A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE COMING OUT PROCESS OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

by

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DEDICATION

EVELENE BUTLER (1937 – 1994)

To my mother, whose life was a constant example of determination, honour, integrity, and service to others. Your spirit has been with me throughout the pursuit of this Doctorate, and to you, I give thanks for encouraging me to always "make my own kind of music." You will always be the wind beneath my wings mom.

MATTHEW SHEPARD (1976 – 1998)

Matthew, you sacrificed your young life so that our world will remember to respect and embrace human diversity. Your name will always be synonymous with what is good and pure and decent in our world. We will miss, but never forget you.

In 1890, in England, **Oscar Wilde** (in Ellman, 1987) was one of the first people to publicly refer to the issue of homosexuality. In his defense of sexual misconduct he offered the following profound statement: *"The love that dare not speaketh its name".* He was in fact referring to the love that one man could have for another.

Metthys Strydom, a standard 9 pupil at Otto du Plessis High School in Port Elizabeth was expelled in 1997, simply because he had honestly disclosed his sexual orientation. Not only were his legal rights violated, but also as a result of this he lost his secondary education.

A year later in 1998, America woke up to the news that a young gay University of Oklahoma student had been the victim of the most brutal forms of homophobia. As referenced in the on the previous page, **Matthew Shepard** was 21 at the time he was brutally beaten and later died. The following extract from the Exit magazine captures both the brutality and poignancy of Matthew's death:

> *"One of our own was lynched*
> *in such a grotesque manner*
> *that we had to hear the warning signal*
> *loud and clear.*
> *Matthew Shephard's death has been likened*
> *to the crucifixion of Jesus*
> *as he was pistol whipped, burned, cut,*
> *beaten unconscious,*
> *tied spread eagle against a pole*
> *and left to die in the freezing cold*
> *as he begged for his life.*

It takes years to perfect and execute hate with such
diligence."
(De Ambrosa in, EXIT, Issue 108, February 1999:8)

Thus, this study has attempted to explore and articulate the lived reality and coming out process of gay and lesbian youth in a contemporary South Africa, with the hope that our nations sexual minority youth can "speaketh" freely and experience a love that certainly has a name. It is hoped that sharing the stories of these 18 brave young people lives will ensure that the Metthys Strydoms' of our country won't have to endure such humiliation again, and that the Matthew Shepards' of our world won't have to pay the ultimate price of coming out – their lives.

The researcher believes that the unveiling of these 18 stories demonstrates that their strength is extraordinary; their challenges are many; their courage is testimony to the beauty and power of the human spirit; and the call goes out to each of us in the helping professions to ensure that the fortitude and resilience articulated by these gay and lesbian youth are met with equal dedication, diligence and commitment in responding to their challenges, and collectively creating an environment that truly reflects an inclusive, diverse and tolerant society which embraces rather than negates the lives and experiences of our country's sexual minority youth.

Finally, in dedicating this study to the brave young people who participated in this study, the researcher will offer the song: "**Making your own kind of music"** as a metaphor for the experience of coming out for gay and lesbian youth in South Africa. This song originated from the first feature film focusing on the lives of gay teenagers, called **Beautiful Thing.** It encapsulates the fortitude of South African gay and lesbian youth as they

have courageously embarked upon a pathway that can only be viewed as pioneering, gutsy and extraordinary. In the face of enormous adversity they have still managed to celebrate their lives by **making their own kind of music.**

It is incumbent upon all South Africans to foster a climate wherein all of our gay and lesbian youth can openly, honestly, and creatively **MAKE THEIR OWN KIND OF MUSIC.**

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC (MAMA CASS)

Nobody can tell you there is only one song worth singing
They may try and sell you
Because it hangs them up to see someone like you

But you have got to
MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC
Sing your own special song
MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC
Even if nobody else sings along

You are going to be nowhere
The loneliest kind of lonely
It may be rough going
Just to do your thing
Is the hardest thing to do

But you have got to

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

Sing your own special song

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

Even if nobody else sings along

So if you cannot take my hand

And if you must be going

I will understand

You have got to

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

Sing your own special song

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

Even if nobody else sings along

(Cass, Sony Records, 1996)

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5. My life has been abundantly blessed with wonderful friends, and two deserve special mention. To Anthea, my soul-mate, sister, friend and companion; you have provided me with unconditional love and support like no other. I will be eternally grateful for the special role you have played in my life, and walking every step of the way in completing this dream. Without you I would be less of a person. To Neil, for your care and support throughout this journey, you never gave up on me and that meant the world. I feel privileged to have walked this journey with you for so many years; you have added so much to my life. Thank you.

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SUMMARY

The experience of being young and gay or lesbian has been seriously neglected in adolescent research and service provision in South Africa. The gay liberation movement and the protection for sexual orientation granted in the New Constitution (The Constitution Act 108 of 1996) has highlighted the acute needs of disenfranchised sexual minority youth approaching the new millenium. Furthermore, as evidenced in this study, teenagers are self-identifying as homosexual at an earlier age than at any time in this country's history, and as a result, are commencing their coming out process during their early and mid-adolescent years.

Thus, the aim of this study was to provide gay and lesbian youth with an opportunity to articulate their coming out stories, and to describe the meanings and associations which they attribute to their developmental task of disclosing their homosexuality. In order to achieve this, a qualitative study was conducted to phenomenologically explore and describe their coming out process, as well as contextualising it within a transforming and contemporary South Africa. As a measure of ensuring trustworthiness and grounding the researcher in the phenomenon under investigation, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of eleven gay and lesbian youth, ages ranging between 18 and 22 years. The pilot study enabled the researcher to critically assess the research process and procedures, and as a result of this assessment, specific modifications were made to the main investigation. Thereafter, a main investigation was conducted with a sample of seven sexual minority youth, ages ranging between 16 and 21.

