heterosexual households.

Studies exploring the self-concept and self-esteem of children of gay and lesbian parents have also shown no positive correlation between the parent's sexual orientation and the self-esteem of the children (Coleman, 1990). These studies, Coleman concluded, support the view that variables such as self-concept may be influenced instead by the parent's attitude, values and other personality characteristics, rather than sexual orientation.

Further support for the notion that parental sexual orientation is poorly correlated with a child's development is provided by a study of children of thirty seven, single-parent and lesbian families (Patterson, 1994). In this regard, the study explored the social development by administering three child adjustment assessments viz., The Child Behaviour Checklist, The Eder Children's Self-View Questionnaire and a standard interview regarding sex role identity, to children of lesbian couples (N=26), single mothers (N=7) and lesbian couples who were separated at the time of the study (N=4). The sample included mostly well educated participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds (White; Afro-American and Hispanic). The ages of the children ranged from four to nine years. Several statistical techniques were utilised so as to thoroughly analyse the data. Although several methodological criteria (e.g., the relatively unmatched samples of these groups) undermined the generalisability of the study, comparison of the findings with available norms has suggested to Patterson that normal psychosocial development had occurred in children born to, or adopted by, lesbian mothers. In this sense, the children had demonstrated normal levels of social competence, behaviour and sexual identity.

Pennington (1987), from her extensive review of studies on the effects of gay and lesbian parenting, concluded that children (particularly those younger than seven years) are more affected by the divorce or separation of parents than by their mother being homosexual.

Coleman (1990) reiterated this view by stating that the primary trauma for children of homosexual parents lies with the threat of disintegration of the parental relationship, rather than with the sexual identity of the parent.

In fact, studies comparing homosexual parents with heterosexual parents have shown the former to put tremendous effort into being proficient parents (Bigner and Bozett, 1990; Patterson, 1994). Congruent with this, Bigner and Jacobson (1989b in Bigner and Bozett, 1990), in a comparison of the responses of homosexual and heterosexual fathers on the Iowa Parent Behaviour Scale, found the homosexual parents to be more strict and more consistent in emphasising the setting of limits in children's behaviour.

There was also a greater tendency for gay fathers, as compared with heterosexual fathers, to nurture cognitive skills and emphasise verbal communication with their children. Although gay fathers were found to be more authoritative than their non-gay counterparts, they were reported as being more sensitive and responsive to the perceived needs of their children. Based on these findings, Bigner and Jacobson (in Bigner and Bozett, 1990) described gay fathers as being more orientated to nurturing expressive role functions than sex-role functions.

Patterson (1994), from a review of studies by Steckel (conducted in 1985 and 1987) on children of lesbian and heterosexual parents, observed that children of lesbian mothers had more favourable perceptions of themselves than did children of heterosexual parents. In these studies, the children of heterosexual parents saw themselves as more aggressive as compared with children of lesbian mothers who saw themselves as more loveable. The latter were also described by teachers, in these studies, as more affectionate, more responsive and protective of younger children while children of heterosexual parents were described by teachers as more bossy, domineering and negative.

#### 5.2.10. CONCLUSION

Despite the evidence from several studies on gay and lesbian parenting showing parental sexual orientation (particularly homosexuality) not to be related to pathology or deviancy in offsprings, as well as the efforts of recognised international psychological associations to remove the labels of deviancy and pathology from homosexuality, the sexual orientation of gay men and lesbian

women still appears to be viewed as pathological by society. Consequently, as Baptiste (1987, in Bozett, 1987) remarked, "even under the best of circumstances, children in gay stepfamilies may experience difficulty, since it is not easy for them to grow up in a family that is disapproved of by society and to be labelled as pathological or undesirable by association." (p. 59).

Pennington (1987) added that it is important to understand that there is no inherent pathology in lesbian or gay families. She believed that the perception of pathology is motivated by the homophobia of this culture. It is true, however, that children in gay and lesbian families face the double challenge of living in a different form of family and having a different kind of mother or father.

### 5.3. AGEING

Older gays and lesbians (i.e., approximately fifty years and older) as well as the psychosocial process of ageing among this population, appear to be given very slight research attention. Available research, according to Shannon and Woods (1991), has been mostly descriptive in nature and based on small samples. Berger (1984) stated that the absence of research and public discussion has contributed to misinformation and stereotypes around older gays and lesbians. In western society, the generalisation and stigmatisation of the elderly as senile, sexually incapable or politically conservative, amongst other negative stereotypes, also appears to be applied to older gays and lesbians (Kelly, 1977).

Researchers have found, however, that the overall perception of older gays and lesbians is even more unsatisfactory than that of elderly persons in general (Berger, 1984; Kelly, 1977; Shannon and Woods, 1991). Some of the stereotypes observed by Kelly (1977), specifically with regard to older gays, include the loss of physical attractiveness and sex appeal; the inability to form lasting relationships; being oversexed; disengagement from the gay world and retreating further into the closet; fitting the label of "old queen" and being highly effeminate.

Weinberg and Williams (1974), having explored male homosexuality across USA, Netherlands and Denmark, similarly identified stereotypes which portrayed the older men as lacking in self acceptance, being anxious, depressed, lonely and generally unhappy.

However, available studies on homosexual persons (i.e., specifically on men) provide data that contradict these perceptions. Weinberg and Williams (1974), from a comparative study of gays in the age categories of under twenty, twenty to thirty-five, thirty-six to forty-five and over forty five years, across USA, Netherlands and Denmark (N=1804) revealed that many of the negative perceptions of heterosexuals and younger gays towards older gays were not valid. The authors found no age related difference in self-acceptance, anxiety, depression or loneliness. Overall findings suggested that, in some areas, older subjects tended to show greater well-being than their younger counterparts. The older respondents also showed less concern about having their sexual identity revealed, had more stable self-concepts, were less effeminate and less likely to seek psychiatric treatment, than younger men. The authors also concluded that many of the issues related to the well-being of older persons were associated more with the ageing process itself rather than with their homosexual identity.

Kelly (1977), from a study of gays, aged sixteen to seventy nine (N=241), living in Los Angeles, California, examined attitudes, stereotypes and factors related to ageing. This study also generated findings which challenged the negatively stereotyped view of older gays. For example, sixty three per cent of the older men, (65-79 year age range) still socialised with peers, typically having many gay friends and fewer heterosexual ones.

Berger (1984), having examined the lives of 18 older gays and lesbians in the USA (from the 40 - 70 year age range), also concluded that stereotypes associated with older gays are not accurate. His findings reinforced previous evidence that most older gay and lesbian persons function in networks of friends, lovers, family and community institutions.

Older gays and lesbians have also been identified to have developed strengths, which facilitate their development and contribute to their well-being. Shannon and Woods (1991) observed that gays, for example, may be more prepared to live independently as they grow older. In this context, they are seen not to have expectations of relying on children or family and they are seen to have greater continuity in their lives (i.e., by not having to deal with children leaving home, or by not having to fulfil rigid male stereotyped roles in a household).

Woods, similarly to Berger (1984), maintained that older gays are also more likely than younger gays to have developed a strong network of supportive friends, in addition to their primary relationships. In this sense, older gays, unless they have not 'come out', are unlikely to feel alone and isolated (Shannon and Woods, 1991).

Kelly's (1977) study in fact revealed the strength and resiliency of the majority of older gay participants in coping with the negativity of society. These findings provided support for the hypothesis that gays adapt well to ageing, at least partially, because the crisis around identity and stigmatisation have already been dealt with earlier in life.

Weinberg and Williams (1974), explained that the inaccurate view that is held of older gays is based on the fact that the homosexual world adulates youth. Thus, the older homosexual person is less valued with regard to certain forms of social interaction and sexuality. The authors believed that the low esteem accorded to the older gays in the socio-sexual context by younger gays, social scientists and the media, is what contributes to the limited perspective on the life of older gays. Along very similar lines, Kelly (1978) wrote that despite increasing legal, religious, media and psychological tolerance towards homosexuality, the view of older gays has not changed significantly, since many of the accounts of the gay lifestyle focus on younger men. As a result, older men are stereotyped both by heterosexist discrimination and by younger gays who adopt this limited perspective.

In addition to being negatively stereotyped, and having both young homosexual persons and heterosexuals act on these perceptions, several of the challenges facing the older gay or lesbian person have been identified (Browning, Reynolds and Dworkin, 1991; Kelly, 1977; Shannon and Woods, 1991). Shannon and Woods (1991) argued that older gay and lesbian individuals, similar to older heterosexual individuals, are primarily concerned with their health. However, older gays and lesbians face unique threats to well-being, as a result of their sexual identity. In this sense, threats of exposure, of job loss, of being arrested or physically violated and harassed, contribute to a sense of vulnerability in the latter. They maintained that irrespective of whether these threats are real or perceived, they promote a sense of fear among older homosexual persons.

These individuals, merely being older, are also exposed to greater social oppression than younger gays and lesbians.

Shannon and Woods also identified that internalised homophobia, resulting in introjected feelings of low self-worth, have given rise to anxiety and depression in the older gay or lesbian person. The fulfilment of sexual or affectional needs was identified by Shannon and Woods (1991) as a further challenge for this group. They elaborated that the perceptions of older gays as "dirty old men", for example, made this need seem inappropriate. In support of this, Weinberg and Williams (1974), identified that older gays, being less valued by younger gays, may also experience problems in terms of procuring sexual partners.

Finally, older gay and lesbian persons seemed to receive less sympathy and support relating to the loss of a partner or significant other. This may be made more complex by problems with family members of the deceased and through the insensitive attitudes of mental health and medical professionals (Kelly, 1977; Kimmel, 1977 in Shannon and Woods 1991).

Browning et. al. (1991), citing a study by Kehol in 1988, reported that the concerns of older lesbians related to loneliness and financial stability. At this stage, there was also an awareness of the need to be assisted by professional caregivers, yet there was the reluctance to trust either the caregiving or legal systems.

## CONCLUSION

The area of the older gay and lesbian persons, as stated earlier, is one seriously demanding exploration. Available studies, while generating useful insights, nevertheless appear to neglect the consideration of variables such as ethnicity, demographic factors, financial resources, support systems, health status, marital and parenting history, and the chronological age at which these individuals have 'come out', amongst others. The aspect of ageing, with regard to lesbian women or minority ethnic populations, deserves particular attention. An attempt has been made to bridge this gap in the literature, in the present investigation. The methodology utilised in this process is described in the following chapter (i.e., Chapter Six) while the findings are discussed in Chapter Seven.

## CHAPTER 6

### METHODOLOGY

#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the area of homosexuality appears to have been given more literary and research attention. The literary focus generally has been by gays and lesbians from various professions, who have shared their experiences of being homosexual, or who have written in a way so as to support the identity development, increase the awareness of, and provide relevant information for, functioning of gay and lesbian persons. Examples of such authors are Berzon, Clark, Altman, Gevisser and Krause. Empirical research in the field appears to be less available internationally, and far less accessible in South Africa, possibly as a result of the pre-election sanctions in South Africa as well as the tail end of sanctions in the post-election period.

The greatest dearth in research, however, appears to be in the area of homosexuality among non-western groups. Some general record appears in anthropological literature. However, the great time lapse and the tremendous socio-political evolution in the world, makes this obviously irrelevant for non-westerners living westernised, urbanised lives.

In South Africa, available literature indicates that the experiencing of the black gay and lesbian person has been given negligible research or empirical attention. In fact, a brief pilot study conducted by the author and described in Chapter One, revealed that 'gay' or 'homosexual' conveyed to people in general, a picture of a white, gay, male.

More recently authors such as Gevisser (1990,1992,1993,1995) and Miller (1992) have described the lifestyles of black gays and lesbians through brief case studies and records of their observations.

The South African media, as described in Chapter Three, have also included the views of the gay and lesbian community, on the one hand, and the public, on the other, on issues relevant to the former.

The purpose of this study was to focus ontologically on the psychosocial experiencing of a doubly oppressed minority, that is, the black person who is homosexual in South Africa. Rather than support or challenge hypotheses generated in the UK or USA literature and research, or provide theories of why people are homosexual, the study embraced the following aims:

1. To provide more holistic information on the gay and lesbian worldview in general (Many of the present studies tend to focus on deficiencies rather than on aspects of growth);
2. To provide a conceptualisation of the ontology of black gay and lesbian individuals in South Africa within a psychosocial context;
3. To explore the effects of a dual oppressive system related to race and sexual identity.

To address the aims of the study meaningfully and holistically required a thorough exploration of the experiencing and issues of the black gay and lesbian person from the perspective of their world view. More importantly, it required gaining the co-operation and trust of these individuals whose visibility, at the point of initiation of the study was manifested by just two persons known to the author.

## 6.2. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

### 6.2.1. PARTICIPANTS

The intention at the outset of this project, was to procure a sizeable (approximately 50), nationally representative sample of black men and women who were gay or lesbian.

In the KwaZulu-Natal region, participants were procured through the author's friendship network, which rapidly extended itself into the existing gay and lesbian community, and the efforts of the KwaZulu-Natal Gay Community, a gay and lesbian support group in the area. More than 150 questionnaires were distributed in this way. Of these 23 (15%) were completed, and returned. Two of these were partially completed but were included in the study since it is primarily phenomenological in context, as opposed to statistical.

The demographic variables that described participants are discussed below.

#### 6.2.1.1. Gender

Although it was intended to obtain a representative sample of men and women for this study, the perceived lack of interest and unwillingness of several individuals who were approached in this regard, as well as the fact that no funding was received for this project, made this objective difficult to attain. Only 4 of approximately 60 women to whom questionnaires were distributed, completed and returned these. Nineteen, of 90 questionnaires, which were distributed to male persons were completed and returned.

#### 6.2.1.2. Age of Participants

The ages of participants ranged from 21 to 30 years. The average age was 25 years.

#### 6.2.1.3. Ethnic Background of Participants

The sample included 13 'Indian' participants (9 men; 4 women); 5 'Coloured' males and 5 'African' males.

(PS The terms Indian, Coloured and African, within the context of the study, have been defined at the outset of this thesis).

#### 6.2.1.4. Occupational Band

The vocations of the participants covered a broad spectrum including the fields of law, art, marketing, social science, journalism, veterinary and health sciences, and the catering, entrepreneurial and business fields. Only one respondent was unemployed. Seven of the respondents were students.

#### 6.2.1.5. Parent and Family Demographics

Since the study was framed within an ontological context, it appeared significant to explore the relevant environments of participants with regard to socio-economic variables (i.e., parental occupation/ occupational band); configuration of the family unit (nuclear or extended; number of siblings); position in family and history of homosexuality in the family.

The occupations/ occupational bands of the parents of participants covered a broad range that included pensioners, labourers, blue-collar workers, professionals and businessmen, and appeared to represent the different strata of the South African workforce.

Of the 21 participants who indicated the type of family with which they were either currently living, or with which they had lived, 17 came from nuclear families and 4 from extended families.

Seven of the respondents were from single parent families, headed by their mothers. Fifteen reported living with both parents. Respondents reported having between one and seven siblings with an average of three siblings.

The positions of respondents in their families varied, with most of them being the eldest (N=10 or 44%) and second eldest (N=7 or 30%).

The religious background was not specifically requested in this study, as religiosity, and not the specific religion of participants, was explored. The issue of religiosity, nevertheless, has been explored in the questionnaire and discussed in the review of literature (Chapter 5.3) and the final discussion (Chapter 7). From the responses to the questionnaire, it appeared that participants were from Hindu, Islamic and Christian (various denominations) faiths or described themselves as atheists or agnostics. This aspect and its relevance to the study will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

The history of homosexuality in the families of participants (nuclear or extended) was also explored and revealed that only 4 (17%) of the respondents were aware of relatives, other than siblings, who were gay or lesbian. Only 1 respondent (female) reported having a sibling (brother) who was gay.