The same methodological procedures were conducted in both the pilot study and the main investigation, namely: Sampling procedures utilised

were purposive and convenience, as well as snowball/chain-referent due to the hidden and invisible nature of this population. Theoretical saturation was adopted to establish the point at which themes had become repetitive, and that no new information was emerging from the interviews. As a result of adopting these techniques, the study was able to obtain a sample of gay and lesbian youth which was relatively reflective of the diverse mosaic of South African society.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and the use of an interview guide. The grand tour question asked each participant to describe his or her coming out stories in as much detail as possible. Tesch's (1990) model of data analysis was employed, and as a result of this content analysis the following five themes emerged from the data: the emotions experienced by the participants and the subsequent coping strategies adopted in managing their emotions; a model theory of the stages of the coming out process; the support structures which facilitated this process; hindrance factors and the multiple levels of homophobia; as well as recommendations suggested by the participants with regards to strategies that would enable an easier transition through the developmental task of coming out.

Various measures were employed to increase the trustworthiness of this study: triangulation, peer examination, authority of the researcher, literature control/audit, interviewing skills and techniques, independent coder, code-recode procedure, as well as providing a dense description of the coming out process, which included direct quotations from the qualitative interviews with sexual minority youth.

A conclusion can be drawn that despite stressors such as initial identity confusion and acts of homophobia, coupled with minimal support systems,

the participants demonstrate an enormity of strength, resilience, and competence in negotiating the process of self-disclosing their homosexuality. This study has proposed that social workers and related mental health practitioners adopt a systems, ecological, strengths focused and empowerment based intervention strategy in responding to the needs and challenges of South Africa's sexual minority youth – the goal of which is to facilitate achieving an integrated sense of coherence and a positive homosexual identity.

KEY WORDS

Gay

Lesbian

Homosexual

Adolescent homosexuality

Homophobia

Coming out

Youth

Emotions

Social work

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction and problem formulation

"A child's personality cannot grow without self-esteem, without feelings of emotional security, without faith in the world's willingness to make room for him (or her) to live as a human being." These are the words of Lillian Smith (in Whitlock, 1989:2) a civil rights activist in the 1940's. During this civil rights speech Smith urged her audience to become aware of the ways in which behaviours and attitudes directed against particular groups place so many children in jeopardy. Smith's poignant commentary reflecting life in the 1940's could be translated into the contemporary world of gay and lesbian youth coming of age in South Africa in the 1990's. This is further reflected in Paul Monnette's (1992:14) epitaph in which he articulates the freedom associated with "coming out." "I cannot conceive the hidden life anymore, don't think of it as life. When you finally come out, there is a pain that stops, and you know it will never hurt like that again, no matter how much you lose or how badly you die. This is all I know."

Based on the researcher's experience in this field, the experience of being young and gay has been seriously neglected in the youth research as well as in youth service provision in South Africa. This study aims to reflect the coming out process of gay and lesbian youth within the context of their adolescent processes. It is the intention that a study of this nature will not only place the lives of gay and lesbian youth within the larger youth at risk population of South Africa, but will also offer a knowledge base from which to build a scientifically motivated intervention model for helping professionals.

It is imperative that South Africa make an honest commitment to the safeguarding and protection of all youth, and gain a critical understanding of a previously hidden and neglected group of gay and lesbian youth. In spite of prejudice and stigmatisation, gay and lesbian youth have demonstrated tremendous resilience.

This has been borne out in the popular magazines focusing on gay and lesbian lifestyles, for example, Exit, Outright, and Gay South Africa. The author will cite two examples to illustrate this point. An article in the Outright magazine by Rose (1996:32) focussed on members of the lesbigay community "who are strong enough to say their say." Rose referred to Ross Hopkins, aged 17, by saying that he is "surely going to be one of the great leaders of tomorrow. He is a proud gay youth who is so sure of himself that he has acknowledged his homosexuality and come out to his entire circle of school friends and to his family." Ross, in Rose (1996:3) expressed his resilience in these words: "Sure, there have been some tough times, especially with people my own age and in this small community, but nothing that cannot be overcome."

In a more recent article in the Outright magazine, Van der Walt, the author, focused on positive gay role models. He covered a feature on Bevan Veenendaal, aged 17, who has come out. Based on the latter's coming out, Van der Walt (1997:17) writes: "Each individual knows when it is time to tell their friends and family that they are gay and for this 17-year-old it came after he tried to kill himself. This may make him sound weak, and even unsuitable to feature in an article on teenage gay role models. Far from it. Today he is confident and comfortable with being gay, has no problem sharing his coming out story, and has some wise words for those who are yet to cross the Rubicon."

The fact that gay and lesbian youth are able to succeed and excel in social development is a testimony to the remarkable resilience of the human spirit. This study will endeavour to capture and articulate this extraordinary human spirit of the country's gay and lesbian youth, and in so doing, discover what enables these young people to demonstrate resilience in the face of such adversity.

It is important to explicate and define the concept of the coming out process, as well as placing this discussion in the historical context of gay and lesbian youth coming out within a New South African society approaching a new millennium. The following discussion will address those issues alluded to in the problem statement. More specifically, reference will be made to the process of coming out within a framework of the identified needs and challenges that are pertinent to the lives of gay and lesbian youth. This discussion will further be placed in the context of present day South Africa, as well as demonstrating this study's application to the social work profession.

1.1.1 The coming out process

Under this heading the concept of "coming out" will be defined as applicable to this study. Coming out is the developmental process through which gay and lesbian people recognise their sexual preferences (orientation) and choose to integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives. Kus (1985:2) agrees and defines this concept as "that process by which a gay or lesbian person identifies themselves as homosexual, changes any previously held negative notions of gays, lesbians or homosexuality in general, accepts being homosexual as a positive stage of being, and acts on the assumption that being gay or lesbian is a positive stage of being."

Troiden and Goode (1980) aptly reflects that perhaps no aspect of adolescent homosexuality is as weighty or rich in its cultural sensibilities as that of the coming out process, the declaration of one's sexual orientation, across cultures. In the same vein no body of research in adolescent development in South Africa is as urgently in need of new models and fresh ideas as the process and implications of coming out as gay and lesbian youth. The latter seems even more apparent in light of the fact that gay and lesbian youth are coming out at an increasingly younger age. This issue requires explication and a more in-depth discussion; thus the researcher will provide a brief overview of international research pertaining to the age of the coming out process.

Since the time of Dank's (1971) classic study on coming out, studies have shown that the mean age of coming out for males has dropped significantly. Dank (1971) reported a mean age of 19.3 years. Troiden and Goode (1980) reported a mean of 16.3 years of age for the first self-identification as homosexual, and Coleman (1989) reported a mean age of 15 years for gay males and 20 years for lesbians. Remafedi (1987) later reported a mean age of 14 years among gay males who self-identify themselves as homosexual. Ross (1989) reported on the mean age of realisation of coming out in four countries: Sweden (14.1 years), Australia (12.5 years), Finland (13.9 years) and Ireland (15.6 years).

Herdt (1989) further contends that the more sexually restrictive the culture, the later the age at which one will discover and accept one's own homosexuality. If the inverse of this hypothesis is used in a present day South African context, a tentative assumption can be made that this country's gay youth are coming out at a far more frequent rate and at a younger age, given that local society has begun to transform itself into a

more open, less restrictive, democratic, accepting culture which celebrates rather than negates individual diversity. In the light of these images of societal transformation, it is important to place this discussion within a framework of how, despite significant changes in contemporary South Africa, gay and lesbian youth are still faced with specific needs and numerous challenges which affect their everyday lives. These needs and challenges will be outlined in the following discussion.

1.1.2 Specific needs and challenges for gay and lesbian youth

1.1.2.1 Social Needs

Systematic discrimination, stigmatisation and criminalisation have placed many gay and lesbian youth at risk. Gay and lesbian youth are vulnerable to verbal, physical and emotional abuse. This occurs in the home, at school, in communities, at work, and in churches. Depression, suicide and substance abuse have been all too common manifestations, and running away from home or dropping out of school have been the only escape from this discrimination and stigmatisation (Bacon, 1989). It is internationally recognised that approximately 10% of any population is predominantly or exclusively homosexual (Herdt, 1989, Kinsey et al., 1948). There are 11 million people in South Africa who are between the ages of 16 and 30 years, and they represent 32.5% of the potentially active population. (Department of Welfare, White Paper on Social Welfare, February 1997). This implies that there are approximately 1.1 million people between the age of 16 and 30 years who are gay and lesbian in South Africa.

In spite of their large numbers and the profound difficulties they face, few groups have been so ignored, and few evoke so poignantly the aura of

quiet desperation, to which American statistics on adolescent homosexual suicide bear such disturbing testimony (Deisher, 1989). Data from the American Youth Suicide National Centre suggest that 20-30% of gay and lesbian youth attempt suicide at least once (Bacon, 1989). While these statistics on gay and lesbian youth suicide in America are alarming, what is perhaps even more alarming is that South African youth services do not have documentable data on this same population. By simple deductive logic, it would appear that South Africa is expressing that either gay and lesbian youth do not exist within its communities, or more significantly, they exist but do not warrant any definitional status in the statistics on South Africa's youth population at risk.

In reality, gay and lesbian youth do exist in South African culture and they do have a high propensity toward suicide, as is aptly captured in Locke (1996:20), <u>Suicide and your parents,</u> in which he describes the story of Bobby, a gay teenager. This extract was found in Bobby's diary. He wrote it when he was sixteen.

> "I can't let anyone find out I am not straight. It would be so humiliating. My friends would hate me, I just know it. They may even want to beat me up. And my family? I overheard them, lots of times talking about gay people. They've said they hate gay people, and even God hates gay people. Gays are bad, and God sends bad people to hell. It really scares me now, when I hear my family talk that way, because now, they are talking about me. I guess I'm no good to anyone...not even God. Life is so cruel and unfair. Sometimes I feel like disappearing from the face of the earth...."
> Bobby committed suicide at the age of 20.

The aforementioned social issues reinforce the need to create a non-discriminatory environment for gay and lesbian youth and to campaign for social programmes that address their specific needs. Furthermore, it is imperative that the needs of gay and lesbian youth for equality in education, employment opportunities and social security are integrated into social programmes that embrace all the youth of South Africa.

Owing to the discrimination and homophobia experienced by gay and lesbian youth, there is a pressing need to support measures that enhance the self-organisation, self-esteem and confidence amongst these young people. Homophobia, defined as hatred, fear or discrimination toward gay and lesbian people (Bacon, 1989), is so interwoven in South African society that gay and lesbian youth face especially difficult struggles for self-esteem, emotional security and a sense of a caring community. Homophobia is so pervasive that many people do not perceive mistreatment of gay and lesbian youth as abusive or wrong. Harassment is not seen as violence, but as a natural response to gay lifestyles. This is supported by Whitlock, (1989:18) in terms of "WHO CARES ABOUT THE HURT AND PAIN IMPOSED ON PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT REGARDED AS FULLY HUMAN?"

Indifference to the destructiveness of homophobia can have deadly, but preventable, consequences. This is borne out by the previous discussion on adolescent homosexual suicide. The researcher contends that it is of the utmost importance to place the aforementioned discussion regarding the social needs of gay and lesbian youth, the prevalence of suicide and the need for integrated social programmes within the domain of the educational system.

1.1.2.2 Need for Gay and Lesbian Youth Equality in the Educational System

Harassment at school by fellow students and teachers has pushed many gay and lesbian youth out of the formal education system. In addition, the subjects taught at school ignore the social contributions and needs of gay and lesbian people.

Bacon (1989) postulates three specific obstacles which gay and lesbian youth face in the educational system.

- The need for emotional and physical safety of gay and lesbian youth is compromised.

The Hetrick-Martin Institute (1987:24) for the protection of gay and lesbian youth's emotional needs, received this letter from a gay youth that attests to the aforementioned statement:

> "I talked to a high school counselor in confidence. But the counselor was not as discreet as I thought, and in one day the whole school found out. At first it wasn't that bad, just a little name calling. A few weeks later it developed into pushing around. Then the kids started fights. When I know I cannot defend myself against the other person, I will run away from the problem altogether. And I did. I quit school."

This example of mistreatment by adults in positions of educational responsibility is also common in South African high schools. (Refer to the Metthys Strydom case in the ensuing discussion)

- A second need is to be accepted within the diversity of student life. School authorities have waged bitter fights against gay and lesbian youth, for example, attendance at dances and social events, recognition of gay and lesbian youth student organisation, and denial of access to school facilities and funds. (Bacon, 1989).