#### 6.2.2. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire for the study was developed as a result of extensive reading in the area, informal interviews with white and two known black gay and lesbian persons, informal interviews with heterosexual persons on their views of homosexuality, and perceived gaps in the understanding of the black gay and lesbian experience as a result of the author's one year internship at the Gay and Lesbian Centre in Santa Barbara, California.

On completion, the questionnaire was presented for scrutiny to the author's black and white gay colleagues for their comments, criticisms and recommendations. This was to ensure that crucial items were not excluded, that ambiguities were avoided, language and terms were understood and that the questions came across respectfully.

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) focused on ontological issues, within a psychosocial context and addressed the following broad areas:

## Identity Development

- Biographical/Demographic data
- Self-identity Definition
- Homophobia and Coming Out

## Lifespan Development

- Developmental Processes (focusing on early childhood and adolescence)
- Relationships
- Parenting
- Ageing

## Social Influences

- Religiosity
- Legal Issues
- Psycho-Medical Issues
- Socio-Political Orientation

## General

These aspects were intended to provide an overview of the homosexual identity development process, the lifespan development process (early childhood to ageing) and relevant socio-political factors as they are integrated and internalised by individuals who are gay or lesbian, and black.

Where empirical research or information on these aspects has been available, it has been included in the review of literature (Chapters Two to Five), to provide an essential theoretical framework for the study.

The intention in exploring each of these aspects, as well as a discussion of the responses they have generated, will be undertaken in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

### 6.2.3. PROCEDURE

The questionnaire was distributed together with an amended form of the motivation presented in Chapter One. At the outset the intention was to be personally involved in administering the three-hour questionnaire either to individuals or groups of respondents. Only 2 participants responded to this suggestion. Other prospective participants, who did indicate an interest in being involved in this study, expressed the need to fill their questionnaires independently. Of the 38 questionnaires distributed in this manner, 6 were completed and returned.

A few participants expressed that the questionnaire tended to facilitate the self-insight and coming-out process. After being briefed on the intention of each question, they offered to oversee the completion of questionnaires by other subjects. Approximately 110 questionnaires were distributed through these individuals. Again, respondents expressed the desire to work independently. Several questionnaires given to the chairperson of the KwaZulu-Natal Gay Community, were circulated with the quarterly newsletter. Eventually 15 completed questionnaires were received through these networks. Some of the comments made by gay and lesbian persons to colleagues who distributed the questionnaires related to the inordinate length of the questionnaire (73 items, approximately 133 sub-items), the fact that they “did not feel ready to look at the stuff”, were “not interested” or “did not want to be guinea-pigs.” A total of 23 completed questionnaires were received from black gay and lesbian individuals.

### 6.3. INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The decision as to how best to organise, analyse and discuss data was governed by the intention to present findings in a coherent, integrated manner that would facilitate readability, draw attention to pertinent issues, link these to previous findings already reviewed in this thesis and, most importantly, to address the objectives of this study.

Since the questionnaire utilised in this study was long, thorough and covered a spectrum of perceptions, issues and concerns, the task of effectively organising and formatting the findings, without being reductionistic, presented a challenge. Although the sample (N=23) permitted the use of non-parametric statistical techniques for the analysis, this presented a danger of the oversimplification of data. In this sense, an attempt to quantify the primarily qualitative data of the study would seem to be reductionistic and contrary to the purpose of presenting a holistic conceptualisation of black gay and lesbian individuals. Thus, a phenomenological approach was adopted, even though frequency tables and percentages have been included to organise the data generated by the questionnaire. Within the paradigm of 'phenomenological', the initial focus has been on the exposition of individual responses and thereafter, on the contextualisation of common themes in the perceptions of black gays and lesbians as a group. A meta-analysis of available studies was of little use as the aims, research instrument and type of sample utilised were unique to this study. However, some guidelines in terms of the organisation and formatting of data, were attained from the empirical research conducted by Chung and Harmon (1994), Herek (1994) and Isaacs and McKendrick (1992).

Before organising data, items on the questionnaire were critically reviewed, so as to identify and group items which generated related information. Having extensively reviewed the literature in the field and through the responses, it became clear that several items were either redundant or misplaced in the initial questionnaire. Thus, some items were rearranged to add optimal value to the various aspects of this study.

It was also decided to integrate the results and discussion sections so as to facilitate the readability of the voluminous pool of responses generated by the questionnaire. As stated before, the organisation, analysis and discussion of the results were done in a manner that would provide the most meaningful framework against which to interpret and understand in context, the qualitative responses generated by this study. This will be undertaken in the next chapter (Chapter Seven) entitled "Results and Discussion."

CHAPTER SEVENRESULTS AND DISCUSSION7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on collating, integrating and offering psychodynamic impressions of, and a theoretical framework for, the responses generated in the study. Fundamental to this process is the attempt to address the major objectives and thus, the key questions of this study, outlined in Chapter One.

The first two objectives , providing more holistic information on the gay and lesbian world view and providing a conceptualisation of the ontology of black gay and lesbians in South Africa, are addressed within this entire chapter, although more specifically under the following headings:

- 7.3 Self-Identity Definition
- 7.4 Identity Development
- 7.5 Developmental Processes
- 7.6 Adulthood and Ageing
- 7.7 Perceptions of Current Psychosocial Influences.

The third objective, an exploration of the dual oppressive system related to race and sexual identity, is addressed specifically in 7.7.3, "Political Influences".

The conclusions are based on the actual responses of the participants and are related to, or corroborated with, findings from available research in the area.

In order to facilitate the integration and readability of the voluminous pool of information generated in this investigation, questions which elicited common response themes were discussed together. There is, therefore, not a one to one correlation between the results presented and the questions on the questionnaire.

## 7.2. *THE PARTICIPANTS*

Despite the small sample, this study attests to the diversity within the gay and lesbian community. In this regard, participants came from qualitatively different socio-economic and religious home environments, different family configurations (pertaining to the nuclear unit or extended family unit, and the possibility of any number of siblings), and had diverse vocational interests and occupations. This finding, supported by Weinberg and Williams (1974) and Isaacs and McKendrick (1992), challenges several theories attributing homosexuality to factors related to family configuration and roles.

Interestingly, the biographical details of participants in the study also challenged some of the stereotypic notions of gay and lesbian persons themselves. An obvious example of this is illustrated by the fact that 70% (N = 16) of the respondents believed that gays and lesbians were more likely to be found in creative jobs involving drama, music, photography or art. In fact only 9% (N = 2) of the participants were actually involved in, or pursuing creative vocations (i.e. art and advertising) as defined by the question in this regard (see item 70, Appendix A).

Some of the generalisations that were expressed in relation to the perceived creative interests of gay and lesbian persons were that “they are more sensitive and tend to think more creatively”; “they are more in touch with themselves and the environment. This sensitivity is essential to the arts” and “...most definitely. They are more creative and more dynamic.”

Only 9% (N=2) of the respondents contested the assumption of creativity, by stating that "... this is a stereotype. They are found in a wider spectrum of jobs." and "Not true. They are just more observable in these jobs."

Thus, while the several difficulties in procuring respondents have obviously limited the representativeness of the sample, an analysis of the biographical data attests to the diversity with respect to self and caregiving environments of gays and lesbians.

### 7.3. SELF-IDENTITY DEFINITION

The perceptions of respondents with regard to formal and colloquial terminology, used to describe homosexual individuals, are explored in this section, in order to provide more holistic information on the worldview of black gays and lesbians. The responses, elicited by questions exploring how individuals described themselves, how they felt about their sexuality and how they perceived the different terms used to describe homosexuality, are tabulated and discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

#### 7.3.1. Perception of Self

##### Results

TABLE 1 : ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE SELF (ITEM 1:APPENDIX A)

<i>RESPONSE TYPE</i>	<i>NO.</i>	<i>%</i>
Described self in terms of Homosexual orientation.	4	17,4
Described self in terms of General Personality Characteristics.	15	65,2
Blank	4	17,4

TABLE 2 : PERCEPTION OF SELF (ITEM 2: APPENDIX A)

RESPONSE TYPE	NO.	%
Perceived self in relation to Sexual Identity	5	21,7
Perceived self in terms of General Personality Characteristics.	13	56,5
Blank	5	21,7

Tables 1 and 2 reflect the responses of subjects to \*Item 1 ("Give one word to describe yourself.") and \*Item 2 ("How do you see yourself?") (Appendix A).

Results indicate that the majority of respondents described themselves more broadly than just in terms of their sexual orientation. The nominalisations used by 65% of the participants in fact described general personality nominalisations and traits that bear no apparent connotations to sexual preference or orientation. These perceptions challenge the tendency by both gay and lesbian individuals as well as heterosexuals to view homosexual individuals primarily in terms of their sexuality rather than in a holistic manner involving the social and psychological dimensions of being.

While there appeared the tendency for gay and lesbian individuals to describe *themselves* more broadly than the sexuality or sexual orientation dimension, their perception of homosexuality (Item 4a), as it pertained to the homosexual population in general, tended to be more reductionistic. The inclination of gay and lesbian individuals to view homosexuality primarily as an attraction, sexual experience or sexual preference between two same-sex individuals, as opposed to viewing it as a relationship, or in terms of emotional and other dimensions, is illustrated by the responses of 87% (N=20) of the participants, which described homosexuality essentially in terms of attraction or sexual activity. Although the terms gay and lesbian (Item 4b) appeared to be viewed more holistically as compared to homosexuality, the majority (57%) of the respondents still appeared to view it primarily as the attraction to same-sex partners.

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Footnote :

\* : All 'Items' discussed in this chapter are listed in Appendix A.

Respondents who described gay and lesbian more holistically viewed them as a “choice of lifestyle”, “an orientation towards own gender, including sexual, personality, emotional dimensions” and “individuals completely accepting and living their sexual orientation.”

The terms gay and lesbian, were also seen to be qualitatively equivalent by 57% of the respondents (Item 4c). Reasons offered to justify the perceived equivalence of these populations hinged on the premise that both groups were in “the same struggle.” The perception of difference between the groups, noted by 26% of the respondents, related to the difference in dynamics between gays and lesbians, the greater sensitivity and discretion of women who were homosexual, and the fact that gay men were perceived to outnumber lesbian women. Of interest, is the fact that five of the six respondents who perceived differences between the gay and lesbian populations were men. Yet, in the literature reviewed on gays and lesbians, there appeared to be a greater tendency by male authors to include lesbians under the broad banner of homosexuality or ‘gay’ issues (Gevisser, 1993; Herek, 1994; Miller, 1992): thus implying no perceived differences between the groups.

Another surprising observation that differs with the trend noticed in the research sample utilised in this study, is whereas female respondents perceived no qualitative difference between the gay and lesbian populations, many investigators, especially female researchers, tend to focus specifically on issues unique to lesbians (e.g., Browning et. al., 1991; Coleman, 1990; Goodman, 1977; Pies, 1990; Sophie, 1987).

The tendency of the majority of the participants in this sample to discount qualitative differences between the gay and lesbian individuals may be interpreted in several ways. The first of these relate to the fact that the sample utilised, specifically the women participants, are not representative of the lesbian population in South Africa. Thus, no conclusive premise regarding the relationship between gender of the homosexual individual and perception of the qualitative differences between gays and lesbians, may be established.

Secondly, the status of the participants in this study, as compared with those in the studies reviewed, is that they are both black and homosexual, a status inherently reflecting dual oppression pertaining to race and gender. In this respect the politicisation of black gays and lesbians, as regards their sexuality may be less significant as compared with their politicisation regarding racism (since the latter, in a South African context until very recently - i.e., after the April 1994 elections - commanded more dominant and critical attention than discrimination or oppression based on sexuality).

### 7.3.2. *Sexuality (Refer to Table 3)*

TABLE 3 : FEELINGS ABOUT OWN SEXUALITY (ITEM 3: APPENDIX A)

RESPONSE TYPE	NO.	%
Positive (e.g. confident; natural; completely comfortable; proud; content)	12	52,2
Neutral/ambivalent (e.g. satisfied and some guilt; one of those things; confused but accepting)	9	39,1
Negative (resentment and indifference)	2	8,7

The attempts to establish how black gay and lesbian individuals felt about their own sexuality (Item 3) procured responses that ranged from ambivalence to positive perceptions of self (refer to Table 3). Resentment and the desire to change gender, were expressed by a mere 9% (N=2) of the sample. Many of the respondents who expressed ambivalence about their sexual orientation, however, tended to describe an overall or strong positive feeling. In this regard, responses such as "99% comfortable", "comfortable but unable to share with family", "quite comfortable, satisfied and some guilt", "content and some guilt because of the community", are suggestive of a positive perception of sexuality, at least at a self-level. In many of these instances, the discomfort with sexual identity appeared to lie with the other-self perception.

7.3.3. *Perception Of Terminology Used To Describe Gays And Lesbians (Refer to table 4)*

TABLE 4 : LEAST LIKED TERM DESCRIBING HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS (ITEM 5 : APPENDIX A)

RESPONSE TYPE	NO.	%
MOFFIE	14	51.9
HOMOSEXUAL	3	11
QUEEN	3	11
SISSY	1	3.7
TOFFEE	1	3.7
NGQINGILI/STABANE	1	3.7
LESBIAN	1	3.7
FAGGOT	1	3.7
NOT STRAIGHT	1	3.7
QUEER	1	3.7

PS : Multiple responses generated.

The word moffie, as a colloquial term to describe homosexual persons, appeared to generate the most negativity (Item 5). This was reflected in the responses of 51.9% of the sample with all, except one of the respondents, being male. Several of these respondents perceived this as being strongly associated with effeminate men and early recollections of the disapproval and disdain expressed to such individuals by significant others (peers and adults in their communities). Isaacs and McKendrick (1992) have actually traced the origin of moffie to the 1950's to the Cape 'coloured' community, and its reference to drag artistes (primarily 'coloured' men).

Queen was found to be offensive to 11% of the respondents. A similar percentage of participants found the term homosexual to be undesirable. For the former respondents, the association of queen with male effeminacy generated disapproval.

For the participants who disliked homosexual, this feeling seemed to be linked to the clinical or medical connotation given to sexuality and the perception that homosexuality fundamentally described sexuality rather than the holistic person.

The women in this study identified words such as queer and faggot as offensive. One of the four respondents found lesbian to be a negative term for women.

Interestingly, only 26% of the respondents provided definitions which they considered positive. Of these gay seemed to be the most preferred term of reference.

From the responses of particularly male respondents, it would appear that terms associating homosexuality with effeminacy are rejected. Words such as gay and family which tend to be perceived as holistic and suggestive of a lifestyle or which suggest the inclusion of the emotional and psychological dimensions, seemed to be more acceptable to gay and lesbian persons.

#### 7.3.4. *Generic Terminology*

The reaction to generic terminology to describe the gay or lesbian population or homosexuality in general, was explored within the context of initial reactions and current reactions to the words straight, homosexual and gay/lesbian (Items 6 and 7, respectively).

Initial reactions to the words gay and lesbian appeared to generate positive (39%) and equivalent negative (22%) and ambivalent (22%) responses. In a positive sense, it was seen to be less stigmatised, denoted more acceptance than homosexual, provoked "interest and delight" and provided a sense of "identity and identification."

Negative responses were expressed as “dislike-because gay was linked to an effeminate, white male”, “female who performs dirty acts with the same”, “queens in western countries” and “sad”. Ambivalent responses to the words gay and lesbian read as “excitement and anxiety” and “unsure”,

Current reactions to these terms appeared to be neutral (48%) to positive and affirming (52%) suggesting an integration of homosexual identity within the self-concept. Neutral reactions were expressed by phrases such as “no problem”, “just another word”, “no reaction” and “defining term.” The current positive and affirming reactions towards gay and lesbian were described by expressions like “joy”, “more comfortable”, “describes my identity” and “happy about myself.”

Initial reactions to the generic use of homosexual appeared to generate equivalent positive, negative and ambivalent responses. Some of the negative responses reported were “guilt”, “fear”, “disgust”, that it was “not acceptable” and the perception that it was a term used to describe the “mentally sick.”

Positive responses pertained to its contribution to identity development. In this sense, it seemed to provide a trigger and framework for information gathering and self-analysis. This is reflected by responses such as “interested”, “curious”, “sounded scientific-trigger for information gathering.”

Ambivalent initial responses to homosexual involved a combination of positive and unpleasant emotions. This is aptly described by a response such as “curiosity-excitement-fear.”

Current reactions to homosexual tended to be mostly neutral. In this respect, the word was seen as a means of facilitating self-identification while conveying a non-committal, clinical sense to the respondent.

Straight, appeared to generate the most negative responses (30%). Initial reactions to this term evoked neutral responses, particularly where the term, at the time, was meaningless to the participant.

The term also initially evoked negative responses which occurred because of an awareness of the undesirability, by society in general, of homosexuality or a gay or lesbian lifestyle. This was expressed by views to the effect that the use of straight made homosexuals “look crooked”, that it implied “one doing good things”, was “cruel” and made “homosexuality look demeaning.”

Current reactions to straight tended to be less negative and more neutral. Only one respondent still perceived straight to imply the “crooked nature of homosexuals.” More neutral attitudes to this word were described by comments such as “not bothered by it” or “just another definition.” Thirty-five per cent of the sample internalised straight as an anchor, to affirm their positive identity as a gay or lesbian person. Some of the responses in this regard included “not wanted to be this”, “challenge” and “feel sorry for them.”

### *7.3.5. Cultural and Colloquial Terms*

The responses from participants, to cultural words or phrases to describe homosexuality and gays and lesbians (Item 8), revealed that, except for terms such as *staban/istabane*, *ngqingili/nekumbili* and *iskhayi* (mentioned by only two African respondents), only general colloquial terms such as *moffie*, *fag* and *gay*, were known.

One of these two respondents who provided the African terminology felt, however, that these words actually described effeminate men rather than persons who were homosexual.

Thus, the knowledge of cultural terminology expressed by the black gay and lesbian participants in this study, appeared to extend to a knowledge of general colloquial terms used by the public to describe individuals who are homosexuals, or effeminate, rather than specific ethnic terminology used to describe homosexuality, homosexual persons or effeminate men.

### 7.3.6. *Summary*

It would appear that black gays and lesbians in South Africa have derived their identity in terms of perceptions of sexuality, lifestyle and self perceptions within the context of information that is made available to them through the perception of significant others (peers and significant elders), or their observations of visible gays and lesbians. While their self perceptions tended to be more holistic and embracing of the physical and emotional dimensions, there appeared a strong tendency to view gays and lesbians, as a group, stereotypically. This stereotyping extended, for example, to associating homosexuality with sexuality or physical attraction, and to typing homosexual persons into a specific vocational category (i.e., creative occupations).

Nevertheless, a comparison of initial and current reactions to terms such as gay, lesbian and straight suggests the growing self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-nurturant attitudes of black gays and lesbians towards themselves and others in the gay community.

## 7.4. *IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT*

In this section of the discussion, responses to the concepts of 'homophobia', 'coming out' and levels of coming out, are explored in order to specifically answer the first key question "What are some of the issues that need to be addressed by black gays and lesbians in their acknowledgement of sexual identity?".

### 7.4.1. *Homophobia*

Terms such as closet gay/lesbian and homophobia are terms with which the majority of the participants seemed familiar (Items 10 and 11). The terms were described as "a lack of interaction with other gay and lesbian persons", "not acting on same sex feelings" and "not being out to self and others." A more critical view of this concept was offered by respondents who associated closet gay/lesbian with a non-acceptance of self-identity as a homosexual person.

The closet gay/lesbian person, in this context, was described as being “paranoid with discretion”, “not admitting or accepting his homosexuality”, “suppressing feelings” and as “not having come to terms with self.”

Homophobia also appeared to be defined critically and somewhat harshly, encompassing words such as “irrational fear”, “hatred of gay people”, “hatred of homosexuality.” The word “fear” to describe homophobia was in fact used by 40% of the respondents in this study. Homophobia was seen by 44% of participants to involve the “derogatory”, “degrading”, and “dangerous attitudes” of the general public to homosexuality and homosexuals. A large number (26%) related homophobia to the “fear in discomfort” of gay and lesbian individuals in “showing a gay inclination” or “gay association.”

Thus, the tendency was to view the concepts of closet gay/lesbian and homophobia judgmentally (in a negative sense) as well as non-personally. In this respect, only three of twenty-three respondents admitted to being homophobic, but proceeded to qualify their responses by saying that it occurred “in some instances” or “to a degree”.

Seventy per cent of the participants considered themselves not homophobic, and justified this by describing themselves as “broad-minded”, “more embracing”, “likes self and acknowledges gayness”, “totally self accepting” or asserting that “homosexuality is natural” and that “homosexuality affirms rather than threatens me.”

What seems evident from these responses is the awareness that homophobia is a negatively expressed attitude by gay, lesbian and heterosexual individuals, and that it militates against the coming out process both at the self and ‘coming out to other’ levels. This perception is conveyed consistently by authors such as Atkinson and Hackett(1988), Coleman(1990) and Shildo(1994), and has already been discussed in Chapter 4.2.

The perception of homophobia within the respondents was further probed by the question of whether they would change anything physical about themselves (Item 12). Only 9% (N=2) of the 23 respondents mentioned a sex change. A large number (44%) of the respondents felt that there was "nothing" that they would want changed while an equivalent number of only male respondents indicated a preference for more masculine changes to their physique (e.g., "bigger frame", "good muscle tone", "hunky body", "more muscles").

These responses tended to support the relative acceptance of gay and lesbian identity in the participants at least at a self-level and, at a broader level, challenged the notion of effeminacy stereotypically bestowed on especially gay men by the public at large and by many of the respondents themselves (i.e., the reasons for disapproving the term moffie, for instance).

#### 7.4.2. *Coming Out*

The process by which individuals acknowledged their sexual identity to themselves and others (i.e., parents, siblings, friends, colleagues and members of the general public) is explored in this section. Responses to questions exploring the coming out process are tabulated and discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

##### 7.4.2.1. *Acknowledging Self-Identity*

TABLE 5 :ACKNOWLEDGING SELF IDENTITY (ITEMS 13,14,15;  
APPENDIX A)

	AGE RANGE	AVERAGE AGE
First Attraction	always there: 6 - 21 Years	13 Years
First Possibility	always there/early childhood: 10 - 20 Years	15 Years
First Feeling	10 - 28 Years	17 Years

Table 5 summarises the responses exploring the first homosexual attraction experienced by respondents (Items 13, 14 and 15). The first attraction to same-sexed persons appeared on average to occur at age thirteen. This also appears to have preceded the first possibility and the first feelings of being gay or lesbian. Acknowledgement of self as gay or lesbian (or homosexual), illustrated by first feelings of being homosexual appears to have occurred later, at approximately age seventeen.

*TABLE 6 : EMOTIONS REGARDING FIRST FEELINGS (ITEM 15b : APPENDIX A)*

<i>CATEGORY OF RESPONSE</i>	<i>RESPONSES</i>	<i>NO.</i>	<i>%</i>
Positive	Peaceful; in love; happy; secure; content	7	30,4
Negative	Why me?; angry and ashamed; afraid of being found out; guilt; disgust	6	26,1
Ambivalent	Fear and confusion; tension and excitement; love, jealousy; joy, guilt, lonely	8	34,8
Blank		2	8,7

The emotions accompanying the acknowledgement of one's homosexuality (refer to Table 6) were varied, the patterns of which appear somewhat related to age. In this sense, participants who acknowledged their homosexuality at an earlier age appeared stuck with negative recollections of feelings while those who acknowledged this identity at a later age seemed able to identify and accept the process more easily. For example, a participant at age thirteen recalled "anger and shame"; a participant at age twelve recalled "guilt" and a participant at eleven recalled "fear, disgust, negative self-worth."

On the other hand, a participant who acknowledged this identity at age twenty eight described a process of “fear, denial, betrayal, acceptance”; a participant at twenty recalled “depressed-then hopeful-way forward”; another participant at age twenty recalled “fear, confusion, tension, excitement.”

Overall, however, no conclusive generalisations could be made from these responses because the expression of negative, positive and ambivalent experiences accompanying the awareness and acknowledgement of being homosexual, occurred across a wide age range.

This trend could, nonetheless, suggest that individuals who are faced with a possibility of their homosexuality later in their life move through the negative emotions to a positive mindset, or one that propels them forward in terms of this identity. This may be related to the mastery of parallel crises, emergent during the teenage years. Those faced with the possibility of homosexuality earlier in life (early adolescence) may have been less equipped or less able to move out of a negative mindset as a consequence of their lack of mastery of developmental issues or their lack of exposure to valid information about homosexuality, or positive role models.

*TABLE 7 : LEVELS OF COMING OUT (ITEM 16 : APPENDIX A)*

<i>LEVEL OF OUTNESS</i>	<i>NUMBER OUT</i>	<i>NUMBER NOT OUT</i>	<i>% OUT</i>
Out to self	23	-	100
Out to siblings	13	10	57
Out to friends	22	01	97
Out to parents	10	13	44
Out in the workplace	6	17	26
Out to the public	7	16	30

Item 16 (Appendix A) explored the extent to which respondents were out. In this study the entire sample appeared to be 'out to self' (refer to Table 7). By itself, this fact does not necessarily suggest any pattern with regard to the level of 'outness' of the black gay population in general. However, the implication that 'out to self' at least provides impetus to challenge the "invisibility" of the gay population and may offer one explanation for why these respondents, of the 150 approached, volunteered to respond to the several questions which explored and probed their development and worldviews.

The reason proposed for coming out to self in most cases though, are reflected by statements such as "tired of fighting/exhausted", "denial led to depression", "tired of lies and loneliness" and "the harder I tried to remove gay feelings, the more they grew" (35% of the sample). A few respondents reported being prompted and encouraged by gay friends, a gay love-story, the fact that they fell in love, and loneliness.

In the process of coming out to others, the greatest reservations related to the fear of exposure and subsequent rejection, alienation and disapproval from family, friends and the community, embarrassment to discuss or express sexuality and an uncertainty of the types of reactions, and a need to feel normal to others.

Social expectations and religious beliefs, and the perceived incongruency between these teachings and self-identity, also appeared to significantly undermine the coming-out process both to self and others. These responses, pertaining more specifically to the hindering influence of religious beliefs, were expressed by individuals of Hindu, Islamic and Christian faiths, in this study. They are consistent with the findings proposed by Herek (1994) on the stifling influence of religious beliefs in the coming out process, discussed earlier in Chapter Five.

#### 7.4.2.2. The Levels of coming out

Only five of the total number of respondents (N=23) provided information on the sequence of acknowledging and disclosing their sexual orientation to self and others (Item 16). This seemed understandable in the light that only 13% (N=3) of the sample reported having come out across the whole spectrum of the self-other levels (i.e., self, friends, siblings, parents, public, work) explored in the study. In total, 39% (N=9) of the participants reported being out, at least at four levels (self, friends, siblings, parents). Of these, five respondents had come out to some friends at work, although this tended to involve colleagues who were also friends. The other scenario for respondents who described being somewhat out in the workplace involved an indirect coming-out in the sense that colleagues "suspected" the sexual identity of the former, who neither discussed, denied or confirmed their perceptions.

The sequence of coming-out, as described by respondents, corresponds closely to that found by researchers in the USA (Gochros, 1989; Lehman, 1978; Sophie, 1982). More detail of this process has been provided in Chapter 4.3. In all cases, in this study, individuals first acknowledged their sexual preferences to themselves.

Disclosure to friends, either in the gay community or close heterosexual friends, followed this acknowledgement. The trend that followed seemed to be disclosure to siblings, followed by disclosure to parents. Exceptions occurred where respondents were only children; where parents were informed accidentally by friends who knew, or members of the community who had a knowledge of the individual's sexual orientation or, as the result of a crisis or injury relating to activities around the respondent's homosexual lifestyle.

As stated earlier, no special attempt appeared to be made to come out to colleagues in the workplace (unless they were friends).

Disclosure to the public, where this occurred, seemed to be incidental, or as a result of the individual feeling no need to particularly make attempts to conceal his or her sexual identity, as opposed to attempts to deliberately disclose self-identity to the public.

#### 7.4.2.2.1. Disclosure to Family

Specific attention in this study, was given to the process of disclosure or intended disclosure, to siblings and parents.

Fifty-seven per cent (N=13) of the participants had disclosed their sexual identity to siblings either directly or as a result of the latter discovering or suspecting this possibility. The reactions reported ranged from “violent threats”, “disgust”, “avoidance” and “shock”, to “sadness” and “concern”, to a sense of “support” and “total acceptance.” Negative reactions such as violent threats and disgust were reported by only 13% (N=3) of the respondents. Concern for the individual’s future and support appeared to be the overall reaction expressed by siblings.

For those who had not yet come out to siblings, anticipated sibling reactions appeared to be similar to the actual reactions of those who were out at this level (“rejection”, “disgust”, “disappointment”, “concern over AIDS”, “acceptance and understanding”).

However, anticipated reactions from siblings tended to hinge more on the anticipation of disappointment than support (i.e., 17% versus 9%, respectively).

In weighing the benefits as opposed to what they would lose if they came out to siblings, it appeared that the risk of disclosure at this level was minimal. Forty per cent (N=9), of the sample, who responded to this question, felt that they had “nothing to lose” by coming out to siblings.

Two respondents felt they would risk losing family, while one participant felt that there would be a loss of friendship and support.

In terms of benefits of coming-out to siblings (Item 18c.ii), 65% (N=14) of the sample (including those who had not come out at this level) felt that this disclosure would be positive for them. Some of the responses in this regard included "peace of mind", "understanding", "more comfortable", "trust" and "ally".

For participants, disclosure to parents (Item 19) appeared to involve far more risk. Forty-four per cent (N=10) of the respondents reported having come out to parents. The latter were informed through letters, usually followed by a telephone call or calls. In some cases parents were informed through an aunt, cousins or straight friends. In addition, parents' suspicion was aroused based on the company kept, the lack of telephone calls from opposite gender persons or by exploring the depressed state of the respondent. In one instance, discovery occurred after injury and subsequent hospitalisation following a sexual experience of the respondent.

The parental reactions described in the above instances ranged from "shock", "anger" and "disappointment", to "concern and suggesting psychological help", "understanding" and "support". The most negative current reactions by some of these respondents extended to avoidance of the issue and pressure to change (to heterosexuality). The overall reaction, however, appears to be one of support, although, as one respondent described it, "begrudged acceptance... You're still my son!"

All, except one of the respondents, expected far more punitive reactions, including "rage", "rejection", "to be thrown out of the house", and to be "to be chased out with no education."

Except for two of the respondents who were out to their parents and reported feeling isolated and distressed since then, the others reported feeling “relief”, “being closer”, and “feeling more comfortable with parents.” One respondent expressed a regret that he had not come out sooner. Of note is the fact that respondents experienced more supportive, accepting attitudes of their mothers as compared with the attitudes of their fathers which seemed to range from indifference, avoidance of the issue, to tolerance, in most of the abovementioned cases. Only a few of the respondents, who had not yet come out to parents, reported having a plan (i.e., involving timespan, setting and process of disclosing identity) for this purpose.

Factors which appeared to delay the process of disclosure for these individuals (Item 20) included the fear of rejection (61% of the 13 respondents who were not yet out to parents). This included the anticipation of the loss of love, respect, the prevailing good relationships between themselves and parents and the loss of financial support. Staunch religious beliefs of parents as well as cultural beliefs were also noted as factors which impeded the coming-out to parents (31% of 13 respondents). There was also the fear of disappointing parents in the sense that marriage, or bearing them grandchildren would not be realised (46% of 13 respondents).