- The lack in curriculum content and library resources on homosexual literature can be posed as another obstacle. School libraries very rarely carry books on homosexuality, and those that exist are often outdated and biased. Information regarding homosexuality is not taught on a par with other subjects in classes, if at all, and it is seldom mentioned in sexuality education classes. (Bacon, 1989).

Mettys Strydom, the pupil who was expelled from Otto du Plessis High School, Port Elizabeth, because of his homosexual orientation (Eastern Province Herald, 12 April, 1997) is a visible example of an insidious and silently abusive school system that perpetuates rather than ameliorates the pain and humiliation experienced by gay and lesbian youth in South Africa's secondary and tertiary education systems. (this will be discussed in greater depth in the historical context section of this chapter). Given that 10% (Kinsey et al.,1948, Herdt, 1989) of the population are predominantly or exclusively homosexual, in an average South African classroom of 30 to 40 pupils, this translates into 3 to 4 students per class being forced to listen to the rhetoric that everyone else's sexual and emotional feelings are natural, while theirs are not mentioned. Rather than providing accurate information on how homosexuals are discriminated against, and explaining the psychological impact of homophobia in schools and society, the curriculum hardly makes mention of these issues.

Thus there is a distinct need for accurate information in which schools dispel the myths surrounding homosexuality and in so doing ensure that South Africa does not raise a future generation of children filled with ignorance, fear and intolerance of people different from themselves. The need for sensitive and informative educational programmes relates directly to the need for an equitable and comprehensive provision of

health and welfare services for gay and lesbian youth, especially with regard to issues of sexuality education. This will be the focus of discussion in the next section of this chapter.

1.1.2.3 Need for Health and Welfare Services to offer sexuality education for gay and lesbian youth.

Historically, Education, Health and Welfare Services have ignored, suppressed or denied the needs of gay and lesbian youth. It is imperative that educators commit themselves to the inclusion of non-judgmental education, which caters also for the needs of gay and lesbian youth.

This is crucial to the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) amongst gay and lesbian youth. Gay teenagers face considerable adversity during their coming out process because of the AIDS epidemic. Feldman (1989) claims that since the mid-60s' never have so many obstacles been placed in the path of gay youth during the formation of their gay identity. As a result of the AIDS epidemic, many gay youth are delaying the development of their gay identities and postponing homosexual relationships (Herdt, 1986). Of greatest concern is that the median age for HIV infection of gay males has become significantly lower.

During the 1980's the median age of HIV infection was 30 years (Hays, 1990) whereas one in four newly infected individuals in the US is under the age of 22 years (Rosenberg, 1994). Placing this in a South African context, the social structures and norms of the gay youth subculture have been transformed throughout the last 5 years. As a result, their behaviour has not been entirely conducive to safe sex practices. In many communities, gay bars and public cruising settings (locations where gay men meet to engage in sexual activity) have emerged for young gay men

to meet and socialise. Both of these settings have a propensity for engaging in high-risk behaviour.

Research on gay youth and AIDS in South Africa is essential in order to determine the knowledge level regarding the epidemic. Information is also needed regarding the socio-cultural variation among South African gay youth (ethnicity, socio-economic status, educational status and residence, amongst others) in order to develop socially appropriate and relevant intervention strategies for AIDS risk education. From a more macro-level perspective the needs of gay and lesbian youth have to be included in the programmes formulated and implemented by the Departments of Health and Welfare. This issue is even more pertinent when considering that gay and lesbian youth are often evicted from their homes because of coming out regarding their sexual orientation (Remafedi, 1987).

1.1.2.4 Need for an Equal Age of Consent for Homosexual and Heterosexual Youth

In the past, gay and lesbian youth faced the stigma of having their sexuality criminalised. The current age of consent is unequal and discriminatory. For heterosexual youth, the age of consent is 16 years; while gay and lesbian youth are permitted to legally have sex only at the age of 19 (National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality Draft submission, 1997). This discriminatory inconsistency calls for an equal age of consent at 16 to be reconsidered for all youth, and motivates the need to take urgent steps to defend the sexuality of gay and lesbian youth.

The discussion thus far, regarding the coming out process of gay and lesbian youth and the specific needs that impact their lives, will be contextualised in the following discussion, as it will attempt to describe the

historical antecedents and evolution of South Africa's transition toward democracy, and its subsequent impact on the gay and lesbian community.

1.1.3 South Africa's transition towards democracy and the impetus for the gay liberation movement

The history of South Africa has been based on an unjust and inhumane system, which was fraught with prejudice, hatred, intolerance and oppression. Owing to these policies of the previous National Party Government, substantial majorities of the population were denied the opportunity to develop to their full potential. This is also true of gay and lesbian youth, many of whom were not only discriminated against because of their race but also discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. Today, South Africa has a new constitution, which protects citizens from the policies of the past and guarantees rights and freedom from discrimination, including discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (The Constitution Act 108 of 1996 and the NCGLE Draft submission, 1997). Despite these guarantees, and while other disadvantaged groups, such as black South Africans and women, have had their human rights upheld and legal discrimination against them removed, social, legal and religious discrimination against homosexuals, adult and youth alike, still continues (NCGLE Draft submission, 1997).

Numerous instances can attest to these forms of discrimination, for example, employment opportunities, rights of gay parents, working in the military and discrimination against young gay and lesbian people in secondary and tertiary educational systems. Two examples to substantiate this claim will be cited. Firstly, the case of a high school gay youth being expelled from a high school in Port Elizabeth (see discussion, section 1.1.3 pg. 19), based solely on his sexual orientation, aptly reflects this discrimination in the educational system. Secondly, gay and lesbian

couples have been fighting for years to obtain equal status in the work place as their heterosexual colleagues. This issue was highlighted by JL Langemat vs the Minister of Safety and Security, in which she sued the South African Police Services (SAPS) in order to gain equality-based domestic partnership benefits for herself and her partner, i.e. medical aid and pension scheme, amongst others. In a landmark decision, the judge ruled in favour of JL Langemat. In his conclusions Judge Roux (in the High Court of South Africa) stated:

> "The State must be held responsible for the creation of Polmed and particularly its rules which, by definition, excludes a great number of persons who are de facto dependants of its members. This in my view is discrimination. The stability and permanence of same-sex relationships is no different from the many married couples I know. Both types of unions are deserving of respect and protection. If our law does not accord protection to this type of union then I suggest it is time to do so. This is how I understand what section 39(2) of the constitution has in mind. Parties to same-sex unions which has existed for years in a common home, must surely owe a duty of support, in all senses, to each other." (NCGLE legal database, 1999:4-5).

Time will show whether or not employers will take heed of this discriminatory practice by including the legal rights of domestic partnerships (homosexual and heterosexual) in their employment contracts. Taking cognizance of the history of imbalances, prejudices, victimisation and a lack of societal empathy on homosexual issues, it is necessary to pay special attention to issues facing gay and lesbian youth. The Department of Welfare recognises that close to 75% of young people of all races are marginalised or at risk of marginalisation. Amongst these

the Department recognises gay and lesbian youth as being particularly vulnerable groups (Department of Welfare, White Paper for Social Welfare, February 1997).

The unprecedented growth of the gay and lesbian community in recent history, both in South Africa and internationally, has transformed both culture and consciousness, creating radically new possibilities for men and women to "come out" and live more openly as homosexuals. Since the days before the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969, the gay perspective has undergone what Plummer (1989) has called a significant dichotomy, from being a pathological category to being an oppressed minority. In June 1969, gay patrons of the Stonewall Inn bar in Greenwich Village, New York rioted after a police raid. The Stonewall Rebellion, as it became known, heralded the beginning of a gay liberation movement in the United States (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994). Subsequently gay or lesbian lifestyles are now regarded as an integral part of society.

Since 1974 the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association and all major mental health associations do not consider homosexuality to be a mental or psychiatric disorder (American Psychological Association, 1974). Very few people anticipated a result of the gay liberation struggle - the emergence of a generation of teenagers who feel themselves to be homosexual. Thus began the process of coming out (Herdt, 1989). Historically, gay and lesbian teenagers were perceived as non-existent or were simply regarded as a social problem. This "invisibility" is consistent with the fact that as a social issue, teenage homosexuality has historically been studied in ways that were "pathologised" and "psychologised" (Martin, 1982 and Plummer, 1975).

An important consideration regarding the historical changes in gay and lesbian life trajectories is to establish whether, for example, coming out in 1999 in South Africa as a 17- year-old teenager is the same process as coming out in 1970. Some researchers (Dank, 1971 and Kimmel, 1988) have suggested that America's Stonewall represents a critical historical marker, distinguishing the process of coming out of cohorts of gay teenagers as well as adults.

The historical markers that kindled and gave impetus to the gay and lesbian struggle in a South African context can be related to three distinctive events, in chronological sequence, namely: Forest Town Raid (1966), New Mandy's Bar Raid (1978) and the New Constitution of South Africa in 1996 (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994).

- The Raid in Forest Town, a suburb north of Johannesburg, took place in 1966 (three years before Stonewall in the United States of America). Police raided and arrested nine men for "masquerading as women". This was followed by a parliamentary threat to widen anti-homosexual legislation. The result, in opposition to this threat, was the instigation of the Homosexual Law Reform movement, whose sole aim was to prevent the proposed anti-gay bill from becoming law. (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994).

- Police raided New Mandy's bar, a gay nightclub in Johannesburg, during Christmas of 1978. Many South African gay and lesbian people refer to the 1978 Mandy's Raid - and not the 1966 Forest Town Raid - as South Africa's "Stonewall". This is because the patrons fought back and, more than anything else, prompted gay people to move beyond the social support

model and begin debating and demanding that their civil rights be protected. As result, gay and lesbian organisations became significantly more politicised, for example, playing a role in the unbanning of the ANC and joining the latter party in its freedom struggle (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994).

- The evolution of South Africa in 1994 into a fully-fledged democracy and the resulting modes of national transformation culminated in the adoption of the New Constitution in 1997. The Constitution Act 108 of 1996 legislates that: "the state may not unfairly discriminate against an individual, directly or indirectly, on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture or language." As the constitution captures the very essence of equality for all citizens, this must surely also signal a new legal recognition of the value and worth of South Africa's young gay and lesbian citizens.

Furthermore, the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Charter was promulgated and nationally endorsed on 11 November 1993. It delineates the constitutionally entrenched right to equality on the condition of sexual orientation. The fundamental rights of the Charter which pertain to the lives of gay and lesbian youth are worth highlighting:

- "Education

1. Non-discriminatory education regarding gender, sexual orientation and sexuality shall be included in the curricula of schools, tertiary institutions, and youth and community programmes

2. Staff in health, welfare, police and other law enforcement agencies, and in the armed forces, administration of justice and

public service, shall receive training on issues relating to gender, sexual orientation and sexuality, including education on new non-discriminatory laws and measures.

- Policing

1. Police and other law enforcement bodies shall protect all people against abuse, including the prevention of harassment, victimisation and bashing of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

- Access to complaints, services, information

1. Have equal access to all facilities providing advice, information, support, counseling, health care and welfare services.
2. Youth students in particular shall have access to sex education and to counselling to give them support with discovering their sexuality.   .

- Employment

1. Lesbian, gay and bisexual employees, including teachers and others working with young people, shall not be victimised if they are open about their sexual orientation in the workplace" (NCGLE Draft Submission, 1997).

This study could potentially serve as a vehicle to provide information to assist these principles in being "made real" for gay and lesbian youth. What is perhaps of even greater historical significance is the fact that the African National Congress, at its 50th general meeting in Mafeking in December 1997, made a comprehensive resolution to adopt a policy includes:

- **The protection of gay and lesbian youth from discrimination at home, at school, on the streets and in the media.**

- **An equal age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual youth. (NCGLE Draft submission, 1997).**

The ANC thus acknowledges that a new culture has emerged. Its swift and steady development in the late twentieth century arises from the cherished expressive individualism that is at the core of the new South Africa. Young peoples disclosure of their homosexuality has begun in all societies, and yet there is good reason to believe that far more change lies on the horizon (Herdt and Boxer, 1994). It is encouraging to note that the gay liberation movement has since used the impetus provided by post-apartheid transformation and in so doing, begun to ensure a rightful place for the emerging cohort of gay and lesbian youth.