The anticipated reactions from parents of individuals who were not out at that level, appeared to be mostly a sense of disappointment and rejection; of not being understood and of a breakdown of trust in the relationship. None of these respondents clearly anticipated support or acceptance, although a few stated that the parental reactions could be either positive or negative (i.e., “acceptance or complete rejection”).

With regard to identity disclosure to parents (Item 20f), the greatest objection raised, or was anticipated being raised by parents (in the case of respondents who were not out), included a concern about the HIV and AIDS (26%), concerns about future happiness and continuity of life in terms of marriage and family (26%), religious beliefs (17%) and others' views, and embarrassment (22%).

Thus, as much as disclosure to parents posed a greater risk than disclosure to siblings, the perception of parents' objections appeared to revolve, to a greater extent, around concern for the individual's safety and future happiness, than religious beliefs and cultural or community values. This finding is supported by Huggins and Forrester (1977). However, the latter factors do appear to have negatively influenced or undermined the coming-out process, or contributed to the internalised homonegativity, or homophobia, of the respondents who have not yet come out to siblings and parents.

Similar trends, with respect to the influence of familial factors in facilitating or impeding the coming out process, have been noted by Herek (1994), Huggins and Forrester (1977), Sophie (1982) and Strommens (1990), and have been discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.3. (in the sub-section Coming Out to Family).

#### 7.5. DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

In approaching the second key question in this investigation, "What are some of the developmental concerns experienced by black gays and lesbians since their childhood?", this section of the discussion explores childhood factors influencing respondents' development.

### 7.5.1. *Early Influences*

Participants, reflecting on two significant events from their early childhood (Item 21), tended to focus on at least one event that related to a sexual experience (attraction, activity) or to sexual identity. Of the thirteen respondents who noted their recollections in this regard, 77% noted at least one event relating to same-gender sexual attraction, harassment, activity or interests which they perceived then, as gender inappropriate. These experiences (of male respondents) included being “scolded (by father) for being girlish”, “running away from home after being found with lipstick and a doll” and “playing with girls since childhood”. Experiences by males relating to same-sex attractions included being “kissed by a same-gender class friend who was admired”, “feeling attracted to older men and boys”, “wanting to sleep with people of the same sex”, “wanting to make love to my best friend”, “experimenting with the neighbour”, “kissed and had sex with a cousin” and “had sex with the neighbour’s son.”

Some of the early childhood recollections focused on sexual harassment by males including the sexual advancement made by an uncle to one of the female respondents. Such examples include being “sexually abused by two older boys at six years of age”; “chased by boys wanting to have sex” and being referred to as “pretty boy”; “fondled by an older boy”; “sexually abused by a fourteen year old male” and being pursued to have sex by “two older boys who were on drugs.”

Only one female responded to this question of early significant events, remembering the toy given to her by her father and the sexual advances made to her by her uncle. Other recollections, which appeared more general, included truanting from school, the death of a close friend and the death of a family member.

In response to a further question (Item 22), specifically exploring whether sexual advances were made to respondents before age twelve, most individuals reported that this did not occur (N=12).

Thirteen per cent (N=3) of the respondents chose not to respond to this question, while 30% (N=7) related instances of sexual advances.

Although two of these experiences relate specifically to sexual molestation, all the advances appear to have been initiated by boys or men described as being older than the respondent at that time.

The advances in these instances were made by uncles, male relatives (one of who was married), a teacher, a child care worker and older schoolboys.

### 7.5.2. *Summary*

Questions around early development were included in the study to provide more information on the earlier events and processes experienced by gay and lesbian individuals, as this area appeared to be seriously neglected in the available literature. Rather than draw comparisons with the childhood experiences of heterosexuals, or demonstrate the applicability of heterosexual models of child development to the early development of individuals who are homosexual, the intention was to explore patterns of perceptions regarding the events of childhood for the latter. As this involved retrospection on the part of participants, and as the purpose of this study was known to all participants, it was expected that all respondents would reflect on events which, from their perspective were more related to their current sexual orientation. Further, given the constraint of the limited sample employed in the study, it would appear that sexual advances occurred in some instances during the childhood period of development, rather than as general ongoing events in the lives of black gay and lesbian South Africans.

In this sense, the findings presented are not conclusive about general ontological processes in gay and lesbian individuals, but provide more insight into development, as it perhaps relates more significantly to the development of the individual's current gay or lesbian identity status.

Emotional abuse, reported by 17% (N=4) of the respondents, involved experiences such as being “disciplined by aunts to be obedient”, “teased by older children” and “labelled constantly as ‘good for nothing’.” These respondents also referred to emotional abuse from parents and step parents.

Neglect, recalled by 13% (N=3) of the respondents, mostly involved the absence of parental figures in the respondents’ lives during childhood. In one instance it included the lack of care by the step mother. In this case the male respondent mentioned that the latter’s attitude towards him created an anger towards women.

A large majority of the respondents (91%) did not consider themselves to have been physically abused. One participant clarified that, although he was given “some hiding”, it was for disciplinary purposes. In this instance, the intention was perceived to be constructive as opposed to being abusive.

Sexual abuse, reported by 13% (N=3), related to the sexual molestation described in the previous subsection. Again, the majority of the respondents (83%) did not consider themselves to have been sexually abused in any way. Although the experience of being bullied (Item 24) included aspects of either emotional or physical abuse which were strongly disclaimed by participants, it was acknowledged by 30% (N=7) of the respondents. In this respect, it included being “misunderstood”, “scolded by father for effeminate behaviour” (i.e., by male respondents), “scratched and verbally abused by a step-mother”, “bullied by elder brother” and “appropriately punished.”

An explanation for why more respondents acknowledged being ‘bullied’ than ‘abused’ may relate to the perceived psychosocial loadedness of the latter term, as compared with ‘bullied’. It may also be that participants were hesitant to be perceived as slandering the family, since most were still in close contact with the latter. This finding was also apparent in a study by the author on black South African children (of Indian ancestry) in foster care, who tended to portray their substitute families favourably (Bickrum, 1991).

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However, whatever rationale may be proposed to explain the low incidence of abuse reported by participants, this incidence appears to be relatively low when compared with the attention-catching media reports of child abuse in the general population. Unfortunately no statistics of actual child abuse are obtainable.

#### 7.5.4. Childhood Factors Influencing Development In Gay And Lesbian Individuals

Of the fourteen respondents who provided information on their role models as children (Item 25), 50% (N=7) referred to the influence of family members of whom mothers seemed to provide the greatest influence (six male respondents; one female). Of these seven respondents, five had both parents living while two were reared in single parent households, headed by their mothers. Mothers were reported as being “friend and father”, “spending the most time” with the respondent, “strong and having a good personality”, “providing protection and closeness” and “providing for needs despite being poor.” Other respondents referred to parents, uncles, a grandfather, a childcare worker, an actor and an author as being their role models. Uncles, as a consequence of their “carefreeness” and the perception that they were the happiest in the family, were modelled by two respondents. The literary influence of the author, the “good looks and everything” of the actor and, the kindness, support and caring of the childcare worker, were factors that appeared to influence these individuals.

Except for the fact that several male respondents considered their mothers as role models, it was difficult to establish any particular pattern or draw any comparison regarding whether this was true for the general population of gays and lesbians in South Africa, since literature in this area is currently unavailable.

In exploring whether previous role models had a significant influence in their lives (Item 26), 44% (N=10) of respondents answered in the affirmative. Some of the responses, exploring the shift in the choice of role models were “too young at twelve”; “now exposed to different people and environments”;

“I am now the stronger person” (where a mother was previously a role model on account of her protective function); “can’t talk to them regarding myself” (in reference to parents); “in hindsight, they lacked direction” (in reference to uncles) and “see weaknesses in my mother and strength in some men.” Overall, the reasons proposed by respondents seemed to suggest that the change of role models coincided with the change in the needs of the former as they moved into adulthood (e.g., protection). Some individuals alluded to the breakdown in communication especially between parents and self, related to their self-identity. This is expressed in responses such as “can’t talk to them in regard to myself”; “now exposed to different people and environment” and “see weaknesses in my mother and strength in some men.” However, no generalisable conclusions may be drawn on the basis of the small number of respondents (N=3), in this regard.

In exploring factors which may have influenced the development of black gay and lesbian individuals since their childhood, they were asked what messages they had received regarding homosexuality (Item 28). The seventeen participants who chose to respond, all cited messages which conveyed the inherent rejection and intolerance of homosexuality. Such messages focused on the undesirability of homosexuality on religious, medical, moral and psychosocial grounds. Negative messages with religious underpinnings included “evil-sin”; “curse from God”; “not of God.” Early messages, associating HIV and AIDS causally with homosexuality, appear to have provided a medical basis for the “undesirability and danger” of homosexuality.

At a psychosocial level, messages related to the label that homosexuality was “wrong and bad” that “gay people are freaks”, “objects of ridicule”, “disgusting”, “irritating”, “performed by people in prison”; “an abnormality”, “disorder” and a “deviance.” From the responses of the majority of the participants (74%) in the study, one may conclude that a significant number of gay and lesbian individuals was exposed to primarily homonegative messages rather than neutral or positive perceptions or to objective facts, with regard to this sexual orientation.

This finding is consistent with that presented by Herek (1994), regarding homonegative influences early in the lives of gay and lesbian individuals. It also appears to provide some basis for the internalised homophobia manifested by participants in this study, by their reluctance to come out to others (i.e., parents, siblings, work colleagues, the public).

Membership of clubs, societies and other groups during their childhood was also explored (Item 27), to provide further information on the developmental interests and associations of gays and lesbians as children. Of eighteen respondents who provided information in this regard, 61% (N=11) reported being involved in religious activities or belonging to religious groups (e.g., choral singing, church youth groups, Christian youth groups, Christian youth club, Catholic Parish, religious societies, Holy Family Youth).

In view of the homonegative influence of religion, identified earlier in the review of literature (Herek, 1994; Huggins and Forrester, 1977; Weeks, 1990) and the negative religious messages reviewed in this section, it would appear that the opportunity for internalised homophobia to develop in the respondents, during childhood, was great. This issue, however, will be discussed at greater length under the sub-section Religious Influences.

Respondents were also asked how their understanding of homosexuality was enhanced (Item 29), in order to provide strategies for coping and developing a positive, more holistic perception of homosexuality and their own self identities. In this regard, 65% (N=15) of the respondents began reading on homosexuality as an initial step in enhancing their own self image as gay and lesbian persons and to learn more about their sexual orientation. Several individuals (39%) indicated that they increased their understanding of homosexuality and social exposure by greater interaction with other gay and lesbian persons and by holding discussions with individuals and groups of gay friends. A few indicated the usefulness of films and plays, although a paucity of such materials currently exists in South Africa.

Other respondents felt that they enhanced their understanding by counselling other gay and lesbian persons. One respondent stated that he was embarking on research on gays and lesbians in South Africa to increase gay awareness and conscientisation in the country. Thus, despite the negativity of the messages received during the childhood, there appeared to be a serious attempt by respondents in the study to enhance their understanding of homosexuality and their own self-image as gay and lesbian persons.

## 7.6. ADULTHOOD AND AGEING

The unique issues that are faced, or anticipated by black gays and lesbians in their adulthood and later life (e.g., relationships, parenting and old age) are investigated in this section of the discussion, in an attempt to address the third key question outlined in Chapter One.

### 7.6.1. Relationships

The questions in this sub-section focused on exploring the dynamics and patterns of relationships between gay and lesbian individuals, on the one hand, and significant others, on the other. Thus, they explored the paradigms of relationships as well as their expectations and unique concerns. An initial question in this section pertained to the expectations that the respondents had for their current lives, as they were growing up (Item30). Fourteen (67%) of the twenty-one responses to this question mentioned marriage (or living together) to a heterosexual person and having children (six respondents specified that they wanted to have two children) as their expectations. Such anticipations, held by male respondents in their early adolescence, are described by responses such as “marry a school teacher and have two children”, “perfect relationship with gorgeous and intelligent girl”, “girlfriend, wife, family, etc.”, “married with two kids-will make marriage work” and “marry the right woman who will accept me...have children.” Two of the four women respondents similarly shared their anticipation of being “married by now” and “married with two kids.”

Other responses to this question, ranging from dismal to hopeful, appeared to be centred within the context of acknowledging and maintaining a gay or lesbian identity. Somewhat more dismal responses included “saw self as an old, lonely gay man”; “never contemplated marriage because I was confused about my identity”; “did not have any plans-confused as a gay man” and “did not imagine the future.” More hopeful responses included, “expected the law to change, to allow gay marriages” and “marry boyfriend, adopt children if possible.” One response to this question reflected integrated options and is described by the following response : “beautiful wife (girl) as a smoke screen for a tall, handsome, fair, hairy, muscular gay person.”

An attempt to establish the influence of parents or care-givers in shaping values around relationships was explored by posing the questions : “Have you felt pressure to marry the opposite sex person?” (Item 40a) and “By whom ?” (Item 40b). Thirteen (57%) respondents reported not feeling under any pressure to marry a person of the opposite sex. Thirty-nine per cent (N=9), who answered in the affirmative to this question, reported that the pressure was from family (mostly parents and older relatives). In isolated cases, an older brother, friends and the Church, were included as being seen to exert this demand. Interestingly, six of the nine respondents who felt pressured by family, were already out as gays and lesbians to parents.

The most common means of coping with the pressure to get married (Item 40c), was “to ignore it- laugh it off.” Others claimed to have had girlfriends or “lied”, or claimed to be “waiting for the right girl.” Another respondent “believed in God and the strength to conquer.” Yet another, mentioned affirming his gayness and stated that he would only engage in a gay marriage. Interestingly, one respondent claimed that he almost did marry an opposite gender person. However, he now informs “all and sundry” that he is gay.

What is apparent in the responses, albeit anticipations of their current lives held at a much younger age, is the internalisation and integration of traditional heterosexual norms by most gay and lesbian individuals. This is reflected in the concept of a two-parent family, by marriage and with two children.

Yet, it is not only the integration of a heterosexual paradigm of relationships that appears to provide self imposed limitations in gay or lesbian relationship structures, but the integration of such a norm to the end of denying or suppressing one's self-identity.

Meyer (1990) contended that gay and lesbian individuals, by virtue of being in heterosexual households (which included all the respondents in this study), are subjected to the same socialisation process that contributes to creating expectations of the traditional concepts of relationships and marriage. While Berzon's (1988) observation that few role models exist for gay and lesbian individuals to model their relationships, the findings in this study relating to the perceived pressure from parents and family for such individuals to marry opposite gender persons, adds to Meyer's premise that the heterosexual paradigm on relationships and values is the most available and prominent to the gay and lesbian individual.

In this regard, Lehman's (1978) proposal that gays and lesbians redefine themselves as persons, as opposed to halves of a relationship, and Goodman's (1977) suggestion that these individuals move away from the heterosexual patriarchal model of relationships and explore forms of relationships which are more suitable to their needs, appear to point the direction for more inclusive options for gay and lesbian relationship models.

#### 7.6.1.1. *The Dynamics Of Gay And Lesbian Relationships*

Elements of relationships that were perceived to be valuable and significant to gay and lesbian individuals and their conceptualisation of 'love' (Item 31) were explored for the purpose of understanding relationship dynamics from the black gay and lesbian point of view. Interestingly, this question was answered to a greater depth than any other on the questionnaire by all respondents.

The concept of love, as defined by respondents, described a holistic sense of mutual commitment which involved sharing, giving, receiving, caring, devotion, friendship, safety and warmth, amongst other terms, all suggestive of nurturance and support. Some of the responses included “giving of myself 100%”; “attraction, psychological satisfaction, contentment and respect”; “fully devoted- share life with him/her-true friend”; “intense involvement and adapting yourself to the other’s lifestyle”; “complete trust - able to be happy and angry with this person”; “the meeting of two souls- you can’t without the person you love” and “the uncontrollable desire to be with somebody mentally, emotionally and spiritually.” By contrast, only one respondent added that “there is no such thing...”