This study hopes to contribute by capturing the experiences of this culture in South Africa in that it focuses on the coming out process of a pioneering group of teenagers who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. They challenge a hundred years of oppression, secrecy, and silence on the rights of those who desire same-sex relationships, when they come out, and courageously reveal themselves to their peers, families and teachers. As previously mentioned, a culture of denial can no longer persist. Port Elizabeth's school system has recently experienced an apt example of this newfound gay and lesbian youth visibility. A gay high school boy was expelled from Otto du Plessis High School in Port Elizabeth (Eastern Province Herald, 12 April, 1997) based solely on his openness about his homosexuality. This has placed the provincial and national secondary

education ministry in a quandary about what to do with gay youth in South African high schools.

This has challenged the implication potential of the new constitution, as well as exposing the inadequacies of the national education ministry in responding to the unique needs posed by this new youth culture. Given these discussions pertaining to the interplay between the specific needs and challenges of gay and lesbian youth and the evolution of a gay liberation movement in South Africa, it is important to describe how these factors relate to the social work profession and its response to these identified needs and challenges.

1.1.4 Applicability of this study for Social Work practice

The opportunity and responsibility of addressing the aforementioned needs and challenges often rests with social workers and other helping professionals. On one hand it is believed that social workers have a responsibility to create services and programmes that offer acceptance and sensitivity to all young people, including gay and lesbian youth (Whitlock, 1989). On the other hand social workers need to be provided with tools, skills and practice models in order to understand and work effectively with gay and lesbian youth (Bacon, 1989). It is the researcher's opinion that there is increasing evidence that a paradigm shift is required for social workers (administrators, policy makers, practitioners, and researchers) to interact with gay and lesbian youth. This shift would move from the medical model of viewing gay and lesbian youth in terms of weaknesses, categorising, labelling, helping and curing, toward a more ecological and developmental model which focuses on reframing problems into strengths, understanding and recognising ecological and support systems, competency building, and nurturing environments which empower gay and lesbian youth. (Hepworth and Larsen, 1993).

As in any youth population, young people who are gay or lesbian have histories of juvenile prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse, placement in foster or residential care, imprisonment, dropping out of school, truancy, homelessness and suicide attempts (Bacon, 1989). Although many social work agencies provide specialised services to young people with histories of abuse and neglect, few attempt to address the harm of homophobic indifference and hostility experienced by gay and lesbian youth. Too often the emotional difficulties and acting out behaviour of sexual minority youth are attributed solely to their sexual orientation. Social workers may treat them as gay youth who ARE problems - not young people who HAVE problems (Whitlock, 1989). Many social workers and helping professionals are entrusted to help children and youth, but it appears this only applies to those who self-identify as heterosexual.

These issues further magnify the need to embark on adolescent homosexuality research, such as this research undertaking, in order to provide social workers, youth workers and mental health professionals with a knowledge base to render a wide range of services, such as, education, prevention and outreach, crisis intervention, and public advocacy campaigns. It could be argued that there has never been a greater need for an interdisciplinary accumulated body of knowledge and findings on adolescence in South Africa, as it would join public health, education, and social work efforts in beginning to address national youth concerns - youth of all races, gender, class, religion and sexual orientation.

It is imperative that this discussion regarding the applicability of this study to social work be placed in a national context. The Government of National Unity received a mandate from President Mandela in 1995 to conduct a

full investigation into the state of youth services in the country. As a result of these investigations two national bodies were established, namely:

- **The Inter-ministerial Committee on the Transformation of the South African Child and Youth Care System (IMC)**

The IMC defines its mission statement as: "To design and enable the implementation of an integrated child and youth care system based on a developmental and ecological perspective." (IMC Draft Discussion Document, February 1996:1). The reason it is important to highlight this definition is the need to ensure that these policies include the lives of gay and lesbian youth. This policy document discusses at great length the various categories of disenfranchised youth, amongst others: abused, rural, race, gender, and disability. No mention is made of gay and lesbian youth as a category of "youth at risk." It is intended that the recommendations from the present research study will become a lobbying agent for the inclusion of this disenfranchised and under-represented population of South Africa's youth in the IMC's policies and programmes

- **National Youth Commission (NYC)**

The NYC is a statutory body of government established through legislation by the National Youth Commission Act 19 of 1996. It aims to assist government in developing a comprehensive youth policy and to make this policy the line function of all ministries of government. The NYC will fulfil its mandate by policy formulation, programme development, network (locally, nationally and internationally) and legislation monitoring.

As with the IMC, it is hoped that this present study into the lives of gay and lesbian youth will, and should, be able to inform policy makers at national, provincial and local levels of government regarding the development of a

comprehensive youth policy which includes, not excludes, the rights and needs of gay and lesbian youth. This was further reinforced by Ms Bengu, Chairperson of the NYC, in her opening address regarding the draft policy in which she urged all persons to use their life experiences to inform and contribute to the NYC's national policy. However, these "claims" were unfortunately not supported when the NYC held their 2nd National Youth Summit from 28 - 30 November 1997 – called "YOUTH 2000." Although 200 of South Africa's leading youth and youth-interest oganisations, including the youth wings of all political parties, were present, no gay and lesbian youth agencies were invited to the Youth 2000 summit. This omission is perhaps even more unacceptable when considering that the slogan for the summit was: "Youth Policy 2000 - Building a future for ALL Youth." The Cape Town and Kwazulu Natal branches of the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality have both submitted draft papers to the NYC regarding the inclusion of gay and lesbian youth issues.

While the NYC acknowledged receipt of these documents, the latter have been completely omitted in the most recent policy document disseminated by the NYC in December 1997 (NYC Policy Kit, 1997).

Irrespective of whether social workers are performing the roles of clinical practitioners or policy makers, or involved in structures like the National Youth Commission and the Inter-ministerial Committee on the Transformation of the Child and Youth Care System, they need to view the process of developing a national youth policy that includes gay and lesbian youth as a major priority and responsibility. As the NCGLE (Draft policy November 1997:7) aptly reflects,

"We cannot reach this vision of a national youth policy if gay and lesbian youth continue to be ignored. How can gay and lesbian youth develop to be law-abiding citizens when they are subject to constant humiliation, prejudice and discrimination? What future is there for gay and lesbian youth if they remain a marginalised and victimized group?"

It is hoped that social workers, as an integral part of their policy development and practice responsibilities, recognise and accept the place of gay and lesbian youth in South Africa's broader youth population, as well as giving priority to addressing their needs. Social workers and other helping professionals need to remain cognisant of the challenge made by President Nelson Mandela during his inauguration speech, in which he said: "The youth of our county are a valued possession for our nation. Without them there is no future. Their needs are immense and urgent." (President Mandela, May 1994).

With the applicability of this envisaged research study for the social work profession, and related commissions highlighted in the aforementioned discussion, the state of the research on adolescent homosexuality will be discussed to further verify the merit of this research study.

1.2 State of the Research on Adolescent Homosexuality

The researcher supports Deisher's (1989) notion that assumptions about the surface behaviours and social patterns of gay and lesbian youth are loosely supported in the research literature by a haphazard accumulation of case studies, incidental findings, and retrospective studies of adult populations. Numerous other flaws are persistently identifiable, namely: inferences about developmental processes and outcomes made on the basis of cross-sectional samples, the time-specific nature of many constructs and findings, and the continuities between childhood gender

behaviour and adult sexual orientation (Boxer and Cohler, 1989). Such reductionism and methodological bias presents formidable roadblocks to understanding gay and lesbian youth lives, and this study will try to avoid these methodological flaws.

Boxer and Cohler (1989) also argue that existing studies of gay and lesbian youth portray only slices of experience at one time, rather than construction or development over time. Because as far as could be ascertained, no previous research of this nature has been reported in South Africa, this investigation will limit itself to an account of gay and lesbian youth at one specific time.

Historically, the mode of inquiry in this field has been nomothetic in nature i.e. emphasis is placed on aggregating data. Research regarding adolescent homosexuality should adopt an idiographic focus, which would emphasise the individuality and heterogeneity of gay and lesbian adolescents. Gerstel et al., (1989:44) articulately argues this point in that an idiographic methodology would demonstrate that "these gay and lesbian youth encompass all socio-economic classes, ethnic backgrounds, and geographic settings - the only common denominator being a desire to determine their place in the mainstream of their society."

However problematic these prior studies regarding adolescent homosexuality may be, the international literature base has at least a foundation on which to build. The researcher will cite an example to substantiate this point. Herdt (1989) edited a compilation of research studies and general literature pertaining to the lives of gay and lesbian youth. This included studies from numerous countries, Australia, England, United States of America, Brazil and France. The same cannot be said for South Africa. During the literature search (abstract scanning in the social

sciences and related fields, as well as researching Network navigator via the Internet) it was found that only two definitive works in the area of homosexuality in South Africa have been conducted.

Firstly, Isaacs and McKendrick's (1992) conducted a classic study titled: "Male Homosexuality in South Africa: Identity formation, culture and crisis." Secondly, Schurink, Liebenberg and Schurink (1993) conducted a comprehensive qualitative study on Commercial Sex Work. A third text written by Gevisser and Cameron (1994) titled: "Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa" presents a collection of critical essays, personal narratives and histories. However, these bodies of research have failed to specifically address the issues affecting the growing cohort of gay and lesbian youth in South Africa. Therefore, it is intended for this study to define an ambitious agenda for research in adolescent homosexuality in South Africa as well as suggesting specific points for engagement in working with gay and lesbian identified youth. Furthermore, it will provide a knowledge base and a perspective from which to build an effective response.

Given this discussion regarding the methodological flaws and research limitations in terms of the present state of research on adolescent homosexuality, the next section will discuss the research question and goals and discuss the research designs and methodology that will be utilised in this study.
However, it is important to succinctly state the problem which this study will explore.

Summary of Problem Statement

The experience of being young and gay has been seriously neglected in youth research as well as in youth service provision in South Africa. Furthermore, the gay liberation movement and the protection for sexual orientation granted in the new constitution (The Constitution Act 108 of 1996) have highlighted the needs of a large group of disenfranchised gay and lesbian youth that are becoming more acute as this country prepares for the next millennium. Thus, a qualitative inquiry will be conducted in this study to phenomenologically explore and describe the coming out process of gay and lesbian youth.

1.3. Research Questions, Goal and Objectives

1.3.1 Research Question

Creswell (1994:70) states that "one typically finds research questions in qualitative research, in comparison with hypotheses in quantitative research. These research questions can take one of two forms: a guiding hypothesis followed by sub-questions, or a grand tour question." This study will make use of a grand tour question that is characteristic of the phenomenological research design employed by this study.

The grand tour question that delineates the focus of this study is:

What meanings and interpretations do gay and lesbian youth attribute to their coming out process?

1.3.2 Goal of the Research:

To explore and describe gay and lesbian youth's experience of their coming out, and to describe guidelines which support and facilitate gay and lesbian youth in their coming out process.

1.3.3 Research Objectives:

a) To gain a deeper understanding of the coming out process for gay and lesbian youth.

b) To gain insight into the support structures that are necessary to assist gay youth in their coming out process.

c) To provide guidelines for facilitating the coming out process.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction

The researcher believes that the recommendations proposed by gay and lesbian youth (Chapter 8 – Theme 5) covers a myriad of professions, institutions and organizations in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of sexual minority youth in their coming out process.

Thus, rather than repeat the strategies proposed in Chapter 8 (Theme 5), the researcher will only focus specific attention in this concluding chapter on the role of social workers in addressing the needs of gay and lesbian youth as articulated in this study. As stated in Chapter 1 (see section 1.4) the researcher is a professional social worker, and as such has focused specific attention on the role of social workers in developing programmes for gay and lesbian youth. Thus, this discussion will be placed within a social work paradigm. The researcher contends that many of the recommendations pertaining to the social work profession can be extrapolated and applied to related helping professions, for example, teachers, psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, child and youth care workers as well as medical practitioners (doctors, nurses) amongst others.

9.2 Role of the social worker in addressing the needs and challenges of gay and lesbian youth

This concluding chapter will provide suggestions and recommendations which social workers could adopt in their work with gay and lesbian youth. The researcher will place these suggestions and recommendations within the context of the following areas of social work:

- Future research endeavours
- Training and education

- Social policy development and implementation

- Practice strategies

An effort will be made to provide specific, clearly defined and practice-oriented recommendations, which could enable social workers to render effective and supportive services for gay and lesbian youth.