Attitudes and values perceived to be significant in a relationship (Item 32) were viewed, similarly to ‘love’, in a holistic sense and included the variables of “trust”; “acceptance”; “fidelity”; “mutual understanding”; “patience”; “stability”; “support”; “romance”; “cleanliness”; “fun-loving”; “non-abusive”; honesty”; “security”; “lasting”; “companionship”; “compassion”; “artistic”; “growing together”; “intimacy”; “nurturing”; “laughter”; “togetherness” and “belonging”, amongst several other expressions suggestive of similar attitudes and values. One respondent indicated the importance of finding an “out of the closet person.”

In evaluating these responses, one may again conclude that the heterosexual upbringing of respondents has socialised heterosexual attitudes and values towards relationships in them. This interpretation, however, comes across as reductionistic, in that it tends to infer that the root of positive attitudes and values resides in heterosexism.

Another way of understanding the data is that attitudes and values, significant for heterosexuals, are similarly shared by individuals who are homosexual. It would also mean that positive attitudes and values regarding ‘love’ and significant elements in a relationship are similar for individuals who may be homosexual or heterosexual.

In relation to the current study, it is worthwhile noting that the sample consisted of adults (or older adolescents), most of whom had been in relationships. They probably based their responses from their observations and experiences within the broader contexts of heterosexual and homosexual environments and the values that they may, or may not, have derived during their upbringing in heterosexual, care-giving contexts.

The fact that only one respondent had included an element such as “out of closet person” in his evaluation of what is significant in a relationship (Item 32), may suggest a poor understanding or awareness of gay and lesbian relationships. In relation to this, Shannon and Woods (1991) found that the internalisation of heterosexual norms serves to undermine the self-esteem of gay and lesbian individuals which in turn influences the ‘outness’ of the person in terms of sexual identity. Individuals who are ‘out’ to different extents are then seen to experience more conflict and difficulty in maintaining relationships of intimacy.

#### 7.6.1.2. Homosexual And Heterosexual Relationships

In exploring the specific dynamics associated with close homosexual (Item 34) and heterosexual relationships (Item33) maintained by the black gay and lesbian community, an attempt was made to also understand the spectrum of relationships, including friendships, held by them. In this regard, it appeared that several participants (52%) separated relationships in terms of friendships and relationships that included intimacy (often along the sexual dimensions). Although no reasons for this tendency were given by the participants, this trend may, in part, relate to the fact that, for gay and lesbian individuals, a large part of the population of same-sex persons may be unavailable because the vast majority are heterosexual. Thus, separation of relationships could, therefore, serve as a means of coping in that it would prevent, deny, discard or sublimate feelings, other than those of friendship, if they occur towards heterosexual individuals.

On the other hand, compartmentalisation of relationships may be viewed as a very natural phenomenon for dealing with and organising multiple relationships within the homosexual or heterosexual context.

Black gay and lesbian subjects, as projected by participants in this study, appeared to have an equal number of homosexual (Item 34a) and heterosexual (Item 33a) friendships. Only two of the respondents reported having no heterosexual friends. The range of homosexual friendships noted by participants extended from four to one hundred. Heterosexual friendships ranged from two to one hundred. Friendships with lesbians appeared to be less prominent among male respondents, but accounted for the largest number of friendships held by the four women participants in this study (range: 0-29). A far smaller group of respondents reported bisexual friendships (range: 0-10). Typically, it appears that gay and lesbian persons have an equivalent number of friendships across both the homosexual and heterosexual populations.

Intimate relationships of gay and lesbian individuals appear to also include both heterosexual and homosexual partners (Items 33b and 34b). In all, 67% of the respondents reported having had heterosexual relationships. Two respondents shared that they had fallen in love with same-sex, heterosexual individuals, and described this as merely lacking in the sexual component of the relationship. The 61% who had engaged in heterosexual relationships described these as “non-sexual”; “spiritual and physical”; “good but strange”; “emotional, spiritual and physical (smoke screen)”; “emotional”; “physical-soul mates”; “platonic, caring, non-physical”; “physically exhausting, emotionally depressing”; “friendships” and “equivalent to a flower...as the petals are plucked, there is no vibe left...”

The most common perception of these relationships pertained to its non-existent, unfulfilling or pretentious sexual nature and its essential “emotional”, “spiritual” and “affectional” dimensions.

The notion of the physical component of these relationships being “a smoke screen”; “exhausting” and “due to immaturity on my side”, tends to reflect the essential dilemma of the gay and lesbian person in assimilating and acting out heterosexual behaviour patterns even though they may be incongruent with the individual’s sexual orientation.

The duration of heterosexual relationships (Item 33a) sustained by participants in this study ranged from approximately three weeks to four years, and averaged approximately seven months. The number of heterosexual relationships engaged in by respondents ranged from one to five and averaged approximately two.

Homosexual relationships tended to include both short-term and long-term relationships (Item 34a). The duration of short-term relationships ranged from one day to six months and averaged approximately two months. Long-term relationships ranged from eight months to seven years (ongoing) and averaged approximately three years.

The number of homosexual relationships engaged in by participants ranged from one to twelve and averaged approximately four. It was not clear which of these were short-term or long-term.

In comparing the heterosexual and homosexual relationships engaged in by respondents, it appeared that homosexual persons engaged in twice as many homosexual relationships as they did heterosexual ones. The latter, in most cases, seem to have been initiated before homosexual relationships.

The duration of relationships, whether they had been with homosexual or heterosexual partners, has been reflected in the very short relationships and the medium-term to fairly long-term partnerships. The more short-term homosexual relationships have included one-night relationships at the beginning of its range. Short term heterosexual relationships, on the other hand, tended to be sustained for approximately one month or more.

However, the more long term relationships with homosexual partners, described in at least twenty one instances, appear to have been sustained for longer periods (i.e., three years versus seven months for heterosexual relationships).

A very straightforward interpretation of the above trend may relate to the fact that heterosexual relationships, formed at an earlier age, and in many cases before homosexual relationships, are found to be less fulfilling and thus sustained for relatively shorter periods.

A different perspective is offered by Meyer (1990), who explored the basis for semi-permanent and permanent relationships among gay individuals who had sustained long-term relationships (i.e., between four to six years). He surmised that they, having being reared in heterosexual environments, were subjected to socialisation processes which contributed to creating expectations of at least a semi-permanent relationship. However, he added, few role models existed for these individuals to learn how to maintain long term relationships. It is in this regard that Fassinger (1991) suggested that the heterosexual, patriarchal concept of relationships, including monogamy, needs to be reassessed by gay and lesbian individuals. Goodman's (1977) proposal that these individuals explore other forms of relationships that are more likely to meet their own natural needs, also bears relevance.

The dynamics of the homosexual relationship appeared to differ for short-term and long-term relationships essentially in terms of the physical component. The latter component seemed to most characterise the very short-term relationship (one day to a few weeks) of the respondents. This is exemplified by responses such as "no substance, only sexual", "physical, remotely emotional" and "physical."

Homosexual relationships that were more medium-term to long-term (eight to twelve months and longer) tended to include not only the physical, but also the emotional, affectionate and spiritual dimensions. Some of the responses in this regard were “emotional commitment”; “intense understanding”; “full of vibe”; “took over my being”; “existing happily”; “affectionate, physical, emotional and spiritual”; “intense affect” and “romantic, confusing, intense, satisfying.”

Long-term homosexual relationships differed from long-term heterosexual relationships in that the former included the physical dimension as a vital element. Long-term heterosexual relationships, as experienced by gay and lesbian individuals, appear to primarily involve the emotional, spiritual and affectional dimensions. In long-term homosexual relationships, a holism is evidenced, inclusive of the emotional, spiritual, affectional and physical components.

In further reflecting on their homosexual or heterosexual relationships (Item 38a), 70% of the respondents felt that homosexual relationships offered qualitatively more than heterosexual relationships.

The remaining 26% of responses indicated that the quality of both homosexual and heterosexual relationships depended on the partner and the loyalty to the relationship. One respondent believed that both relationships were qualitatively equal, overall. He felt, however, that societal attitude bestowed more desirability on heterosexual relationships, than on homosexual relationships.

### 7.6.1.3. *Social Influences On Relationships*

The gay and lesbian relationship, in as much as it embraces elements that are different from the heterosexual relationship, still operates largely within the context of the heterosexual model. For black gays and lesbians, this macro context also involves the eurocentric paradigm.

An exploration of heterocentric and eurocentric influences is, however, too broad an area to be effectively covered in the scope of this chapter.

Rather the focus has been on the more salient aspects only: the criterion of race in the choice of a partner; the concept of loyalty and its perceived source of influence; the response to special occasions such as weddings and St.Valentines Day and responses to the 'butch' and 'femme' stereotypes in defining roles in gay and lesbian relations (Items 39, 36, 42, 35, respectively).

Race, as a criterion in selecting a partner, was explored in order to obtain a sense of whether being homosexual, and thus 'different' to the mainstream, influenced one's choice in selecting racially 'different' partners or whether the issue of being black in any way contextualised (i.e., preceded) being gay or lesbian. Responses indicated that the majority (57%) of gay and lesbian individuals did not consider race to be significant in their choice of a partner. These responses were clarified by comments such as "all are equal"; "not racist"; "attracted to whites" and "feelings overcome barriers." Two (9%) of the respondents were unsure, citing that the "first relationship was with a white man" and "I'm generally not attracted to blacks."

Those who felt that race was an important criterion (approximately 30%) explained this choice by the following responses: "prefer certain attributes"; "dislike whites"; "prefer whites because of safer sex practices"; "preference for Whites and Coloureds, not Indians and Africans" (a 'coloured' respondent); "because of apartheid, it is difficult to have satisfying relationships across the colour-line" and "the person would have to share my political sentiments."

While some respondents have alluded to the criterion of race, resulting from apartheid and racial oppression, in their choice of a partner, others appeared to have based their preference on positive and negative stereotypes attributed to black and white gays and lesbians.

While this may be reflective, to an extent, of the internalised apartheid or racial oppression by black South Africans, what is interesting is that none of the respondents framed his or her preference in a way that suggested that white partners were unavailable. The preference appeared to be generated from an internal locus instead. The issue of race in relationships among South African gays and lesbians, according to Isaacs and McKendrick (1992), is seen as becoming less significant and evidenced in the increasing number of racially mixed gay and lesbian couples in this country.

The criterion of race, at this stage of the discussion, is admittedly superficial and brief. It would be given more attention in a subsequent section of this chapter (i.e., political influences).

'Butch' and 'femme' (Item 35), being words commonly used by the general population to describe the more masculine woman partner and the more effeminate male partner, respectively, were presented to the respondents in order to elicit their perceptions of, and reactions to, these terms. Responses tended to suggest an indifference, or strong rejection, to the use of these terms in defining roles in homosexual relationships. These attitudes are reflected in responses such as "dislike- because they are distorted images"; "dislike the stereotypes- value the uniqueness"; "don't accept"; "nonsense"; "there are no butch and femme roles only gay roles"; "stereotypes"; "don't approve" and "prefer to stay away from these terms; a man is a man and a woman, a woman."

The perception that these were misrepresented stereotypes undermining of the uniqueness of individuals in a homosexual relationship, seemed evident in the responses evoked by this question.

The concept of loyalty (Item 36), seen to be of moral and religious significance in heterosexual relationships, was explored for the purpose of understanding its significance to gay and lesbian individuals and their relationships, and ascertain the basis, if any, for this value.

Ninety-five per cent (N=22) of the respondents who answered this question described loyalty to a partner as being significant in a relationship. One participant affirmed this value, but added that he was confused as a result of the shallowness he perceived in gay relationships in Durban.

The source of the value of loyalty was perceived to have been influenced by a combination of family upbringing and religious beliefs (44% of participants). Respondents also referred to the influence of their “heterosexual upbringing” including the “tragedy of witnessing extramarital relationships and divorce.” A few other respondents attributed this value to their “heart”; “fellowmates and self”; “movies”; “previous relationship and commitments”; “the experiences of a few gay couples” and “experience.”

The fact that, for many respondents, the concept of loyalty was attributed to family upbringing and religious beliefs, again is suggestive of the strong influence of familial and religious values in gay and lesbian relationships.

Admittedly, not all families may have been aware of the sexual orientation of the respondents but that does not negate the influence of the family.

Finally, the notion of special occasions such as weddings and St Valentine’s Day and their significance for gays and lesbians, was explored (Item42). The purpose was simply to understand how such events were related to the black gay and lesbian view of self and relationships with significant others. The responses indicated that feelings of apathy or sadness were as likely as joyful feelings to prevail around such events. Respondents who were affected negatively in this regard cited responses such as “sad and lonely”; “reminders of loneliness”; “weddings are depressing”: “have own special events” and “never celebrate St Valentine’s - it is for straight people.”

Individuals who were positive described these events as “romantic”; “good- expression of love for each other”; “excited- because they also occur in the gay world” and “romantic- love them if not alone.” The more apathetic responses included “ignore these events, don’t attend weddings”; “not much relevance” and “not important- waste of time and money.”

Given that equivalent numbers of gays and lesbians, in this study, perceived events positively or negatively, it is difficult to draw any conclusion about the specific patterns relating to behaviours manifested by them. One interpretation may be that a significant number of these persons experience sadness during these events, perceiving them to be heterosexual events. The positive perception of these events by some of the gay and lesbian persons may be because they see such events as inclusive of themselves.

#### 7.6.2. Parenting

The issue of parenting was researched in order to understand the gay or lesbian attitude towards having and rearing children, as well as to explore how gays and lesbians perceived themselves as parents. As none of the respondents was a parent, it was expected that much of the information elicited would be reflective or constructed, rather than experiential.

Thirteen (57%) of the twenty-three gay and lesbian respondents indicated their desire to have children, while seven (30%) indicated that they did not have such a desire (Item 43a). Interestingly, at least four of the latter respondents, while outlining their anticipations of their current lives (Item 30) indicated their desire for children at an earlier age. Only six respondents outlined how they planned to have children (Item 43b). Adoption was proposed by four of these individuals, while “artificial insemination” and “surrogate parenting” were indicated by the other two. Two male respondents contemplated getting into relationships “with the right women who would accept me” in order to fulfil the desire to have children.

In order to understand the attitudes of gay and lesbian individuals to parenting, their perceptions of the capability of gays and lesbians for parenting (Item 44) as well as their reactions if they knew that their child was homosexual (Item 45), were elicited. Eighteen (78%) respondents provided positive perceptions of the gay and lesbian capacity for parenting. The same number reported the capacity for positivity and support from themselves to their child who may be homosexual, although several of their responses also reflected concern for the child's well-being in a heterosexual world.

Responses regarding the parenting by gay and lesbians were: "make sensitive understanding parents"; "good parents-sensitive, creative- offer much more"; "wonderful-capable of being parents without corrupting a child's life with social stereotypes"; "fantastic-three cheers for them" and "can be good parents-the ability to parent is not affected by a homosexual identity."

However, a few more tentative responses alluded to concerns in this regard. These are expressed by statements such as "if capable of providing a loving environment, great!"; "okay, as long as children are aware that heterosexual relationships are equally conducive"; "happy for them - but sceptical. You need a mother and father"; "pondering ..." and "nothing wrong if they are realistic of weaknesses and downfalls of such a family."

Negative responses to this issue, elicited from three respondents, were expressed as "not okay"; "caught in misfortune" and "don't think it's fair on the children."

The latter responses, for not sanctioning gay and lesbian parenting, may suggest a concern for the well-being of the children given the misperceptions of gays and lesbians. It could also be a reflection of their internalised homonegativity towards the capacity of homosexual persons to be effective care-givers.

Given the perpetuation of the notion of care-givers (i.e., teachers, child-care workers etc.) as child molesters (Huggins and Forrester, 1977) and the fact that few, if any parenting role models exist for gays and lesbians in South Africa, the latter rationale may well have its basis in how homosexuality and gay and lesbian parenting are conveyed by the major institutions (religious, legal, psychological, media) and in how these messages are internalised by gays and lesbians.

The anticipated reactions of respondents with regard to their own child who may be homosexual (Item 45) appeared to convey a collective sense of concern, support and nurturance. Responses to this scenario included “welcome to the family! (seriously, sadness for what will be experienced)”; “not be happy- but shares do’s and don’ts”; “just concern for the child’s happiness”; “disappointed, afraid- know how confusing this experience can be”; “will teach the child the right way of living a homosexual life”; “accept and understand”; “be supportive”; “Support. Insist sexual relationships start at an appropriate age” and “let children grow up with positive image of self since this is fundamental to a healthy person.”

Only two responses conveyed entirely despondent perceptions around this scenario. These are exemplified by the responses “blame myself” and “not be happy- too much pain and suffering.”

It appears, however, that even in the above instances, the negativity was towards self, or concern for the well being of the child, presumably with regard to being reared in a heterosexist mainstream culture. Overall, whilst gay and lesbian individuals may be cognisant of the difficulties associated with being homosexual in a primarily heterosexist culture (refer for more detail to Chapter 5.2.), it appears that their attitude to offsprings who may be homosexual, would be reflective of concern for their well being, support and nurturance. Such elements appear to be critical to effective parenting (Coleman, 1990; Gottman, 1990; Patterson, 1992).

### 7.6.3. *Ageing*

Ageing, among gays and lesbians has been given only scant research attention internationally and almost none in South Africa. Therefore, aspects of the phenomenon of ageing were explored with the purpose of eliciting from gays and lesbians their feelings about the future (Item 46) and about getting older across four different age spans (i.e., 25-35 years; 36-45 years; 46-55 years and 55-70 years) (Item 47).

In all, fifteen respondents (65%) described feeling very positive about their future. These responses read as “optimistic”; “successful career”; “fantastic”; “positive-now that I’m out” and “confident; looking forward to being a socially and legally accepted gay man.” A few of these responses seemed to focus specifically on the future in respect to career advancement, while others more broadly referred to “having a profession and settling down with a person for the rest of my life” and “being a successful career woman but still confused about my identity.”

The remaining respondents (35%) reflected insecurity in terms of career, financial and relationship concerns.

Such responses read : “worried”; “trying to be positive”; “unsure”; “worried (about professional status once qualified)”; “not going to be easy”; “become disillusioned”; “would like to settle down with a partner, but financially insecure” and “bleak, regarding relationships.”

#### 7.6.3.1. *The Twenty- Five To Thirty-Five Year Age Span*

This age span appeared to be perceived somewhat positively to positively by most respondents.

Responses focusing on career, health and relationship issues, were: “stepping stone in my career”; “to get the most out of it”; “great”; “know what I want out of life”; “pick up speed”; “can’t wait”; “work towards enjoying youth”; “as long as I’m in shape”; “growing old with someone special”; “settle down with a committed guy” (male respondent) and “could still find myself a good companion and have young guys looking at me” (male respondent).

Examples of less positive responses of a few respondents were “bad-no lover to settle down with”; “hurts to get older” and “worried, haven’t lived enough.”

The significance of this age category is that it included the majority of respondents in this study. The overall positive, anticipatory tone of the majority of the respondents, therefore, could be a reflection of their belief in their capacity to cope, based on their current lifestyle.

#### 7.6.3.2. The Thirty-Six To Forty-Five Year Age Span

For respondents, this age span appears to be a time for achieving greater stability in their relationships and work as well as maturity regarding their ‘outness’ as gays and lesbians.

These were illustrated by responses such as “conquering more life experiences”; “making a success”; “successful career woman”; “profession, right person and supportive and purposeful friends”; “settled with a lover”; “romantic”; “travel the world with a gay roommate” and “cope and face it.”

However, a few of the responses (22%) also conveyed some anxiety regarding ageing and relationships. This is reflected by “hate to see self at this age”; “frightening- won’t get enough attention”; “don’t know what to expect”; “prefer not ageing” and “by this time I’m worrying about what happens after forty five years.”

### 7.6.3.3. The Forty-Six To Fifty-Five Year Age Span

Reflections on this age span also evoked positive thoughts relating to career advancement, relationship stability and the notion of “growing old gracefully.” Also included, were thoughts on being married and having children (one respondent) and around planning retirement and pension details.

Interestingly, this age span appeared to generate far fewer responses than the twenty-five to thirty-five or the thirty-six to forty-five year age spans. These responses were replaced by comments such as “will see when it comes”; “can’t imagine self here” and “don’t know what to expect.”

Such responses may be interpreted in several ways, including the notion that future pacing may be anxiety provoking for gay or lesbian individuals, as it creates the overwhelming awareness of other challenges and obstacles that must be faced by being a minority group member (i.e., being homosexual in a predominantly heterosexually biased society). It may also reflect the inability to make fine distinctions regarding the future that such a separation of age categories requires.

### 7.6.3.4. The Fifty-Six To Seventy Year Age Span, And Onwards

A few of the responses relating to turning fifty five and older, appeared to convey a sense of stability and success. These were expressed by responses such as “growing old with someone special”; “more settled”; “living successfully” and “settling down with a person for the rest of my life and having supportive friends.”

However, many of the responses came across as negative and defeatist centring around the fear of ageing alone.

Some of the responses in this regard were : “very lonely age”; “fine as long as I’m not alone”; “scared of loneliness”; “comfortable in a relationship, lonely if not”; “ buy a walking stick”; “wheelchair”; “not wanting to be here”; “wouldn’t want to be around”; “no one wants a TAFTA (i.e., old gay guy)”; “waiting to fucking die” and “dead by then.”

#### 7.6.3.5. Conclusion

In comparing participants’ responses to the different aspects of adulthood and old age (relationships, parenting and ageing), it was evident that the area of ageing, specifically after age forty five, elicited responses which appeared most defeatist and despairing. The negative stereotypes around ageing, gleaned from this study are congruent with those observed approximately twenty years ago by Kelly (1977) regarding the loss of physical attractiveness and the inability to form lasting relationships.

Berger (1984) noted that the absence of research and public discussion has contributed misinformation and stereotypes around the older gay and lesbian person. The western stereotyping of the elderly as senile, sexually incapable or conservative, amongst other negative stereotypes, was also identified as a factor influencing negative attitudes towards ageing (Kelly, 1977).

Researchers such as Shannon and Woods (1991) have surmised that, for gay and lesbian individuals, the stereotypes associated with ageing are seen to be even more negative than for the mainstream population. From the responses towards ageing generated in this study, the influence of such negative stereotypes regarding the ‘dismal future’ of elderly gays and lesbians, appears to have been internalised by the majority of the respondents.

## 7.7. PERCEPTIONS OF CURRENT PSYCHOSOCIAL INFLUENCES

The status of homosexuality over time appears to have progressed significantly from the reductionistic labels of “immoral”, “illegal” and “abnormal” (Altman, 1993; Weeks, 1990). A similar trend seems to be establishing itself in South Africa. Although this does not imply that homosexuality is fully recognised as a normal sexual orientation, there have been significant developments with regards to the visibility and empowerment of Gay Rights groups, and, thus the call and pressure for gay human rights (Refer to Chapter Three for more detail). This section of the discussion explores the fourth key question outlined in Chapter One viz., “How have social factors influenced the perceptions and experiences of black gays and lesbians in South Africa?”

In view of the recent developments in South Africa, an exploration of social influences, specifically religious, legal, psychomedical and socio-political, is included. Although each of these variables in itself spans broad areas of information, the scope of this study allowed only a limited focus.

### 7.7.1. Religiosity And Its Influence On Black Gays And Lesbians

Of the twenty three respondents (Hindu, Christian and Islamic faiths), 39% (N=9) reported that religion played an important role in their lives while 45% (N=10) stated that it did not (Item 53).

The four remaining respondents clarified their view with responses of “uncertain” or “used to, not any more.”

Some of the respondents who affirmed the role of religion in their lives stated that it provided “direction and hope”; “a framework in life and strength” and “taught morals and values.” Others in this category cited the following: “love for God”; “was created to be myself through God’s mercy”; “was involved in Church activities as parents were strong Christians” and “is God fearing.”

Interestingly six of these nine respondents perceived that their religion viewed homosexuality negatively (Item 54). This is supported by religious beliefs of the respondents who view homosexuality as “an abomination”; “sin” and “a sin that will book you a place besides the devil.” Other responses from participants who viewed religion as important, included “don’t know- no mention of homosexuality”; “not sure-perhaps acknowledges it” and “mentions nothing as far as I know.” Only one of these respondents felt that homosexuality was “viewed without prejudice” by his religion (Christianity).

Those respondents who reported not being influenced by religion described themselves as being atheists, as not being deeply religious and as not being religious but knowing that all religions condemned homosexuality (N=4). Others rejected religion on the basis that it rejected homosexuality or viewed it judgmentally. This is illustrated by responses such as “it considers homosexuality a sin”; “it is anti-gay”; “concept of sin”; “taboo”; “condemns homosexuality”; “sees homosexuality as wrong” and “totally against homosexuality.”

From the responses elicited, it would appear that religion was rejected by a large percentage of respondents on the basis that it was perceived to condemn and reject homosexuality. The response “not anymore”, describing the current influence of religion in the individual’s life, appears to support this interpretation.

For those who chose to see religion as being meaningful in their lives, its value in providing direction and a sense of “God’s love” were seen as significant, despite the perception that homosexuality may not necessarily be approved by its dogma. What seemed apparent from the responses evoked in regard to religiosity, is the lack of actual knowledge of religious teachings, as opposed to opinions and judgements presumed to be religiously based. In this respect, none of the respondents referred to their religion of origin, the specific teaching or the specific religious text, that conveyed the views that they held regarding homosexuality.

### 7.7.2. *Perceptions Of The Law And Homosexuality*

Approximately 35% of the twenty-three respondents in this study, perceived a positive change with regard to the status of homosexuals within the law in South Africa (Item 56a). This was described by comments such as “moving to liberation”; “existence of homosexuality is permitted”; “lawyers for Human Rights are involved in guiding the law”; “a growing acceptance of homosexuality in South Africa constitutionally” and “the new constitution makes provision in clause 8(i) and 8(ii), even though the law as it is currently practised is discriminatory (e.g., age of consent).”

For these respondents the source of information regarding the law was the media (Item 56b), especially the newspaper (unspecified but quoted by most of the respondents), television news- specifically those providing coverage of constitutional issues, through information dispersed through the university support groups and through meetings and newsletters of the KwaZulu-Natal Gay Community (Durban). Other respondents (65%) perceived no legal sanctioning of homosexuality, or expressed a lack of knowledge about the law in this regard. These perceptions are conveyed by the following comments : “not given rights”; “sodomy is illegal”; “needs to be reviewed-to western country levels”; “oppressive - still views as illegal/indecent” and “homosexual relationships are illegal.”

Their perception of the law, with regard to fears of being arrested or harassed by police (Item 57), was also elicited from respondents in order to comprehend more personal experiences related to the implementation of South African law. In this regard, 39% (N=9) of the respondents expressed fears or concerns regarding arrest and police harassment of themselves or other gay and lesbian persons. These sentiments are described by the following comments: “If I visit the wrong places”; “sometimes on a gay beach”; “camping on the beach”; “have to be discreet”; “usually femme stereotypes invite harassment”, “have to be cautious.”

Few responses were given by the 48% of participants who reported no fears of harassment. They included “because I have a right to be what I am!” and “not anymore-unless Mugabe is president!”

The impression gained from the above-mentioned comments is that fear of police harassment may exist with regard to behaviours that involved soliciting partners in public places such as the beach. However, although fears regarding harassment were acknowledged by many participants, the use of words like “caution” and “being discreet” suggested that they were coping with the situation. Gordon (Yoganathan,1994) and Gevisser (1993), in fact, have asserted that homosexual subcultures existed relatively unharmed in the major South African cities and that only isolated cases of such harassment still occurred.

In comparison with the influence of religious beliefs, perceptions around the legality of homosexuality in South Africa seemed far less intense and restrictive to gays and lesbians. Also, in outlining their perceptions of the South African law with regard to homosexuality, respondents in general appeared more aware of actual constitutional developments and more able to link these perceptions to the source of the information. This scenario, being notably absent in the explanation of religious influences, suggests a somewhat greater awareness and empowerment of gays and lesbians legally, in comparison to religiously.

### 7.7.3. *Psychomedical Issues*

In this subsection, the issue of suicide and HIV were covered in order to contribute to the literature in this regard.

#### 7.7.3.1. *Suicide*

Regarding suicide (Item 58), it was found that 39% (N=9) of the respondents had attempted suicide between one to “a few times.” This figure included two of the four female respondents.

Reasons for attempting suicide included “feeling unloved by the person I love”; “broke up with lover who went out with my best friend”; “boyfriend disappeared - the rejection was uncontrollable”; “loneliness”; “depression”; “depression on the job”; “as a teenager my father was always drunk” and “confused - just come to accept my own homosexuality.” In interpreting these responses, it would appear that rejection and loneliness relating to relationship losses were primary in influencing the suicide attempts by respondents. One response, pertaining to attempted suicide following the acknowledgement of homosexual identity, appears to accentuate the crisis of coming-out in a heterosexual mainstream. However, there is insufficient information in this regard, on which to base meaningful or significant deductions.

Suicide attempts as a means of coping with the consequence of relationship losses (rejection, loneliness) appear to be more strongly conveyed in the available responses. Significantly, the thought of not being in a relationship, appeared to also cause concern in many of respondents who held negative views about ageing. For others, stability was seen in terms of being eventually settled with a partner. Thus, the findings in this subsection would also tend to support the notion of the critical nature of relationships in fostering a sense of stability and of support for gay and lesbian individuals.

#### 7.7.3.2. HIV And AIDS Related Influences

The perception of the causal association between homosexuality and the transmission of the HIV has been rife in society to the extent that even gays and lesbians appear to have internalised this belief. The purpose of briefly focusing on HIV and AIDS was to tap the perceptions of gays and lesbians, in this regard, and thereby gain an understanding of how it may have impacted on their lives or influenced their reactions.

Initial questions in this section (Item 59) explored the frequency with which HIV tests were undertaken by respondents as well as how often they looked out for signs of infection. Of twenty-three respondents, 26% (N=6) claimed never to have undergone HIV tests. Reasons proposed for this related to the fact that some respondents perceived themselves to be practising safe sex. The remaining respondents (74%) had been for between one and “several tests”, averaging approximately two tests.

In further exploring their awareness and sensitivity to HIV, it was found that at least 48% of all participants looked out for signs of HIV infections. The frequency of this ranged from “now and again” to “all of the time.” Some respondents described frequency more tangibly in terms of “after every sexual intercourse” versus “monthly.” Those respondents who reported not looking out for these signs again felt that there was no need as safe sex was practised by them. This, nevertheless, was rationalised by the typical comment “but I am aware of all the signs.”

Fourteen (61%) of the respondents also reported “reading a lot” about HIV related information. The purpose of doing this was explained by the following responses: “to keep updated”; “to recognise the signs”; “the more information the better” and the fact that respondents perceived themselves to be in a high risk group. Other respondents in this category shared perceptions which suggested that “the government was not supportive of research” or that AIDS was not accepted as a homosexual disease.

The attitudes of gays and lesbians to people who were HIV+, or who had AIDS, reflected mostly those of compassion, empathy and support towards the latter. Attitudes of fear and anxiety appear to be generated in several respondents to these conditions. These attitudes are reflected in comments such as: “I feel scared, yet I have no negative feelings towards infected people”; “acceptance and support versus rejection”; “support and empathy (if I were in their shoes?)”; “hate AIDS, not the people infected by it”; “sorry for HIV+ people.

Afraid of contracting disease. Disastrous.” “able to converse with HIV+ people. AIDS is fearful.”

Examples of several of the other responses reflecting compassion were: “pity them”; “sad-irrespective of whose fault it is”; “feel compassion-they need this and care”; “feel empathy-they need support”; “admire their will and courage to enjoy what life is left.”

Only one response conveyed a judgmental, blaming attitude towards carriers of the disease: “...people that can do nothing about life. Words like trust and love mean nothing (to them).”

In as much as a higher incidence of HIV infection was reported in heterosexuals in the KwaZulu-Natal region (Sher, in Van der Walt, 1995), the belief that AIDS is caused by homosexuality (i.e., perpetuated by films such as ‘Philadelphia’, the media, society at large and the internalisation of these perceptions by gays and lesbians) may, in part, account for the heightened awareness among gays and lesbians of the disease and its symptoms. It may also, to an extent, explain the sensitivity and compassion of this population to infected persons.

#### 7.7.4. *Political Influences*

Much of the discussion thus far has focused on issues related primarily to being gay or lesbian. In fact, unless prompted, very few respondents appeared to include the issue of race (i.e., of being black) in how they perceived themselves or conceptualised their worldviews.

In addressing the third objective of this study (see Chapter One), this section focused specifically on the issue of belonging simultaneously to two historically oppressed groups viz., black and homosexual.

In describing their status in these respects, respondents' attitudes ranged from apparent indifference to an unawareness of this dual status; neutral attitudes, affirmative attitudes which included aspects of race and sexual identity, and affirmative attitudes which pertained specifically to sexual identity.

Indifferent and neutral attitudes elicited by the prompting "Your comment on being black and gay in South Africa?" (Item 63) included: "no different"; "no comments"; "not applicable", "don't know." "consider ourselves South Africans first" and "No problem. See myself as a gay person in South Africa." Altogether 26% (N=6) of the participants responded in this mode.

The remaining responses, affirming the oppression relating to being black and gay, were as follows: "double oppression"; "horrendous; doubly and triply repressed and oppressed" (female respondent); "experiencing prejudice on two fronts"; "being Black is bad enough. Being gay, in addition, is worse. But this is changing greatly"; "difficult as a child - getting better"; "double discrimination disturbs normal development."

A few respondents conveyed a need for empowerment in regard to being black and gay. This is reflected by statements which read:

"I'm here to stay"; "have to stand up and acknowledge self-change the prejudice"; "time to break chains, be responsible for selves and move on."

Although significantly more respondents demonstrated an awareness of the dual oppression they were subjected to as gays and lesbians, more respondents appeared to emphasise the oppression with regard to being gay, than black. Of several possible interpretations of this trend, it could be surmised that the political changes in South Africa (specifically with regard to race) which preceded this study, may have conveyed the sense that racial oppression was being, or had been, addressed. On the other hand, the attention given by heterosexual and homosexual persons to addressing discrimination on the basis of sexual identity has been far less prominent, both within and outside the country. Another explanation may be that the gay and lesbian population is less visible than the black population in South Africa.

Hence the need, by some respondents, to enhance the visibility of their sexual identity over that of being black.

In general, however, the political involvement of respondents appeared to be quite low (Item 60). In this regard, while 57% (N=13) of the respondents, described themselves as being “not interested”; “not politically active”; not involved” and as hating politics, none of the participants indicated any significant political involvement or interest. A significant proportion of participants (44%), however, defined their level of political involvement in terms of their support for the African National Congress (ANC). A few of these respondents motivated this by stating that “the ANC promised to provide a better lifestyle for gays and lesbians” and that “the ANC agreed to guarantee rights in the new constitution.” One respondent indicated his support for the National Party (NP) and two, for the Democratic Party (DP). No motivation was furnished in these latter instances.

The finding of the relatively low politicisation of the gays and lesbians in this study may be seen in conjunction with the earlier finding that being black appeared to be less relevant to more respondents than being gay or lesbian. In this regard ‘politics’, as defined in a South African context, is currently applied more to addressing racial inequalities than inequalities based on sexual identity or any of the other non-ethnic population categorisations (e.g., gender, the disabled).

Perceptions relating to being black and gay in South Africa were further investigated by exploring interactions between the black and white gay and lesbian populations in South Africa (Item 62).

In this respect, fifteen of twenty-one respondents (71%) believed that racism between black and white gays and lesbians existed in South Africa. Forty-eight per cent of these individuals claimed to have experienced this personally, while four respondents (19%) felt it did not exist. Two of the twenty-one respondents (10%) were doubtful.

Further investigation within this context revealed that twice as many black gays and lesbians perceived more prejudice from the white population in general (10 respondents) than from white gays and lesbians (5 respondents) (Item 62c). No further explanation was provided in this regard.

An interesting finding was that 61% (of the nineteen respondents who answered this question) felt that the white racial group was “most accepting” of homosexuality (Item 61). One respondent felt that “Asiatics” were “accepting” (respondent of Indian ancestry), while another felt that this described the attitude of the ‘coloured’ group since they were “not as idealistic as others” (respondent of Indian origin).

The reasons supporting the perceptions of the ‘White’ as the most accepting group were described as: “had time to deal with it”; “their exposure and educational facilities”; “influence of their culture, upbringing”; “liberal thinkers”; “perceived to be a white person’s lifestyle”; “see more positive responses from them”; “the number of ‘out’ gays indicate this.”

Blacks were perceived by 88% of the respondents (i.e., fourteen of sixteen who responded) as the group that was least accepting of homosexuality. Reasons for this viewpoint included: “clashes with traditional cultures”; “religion and social reasons”; “cultural influence and upbringing”; “very ignorant on homosexuality”; “aren’t exposed to it as much”; “few are ‘out’.”

The responses of the gay and lesbian participants with regard to black and white gay and lesbian interfacing, in general, appear to accentuate the perception of differences between these groups. In this respect, white gays and lesbians, similar to the general white population, were perceived by several respondents as being prejudiced against black gay and lesbian persons. The white population in general was seen to be more ‘embracing’ and ‘accepting’ of homosexuality, thereby contributing to the greater “outness” of white gay and lesbian people.

Relating these perceptions of differences to the earlier perception of being black and gay, it would appear that the sense of being doubly oppressed also contributes to the perception of a qualitatively different, more oppressive experiencing, than white gay and lesbian counterparts.

The lack of perceived acceptance from Black racial groups appears to be attributed primarily to cultural constraints and “ignorance regarding homosexuality.”

The future of black gay and lesbians in South Africa over the next five years (Item 65) is perceived by most respondents to be mostly positive. This is expressed by comments such as: “bright”; “no discrimination”; “big, bright future, but we need the persistence and hope from all gays in the country”; “South Africa will lead the way, world-wide, as far as gay people are concerned.”

However, this optimism was tempered with an appeal for greater involvement and the greater visibility of gay and lesbian people. Some of these messages were: “time to come out of closets in the New South Africa”; “long time for change because many Blacks are still in the closet”; “hard work is needed to show they exist”; “need to challenge the invisibility first”; “more leaders are needed to ‘come out’ and challenge the invisibility.” Similar challenges to the invisibility of black gays and lesbians have been voiced by national activists and authors (Ditse, 1995; Gevisser, 1994). This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Respondents also tended to believe that there was a greater chance of the legislation changing “in favour of gay and lesbian people”, over the next five years (Item 64). The feeling, regarding the change in social attitudes, appeared to be less optimistic, even though several respondents believed that homosexuality would be more acceptable in society.

In this regard, it was felt that a positive change in the legislation and education would contribute to changing social attitudes towards the gay and lesbian population.

## 7.8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

At the outset of any study, there is the need to select from several issues those which appear most pertinent, topical, relevant or which appeal most to the researcher. In this way many important issues are deferred, and many not detected until some later stage of the research. Thus, many issues have emerged during the course of this investigation that have not been included in this study. In this regard, the following recommendations for future research in the field of homosexuality among black South Africans are proposed.

### 7.8.1. Homosexuality Among Women

The relative difficulty in procuring female participants, as opposed to male participants for this study, raises questions about the circumstances contributing to the invisibility of the former. Research into the experiencing of black lesbians may highlight unique issues faced by this group in dealing with their sexual identity.

### 7.8.2. Gay And Lesbian Adolescents

A review of available literature in this area indicates that the adolescent gay and lesbian groups have received negligible research attention internationally and none nationally.

Information generated from studies of gay and lesbian adolescents can be vital in promoting an understanding of their needs and concerns, and in creating relevant support structures and systems to address their resolution.

### 7.8.3. Older Gays And Lesbians

This study focused specifically on the worldviews and experiencing of younger gays and lesbians (i.e., between 20 and 30 years of age). An investigation focusing on the unique needs of older gays or lesbians can provide a more holistic understanding of the ontology of gays and lesbians and assist in creating relevant support structures for the fulfilment of their needs.

#### *7.8.4. Gays And Lesbians Who Have Been Or Who Are In Heterosexual Marriages*

An investigation into the experiences of gays and lesbians who may have been previously married to a heterosexual partner, or who are currently in heterosexual marriages, would provide useful insights that could be used in understanding and counselling both the gay and lesbian populations and, heterosexual spouses of homosexual partners.

#### *7.8.5. Parents Of Gays And Lesbians*

The current study has explored the gay and lesbian person's perception of parental responses, or anticipated responses, to their homosexuality. However, the issues and concerns of parents of gays and lesbians are also crucial in generating knowledge of how the latter deal with their offspring's homosexuality and what their specific needs may be.

#### *7.8.6. Children Of Gays And Lesbians*

This is an area that appears to have received no research attention in the South African literature. It would be useful, for example, to understand what the anxieties or needs of this population are, or what impact or implications the increasing visibility of gays and lesbians has on their lives.

#### *7.8.7. Bisexuals*

This is also an area that appears to have been ignored by researchers. The current study has attempted to focus on individuals who considered themselves to be exclusively homosexual. However, those individuals who consider themselves to have both homosexual and heterosexual preferences, may undergo experiences that are specific to their broader sexual identity.

Research in this context may thus generate insights into the issues of individuals who describe themselves as bisexual.

### 7.8.8. Issues In The Workplace

Within the current South African context, there are attempts by several employers to redress imbalances in their company's demography by addressing the issues of racial, gender and differently-abled inequalities. Although the gay and lesbian populations have been identified as disadvantaged (in terms of it being discriminated against) at a constitutional level, this recognition does not appear to translate itself into affirmative action for these groups.

However, the new Labour Act of 1995 does in fact identify that harassment or victimisation based on sexual preference is an unfair labour practice. In view of this political and legal recourse, it would be meaningful to procure the views and attitudes of employers and both homosexual and heterosexual employees, in the workplace.

### 7.9. CONCLUSION

The area of homosexuality among black gays and lesbians is expansive, yet one with a severe dearth of research, and demanding extensive exploration. In an attempt to accomplish this need, this study has attempted to address the following objectives in the course of its discussion.

1. To provide more holistic information on the gay and lesbian worldview in general (Many of the present studies tend to focus on deficiencies rather than on aspects of growth);
2. To provide a conceptualisation of the ontology of black gay and lesbian individuals in South Africa within a psychosocial context;
3. To explore the effects of a dual oppressive system related to race and sexual identity.

Among the most significant of the findings generated in this study is that of the adoption of society's homonegative stereotypes by gays and lesbians themselves. The integration and internalisation of these negative attitudes and values appears to undermine the self-valuing of gay and lesbian persons and inflame the oppression of self-identity, which in turn is debilitating to the individual's self-concept and its expression as a whole. This process contributes to perpetuating the invisibility of black gay and lesbian persons to parents, siblings, the workforce and the public.

In any liberation, the point of the struggle must be acknowledged by the oppressed themselves. In this case, the gays and lesbians must take up the cudgels if this struggle is to be fuelled and propagated by every other respectful, thinking individual and group in South African society. This must be done so that the visibility, dignity and valuing of the gay and lesbian populations may be accentuated or enhanced.

If the gay and lesbian populations in South Africa, as they have been found to be all over the world, represents between 10% to 15% of the population (Fassinger, 1991), then the gay and lesbian populations in South Africa should in fact be at least five times larger than the so-called Indian population (South Africans of Indian ancestry) in this country, for example. If our response to this demography is one of blatant disbelief, it merely serves to accentuate the debilitating invisibility of gay and lesbian persons in South Africa, black or white. What is also necessary, therefore, is more input by the media to bridge the ignorance and misinformation as a result of self righteous, 'pathological' and 'immoral' labels apportioned to homosexuality, and to focus on pertinent issues that would serve to enhance the respect and valuing of the gay and lesbian populations.

Inferring the developmental experiencing of South African black gays and lesbians from a sample of twenty-three persons, procured from a single city and who are all relatively 'out' at the self level, admittedly, limits the generalisability of the current findings.

In this respect, the diversity of thoughts, experiences and perceptions of homosexual persons, as for heterosexual persons, spans a multitude of factors and variables. Added to this, the broad scope of the current study further restricts the generalisability of any findings to the greater black gay and lesbian communities.

However, considering the relative absence of research in the area of homosexuality among black South Africans, the findings presented here are at least a start to challenging the current void in the awareness of the academic and the lay public. Most importantly, it is hoped that the findings presented herein contribute to the increasing awareness, in black gay and lesbian persons themselves, of pertinent issues that need to be addressed and challenged tenaciously at the self and community levels.

In as much as the purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the field of Psychology, its wider intention is to contribute to the acknowledgement of, and respect towards, the gay and lesbian communities as a vital, integral pulse in the South African heartbeat.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUMMARY

#### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the area of homosexuality appears to have been given more attention. Empirical research in the field, however, seems to be less available internationally and far less available in South Africa. The greatest dearth in research appears to be in the area of homosexuality among non-western groups. In South Africa, available literature indicates that the experiencing of the black gay or lesbian person has been given negligible research attention.

With a cognisance of the above gap in the literature, the purpose of this study was to focus ontologically on the psychosocial experiencing of a doubly oppressed minority, that is, the black person who is homosexual in South Africa. This study embraced the following aims:

- To provide more holistic information on the gay and lesbian worldview in general (many of the present studies tend to focus on aspects of deficiencies rather than on aspects of growth);
- To provide a conceptualisation of the ontology of black gay and lesbian individuals in South Africa within a psychosocial context;
- To explore the effects of a dual oppressive system related to race and sexual identity.

To address the aims of the study meaningfully and holistically required a thorough exploration of the experiencing and issues of black gay and lesbian persons from the perspective of their worldview.

In this respect, and with an intended provision of an overview of the homosexual identity development process, the investigation focused on the following aspects: the lifespan development process (early childhood to ageing) and relevant socio-political factors as they are integrated and internalised by individuals who are gay or lesbian, and black. The following are areas thus covered:

#### Identity Development

- Biographical/Demographic Data
- Self-identity Definition
- Homophobia and Coming Out

#### Lifespan Development

- Developmental Processes (focusing on early childhood and adolescence)
- Relationships
- Parenting
- Ageing

#### Social Influences

- Early Socialisation
- Religiosity
- Legal Issues
- Psycho-Medical Issues
- Socio-Political Orientation

### 8.2 RESEARCH PROCESS

Of 150 questionnaires distributed to black (i.e. Coloured, African and Indian) gays and lesbians, 23 were completed. A phenomenological approach in the organisation and interpretation of data was adopted, given the voluminous pool of responses generated by the questionnaire.

### 8.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

#### 8.3.1. SELF -IDENTITY DEFINITION

##### 8.3.1.1. Perception of Self

Black South Africans appear to have derived their identity in terms of their perception of their sexuality, their lifestyle and self- perceptions within the context of information made available to them through the perception of significant others or their observation of gays and lesbians. While their self-perceptions have tended to be holistic, incorporating physical and psychological dimensions, there appears to be a tendency to view gays and lesbians, as a group, stereotypically (i.e., primarily in terms of sexuality).

Nevertheless, findings of this study suggest the growing self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-nurturing attitudes of black gays and lesbians towards themselves and others in the gay and lesbian community.

##### 8.3.1.2. Homophobia

Participant responses, with regard to homophobia, tend to support their relative acceptance of sexual identity, at least at a self level. There was a tendency, however, for respondents to view others in the gay community as homophobic.

### 8.3.1.3. Coming Out

The primary factors, perceived to delay the process of identity disclosure to parents, were the fear of rejection (including the anticipation of loss of love, respect, financial support and good relationships between participants and parents), staunch religious and cultural beliefs of parents as well as the fear of disappointing parents (in the sense that marriage or bearing them grandchildren may not be realised).

In weighing the benefits as opposed to the risk of coming out to siblings, it appears that the risk of disclosure at this level was minimal. In fact, the majority of respondents, felt that this disclosure would have positive consequences for them.

Disclosure to parents posed a greater risk than disclosure to siblings. However, the perceptions of parents' reasons for objections appear to revolve to a greater extent around concern for this offspring's safety and future happiness than religious beliefs or cultural and community values.

## 8.3.2. DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

### 8.3.2.1. Childhood Abuse

Findings of this investigation suggest that relatively few respondents considered themselves to have been abused (i.e., emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse or physical abuse) during their childhood (i.e., before age twelve).

It appears that sexual advancements were experienced in only a few instances during this period of development, rather than as generic, ongoing events, in the lives of black gays and lesbians.

### 8.3.2.2. Early Influences

The responses of the majority of respondents in this study suggest that black gays and lesbians were exposed to primarily homonegative messages about homosexuality.

### 8.3.3. ADULTHOOD AND OLD AGE

#### 8.3.3.1 Relationships

Although the findings of this study suggest an internalisation and integration of traditional heterosexual norms by most of the participants, the majority had engaged, or were currently involved, in short-, medium- or long-term homosexual relationships.

The dynamics of the homosexual relationship appeared to differ for short-term and long-term relationships essentially in terms of the physical component. This component seemed more characteristic of the very short-term relationship. Relationships that were more medium-term to long-term (eight to twelve months and longer) tended to include emotional, affectionate, physical and spiritual dimensions.

Among homosexual persons, long-term homosexual relationships differed from long-term heterosexual relationships in that the former included the physical dimension as a vital element. Long-term heterosexual relationships, as experienced by gay and lesbian individuals, appear to primarily involve the emotional, spiritual and affectional dimensions. In long term homosexual relationships, a holism is evidenced, inclusive of the emotional, spiritual, affectional and physical components.

#### 8.3.3.2. Parenting

The majority (78%) of the respondents provided positive perceptions of the gay and lesbian capacity for parenting. The same number reported their own capacity for positivity and support to their child who may be homosexual, although several of their responses also reflected concern for the child's well-being in a heterosexual world.

#### 8.3.3.3. Ageing

In comparing participant responses to the different aspects of adulthood and old age (relationships, parenting and ageing), it was evident that the area of ageing, specifically after age forty-five, elicited responses which appeared most defeatist and despairing. The results indicate that the influence of negative stereotypes, regarding the 'dismal future' of elderly gays and lesbians, appear to have been internalised by the majority of the respondents

#### 8.3.4. SOCIAL INFLUENCES

##### 8.3.4.1. Religiosity

From the responses, it would appear that religion was rejected by a large percentage of respondents on the basis that it was perceived to condemn and reject homosexuality. For those who saw religion as being meaningful in their lives, direction and a sense of "God's love", were seen as significant, despite the perception that homosexuality may not necessarily be approved within the context of their religion. What seems apparent, is the lack of actual knowledge of religious teachings, as opposed to opinions and judgements perhaps presumed to be religiously based.

#### 8.3.4.2. The Law and Homosexuality

In comparison to the influence of religious beliefs, perceptions around the legality of homosexuality in South Africa seemed far less intense and debilitating to gays and lesbians. Also, in outlining the perceptions of the South African law with regard to homosexuality, most respondents, appeared aware of actual constitutional developments and were able to link these perceptions to the source of the information. This scenario, being notably absent in the explanation of religious influences, suggests a greater awareness and empowerment of black gays and lesbians in relation to the law than to religion.

#### 8.3.4.3. Psycho-medical Issues

##### 8.3.4.3.1. Suicide

Regarding suicide, it was found that 39% (N=9) of the respondents had attempted suicide between one to “a few times.” In further probing the responses, it would appear that rejection and loneliness, relating to relationship losses, were primary factors in influencing the suicide attempts by respondents.

##### 8.3.4.3.2. Related Influences

The majority of the respondents (61%) appear to be sensitised to the condition of AIDS. The attitudes of gays and lesbians to people who were HIV+ or who had AIDS reflected mostly compassion, empathy and support towards the latter. Attitudes of fear and anxiety to these conditions appear to be generated in several of the respondents.

#### 8.3.4.5. Political Influences

This section focused specifically on the issue of belonging simultaneously to two historically oppressed groups: black and homosexual.

Although significantly more respondents demonstrated an awareness of the dual oppression to which they were subjected as gays and lesbians, more respondents appeared to emphasise the oppression with regard to being gay or lesbian, than black.

The perception of the gay and lesbian participants with regard to black and white gay and lesbian interfacing, appears to accentuate the perceived differences between these groups. In this respect, the white population in general as compared to white gays and lesbians, were perceived by several respondents as being prejudiced towards black gay and lesbian persons. The white population in general was also seen to be more 'embracing' and 'liberal' towards homosexuality, thereby contributing to the greater "outness" of white gay and lesbian people. It would appear that for black gays and lesbians, the sense of being doubly oppressed (black and gay) also contributes to the perception of a qualitatively different, more oppressive, experiencing, than white gay and lesbian counterparts.

#### 8.4. CONCLUSION

The area of homosexuality among black gays and lesbians is expansive, yet one with a severe dearth of research interest and demanding extensive exploration. This study has contributed to bridging this gap by addressing the following questions in the course of its discussion:

1. What are some of the issues that need to be addressed by black gays or lesbians in their acknowledgement of sexual identity?
2. What are some of the developmental concerns experienced by black gay and lesbian persons since their childhood?
3. What are the unique issues (i.e. relationships, parenting, old-age) that are faced, or anticipated by black gay and lesbian individuals in their adulthood and later life?

4. How have social factors (e.g., religion, legislation, politics) influenced the perceptions and experiences of black gays and lesbians?

Among the most significant of the findings generated in this study, is that of the adoption of society's homonegative stereotypes by gays and lesbians themselves. The integration and internalisation of these negative attitudes and values, appears to undermine the self-valuing of gay and lesbian persons and inflame the oppression of self-identity, which in turn is debilitating to the individual's self-concept and its expression as a whole. A consequence of this is the invisibility of the black gay and lesbian person to parents, siblings, the workforce and the public.

In the relative absence of research in the area of homosexuality among black South Africans, the findings presented here are at least a start to challenging the current void in the awareness of the academic and the lay public. Most importantly, it is hoped that the findings presented herein contribute to the increasing awareness in black gay and lesbian persons themselves of pertinent issues that need to be addressed and challenged tenaciously at the self and community levels.

*APPENDIX A**QUESTIONNAIRE**A. BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS*

Age

Sex

Occupational Status / Field of Study

Single Parent / Both Parents

Occupational Band    Mother :

                                    Father :

Nuclear / Extended Family

No. of Siblings

Position in family

Racial Group

History of homosexuality / bisexuality in family

*B. DEFINITIONS*

1. Give one word to describe yourself?
2. How do you see yourself? (Do you have a certain image of yourself?)
3. How do you feel about your sexuality?

4. What do you understand by the words

(a) homosexuality ?

(b) gay / lesbian ?

(c) Do you see the gay and lesbian populations as being significantly different from each other?

Why ?

How ?

5. With which word, of the several used to describe gay or lesbian people you are most/not comfortable with?

6. What was your reaction to these words when you first heard them?

(a) homosexual ?

(b) gay/lesbian ?

(c) straight ?

(b) gay/lesbian ?

(c) straight ?

8. Is there a specific word in your culture / home language that is used to describe (a) a gay/lesbian individual?

(b) homosexuality ?

9. Which slang do you use most often to refer to
- (a) yourself ?
  - (b) other gay/lesbian individuals ?
  - (c) the gay/lesbian population ?

C. COMING OUT AND HOMOPHOBIA

10. What do you understand by a closet gay/lesbian?
11. (a) What do you understand by "homophobic"?
- (b) Would you describe yourself as homophobic? Why not?
12. If you could change anything physical about yourself, what would that be?
13. When did you first feel attracted to someone of the same sex?  
(age/place/event)
14. When did you first think about the possibility of your being gay/lesbian?
15. (a) When did you first feel gay/lesbian/homosexual?
- (b) The emotion that accompanied this feeling? (If several, rank them in the order of your experience).
16. (a) Are you 'out' as a gay/lesbian person?
- (b) To self Y/N
- (c) To siblings Y/N
- (d) To friends Y/N
- (e) To parents Y/N

- (f) general public Y/N
- (g) colleagues in workplace Y/N

(Please rank above in order of coming out)  
or how you think you will come out.

17. (a) What eventually made you acknowledge your sexual preference to yourself?
- (b) What was the greatest obstacle to this process?
18. (a) What have your siblings' reactions been to your disclosure of your sexual preference?

OR

- b) What do you think your siblings' reactions would be to your self-disclosure of your sexual preference?
- (c) What do you stand to
- i) lose
  - ii) gain, by disclosing your sexual preference to your siblings?
19. (a) How were your parents made aware of your sexual preference?
- (b) Their reactions towards you after the above awareness?
- (c) How did this differ from the reactions you anticipated?
- (d) Your reaction to them after this awareness?

OR

20. (a) If you have not yet shared your sexual preference with your parents, what has prevented you from doing this?

- (b) Do you plan to disclose your sexual preference to your parents?
- (c) Do you have a plan (timespan, setting)?
- (d) What do you anticipate their reactions to your disclosure would be?
- (e) How do you expect that their knowledge of your sexual preference will affect your relationship with them?
- (f) What, do you think, will be their greatest concern/objection to your sexual preference?

D. DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS

- 21. Mention two significant events from your childhood (up to age 12) and ages while these occurred.
- 22. Do you recall feeling that a sexual advance was made on yourself as a child (up to 12), by a peer or older person? (include age of self, other and relationship between self and other).

23. (a) Have you ever experienced abuse as a child (up to 12) ? Y/N
---

Age      Type of Abuse By Whom

Reaction now to this abuse

EMOTIONAL :

NEGLECT :

SEXUAL :

PHYSICAL :

24. Did you experience being bullied by your parent/s as a child?  
Explain.
25. As a child (up to 12), who was your role model and why?
26. Has this changed now ? Y/N                      How?
27. To which clubs / societies did you belong to during your childhood or adolescence?
28. What were the messages you received / were exposed, to regarding homosexuality?
29. What have you done to enhance your understanding of your sexual identity?

E. RELATIONSHIPS

30. As you were growing up (say high school Std 6 - 8), how did you imagine your life would be in the present? (in terms of relationships / marriage/children etc.)
31. Define "love".
32. What are you looking for in a relationship with a significant other?
33. a) List all the heterosexual relationships you've had, and the duration of each.  
b) How would you describe these relationships (e.g., physical, emotional, spiritual, affectionate)?
34. a) List all the homosexual relationships you've had, and the duration of each?  
b) How would you describe these relationships (e.g., physical, emotional, spiritual, affectionate)?
35. What is your reaction to the "butch/fem" or "queen" role stereotypes?
36. a) Are you governed by the idea of loyalty to a single partner?

- b) From where has this influence come from?
37. Do you find yourself compartmentalising relationships according to purely sexual or friendship dimensions?
- 38 a) Does a homosexual relationship offer you more/less than a heterosexual relationship?
- b) How many of your friends (close acquaintances) are  
gay?  
lesbian?  
bisexual ?  
homosexual ?
39. Is race a criterion in your choice of a partner? Why?
40. a) Have you felt under pressure to marry an opposite sex person?  
Y/N
- b) If "yes", by whom ?
- c) How have you dealt with this ?
41. How do you feel about marriage (for yourself) ?
42. How do you feel about events such as St. Valentine's Day; weddings etc.?

#### F. PARENTING

43. a) Would you like to have children?
- b) If "yes", how do you plan to have children?
44. What is your perception of gay/lesbian couples who are parents?

45. What do you expect your reaction would be if your child is gay/lesbian?

G. AGEING

46. How do you feel about your future?

47. How do you feel about getting older ?

a) 25 - 35

b) 36 - 45

c) 46 - 55

d) 55 - 70

e) 70 onwards

H. SOCIAL INFLUENCES

48. What are your interests? How did they begin?

49. To what club/s; movement/s; society or societies do you belong?

50. a) What was the most inspirational line (advice, saying) you've ever heard (regarding your life style) that moved you forward in terms of your lifestyle/sexual preference?

51. b) What was the most negative line you've ever heard (regarding your life style/sexual preference)?

52. What book/s / plays /audio visual project has/have influenced your actual identity either by inspiring you, empowering you or making you more comfortable with your sexuality?

I. RELIGION

53. Does religion play an important role in your life?

How?

If it does not, why not?

54. How does your religion view homosexuality?

55. a) Which religion do you perceive as being most accepting of homosexuality?

b) Which religion do you perceive as being least accepting of homosexuality?

J. THE LAW

56. a) What is your knowledge of the law (legal stipulations) as it concerns the lives of gay/lesbian individuals in South Africa?

b) What is your source of this information?

57. Have you any fears of being arrested / harassed by police for being gay/lesbian?

K. PSYCHO - MEDICAL ISSUES (SUICIDE/HIV)

58. a) Have you ever contemplated suicide?

b) Number of times ?

c) What prompted the above attempt/s?

59. a) How often have you been for HIV tests ?

b) How often do you look out for signs of infection ?

- c) Do you find yourself particularly reading, or avoiding literature on HIV/AIDS? Elaborate.
- d) Your attitudes to AIDS (or people infected with HIV)?

#### L. POLITICAL ORIENTATION

- 60. What is the level of your political involvement?
- 61. Which racial / ethnic group do you perceive as being
  - a) most accepting of homosexuality ? Why ?
  - b) least accepting of homosexuality ? Why ?
- 62. Racism between Black and White gay/lesbians in South Africa :
  - a) Does it exist ?
  - b) Have you ever experienced it ?
  - c) Have you experienced more prejudice from white gay/lesbian individuals as a gay/lesbian person or have you experienced more prejudice from the white population in general, as a black person?
- 63. Your comment on being Black and gay/lesbian in South Africa?
- 64. What is your perception of the future for gays/lesbians in South Africa over the next 5 years? (legislation, people, attitudes, gay/lesbian attitudes)?
- 65. The future of Black Gay and Lesbian individuals in South Africa?

#### M. REFLECTING ON BEING GAY/LESBIAN

- 66. Before acknowledging your sexual preference, did you hold any stereotypes / prejudices towards gay and lesbian persons?
- 67. How have these perceptions influenced your life?

68. Does being gay/lesbian allow you to perceive the world differently than if you were heterosexual?
69. Have you ever experienced prejudice as a result of your sexual preference?
70. What is your comment on the perception that gay/lesbian individuals are more likely to be found in creative jobs (drama, music, photography, art)?

N. GENERAL

71. If you could change any of your experiences, what would you change?
72. Is there any other place than this city/country in which you would feel better?

Where ?

Why ?

73. Other comments ?

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(PS. Only primary reference sources are listed)

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