9.2.1 Future research endeavours

9.2.1.1 Introduction

Hepworth and Larsen (1993) speak to the importance of research as an integral component of the knowledge base of social work. Increasingly, research is receiving emphasis as a vital dimension of the knowledge base essential to social work practitioners. Knowledge of research is indispensable to scientific and scholarly inquiry, which in turn is the driving force behind rigorous advancement of knowledge. To keep abreast of knowledge, practitioners must be able to utilise information gained from research studies.

In considering suggestions for future research in this field pertaining to gay and lesbian youth, the researcher has been mindful of recommending research opportunities that could be pursued by social work practitioners. While this study focussed on exploring the coming out process as experienced by a sample of gay and lesbian youth, the following research endeavours could serve to complement the findings from this study, namely:

Table 9.1 Future research endeavours

Type of study	Target of study	Focus of study
1 Focus group interviews	• Ministers of religion • Social workers and related helping professionals • Policy makers	Explore and assess: • Level of understanding and knowledge regarding homosexuality • Present status of service and policy provision for gay and lesbian youth • Referral system regarding gay and lesbian youth
2 Focus group interviews	• Parents and siblings of gay and lesbian • Children	Explore the following: • Their process of dealing with their child's homosexuality • Communication patterns and strategies of conflict resolution • Utilisation of social and support services, and the effectiveness of these services • Recommendations for supportive programmes
3 Survey study	• High schools (including a sample	Assess the following: • Curriculum content

Type of study	Target of study	Focus of study
	of principals, teachers, counselors and learners)	regarding homosexuality • Level of knowledge regarding homosexuality • Harassment and homophobia in secondary and tertiary education • Level of support for gay and lesbian learners • Code of conduct pertaining to gay and lesbian youth
4 Survey study	• Tertiary education Institutions – specifically Faculties of Social and Health studies (academics and learners)	Assess the following: • Curriculum content regarding homosexuality • Level of knowledge regarding homosexuality • Harassment and homophobia in secondary and tertiary education systems • Level of support for gay and lesbian learners • Code of conduct pertaining to gay and lesbian youth
5 Longitudinal study Six month intervals over a three year period	• Gay and lesbian youth (16-22 years) – preferably a sample drawn from all nine provinces in South	• Qualitative interviews • Explore the developmental milestones of the coming out process and the integration of a

Type of study	Target of study	Focus of study
	Africa covering all demographic criteria	homosexual identity • Expand upon the theories developed in this study
6 Action based research (programme education)	• Social workers (sample drawn from NGOs, governmental, private and parastatal agencies)	• Assess the quality, frequency and effectiveness of service provision to gay and lesbian youth • Suggest modifications for service provision, develop and implement modified programmes

It is intended that the results from these aforementioned research endeavours in conjunction with the information gathered from this study, would be able to inform social work and related mental health practitioners focussing on policy development and implementation and practice/intervention strategies in working with gay and lesbian youth.

9.2.2 Training and Education

9.2.2.1 Introduction

The researcher contends that education and training around the issue of homosexuality would be a significant first step in enabling social workers to provide effective services for gay and lesbian youth.

The researcher recommends that practising social workers should be required to attend training sessions to develop their knowledge of, and sensitivity to, gay and lesbian issues; to develop their skills in working   with

this client population; and to become aware of their own attitudes and beliefs that influence their work with this client population (Travers & Schneider, 1996).

A number of models for the treatment of gay and lesbian adolescents call for a priority to be placed on counsellor awareness and education (Coleman & Remafedi, 1989; Maylon, 1982; Slater, 1988). Gay and lesbian adolescents, are not likely to get accurate information or timely assistance in perhaps their most formidable personal struggle.

This section will be divided into discussing training social work practitioners as well as developing curricula for Schools of Social Work

9.2.2.2 Training Social Work Practitioners

Theme 1 (Mental stressors and coping strategies) and Theme 4 (Homophobia and hindrances) highlighted the multiple layers of difficulties gay and lesbian youth encounter as they interact and interface with their social environments. Because of its mission to enhance the social functioning of people, social work is particularly concerned with knowledge of factors that contribute to developmental difficulties. Knowledge of these factors, which commonly involve inadequate emotional resources, is essential to planning and implementing services for gay and lesbian youth. Expanded awareness of the broader range of lesbian and gay peoples' lives is essential to workers' knowledge base. Thus, the research

suggests that the following areas of adolescent homosexuality be highlighted in training programmes with social work practitioners.

a) Focus Areas of Training

- Enable social work practitioners to become familiar with the phenomenon that gay and lesbian youth not only exist in all of our schools and communities, but more importantly, that they are self-identifying as homosexual and beginning their coming out processes at an earlier age than in any other time in South Africa's history (see chapter 5). Exploring and ultimately accepting the reality of this phenomenon has to be viewed as the cornerstone in conducting any training in this area with social work practitioners. If the concept of gay and lesbian teenagers self-identifying as homosexual and subsequently coming out is continually denied by social work and mental health practitioners, training would quite simply be redundant. Thus, a first step would be breaking the silence and denial of the existence of sexual minority youth in our communities.

- Closely related to this recommendation would be to encourage practitioners to readdress their methods of intake and statistical evaluation of various populations. For example, assess whether any mention is made of sexual orientation on intake forms. If not, it could be suggested that the necessary adjustments and modifications are made to intake forms of social welfare agencies which include data pertaining to gay and lesbian youth. This information, or data set, could

also facilitate the various research endeavours which was discussed previously in section 9.2.1.1

- A subsequent focus area would be to explore and identify practitioners attitudes toward homosexuality, as well as exploring their own homophobia. It is important for social workers to honestly assess their own homophobic attitudes and heterosexist bias, and how this could impinge upon their service provision. Studies have assessed the attitudes and feelings of people in the helping professions toward homosexuality and homosexual persons (Casas, Brady & Poterotto, 1983; Davison & Wilson, 1973; DeCrescenzo, 1983/84; Garfinkle & Morin, 1978; Gartrell, Kraemer & Rodie, 1974; McQuoid, 1988; Pauly & Goldstein, 1970; Wisniewiski & Toomey, 1987). These studies have found a heterosexual bias in these persons' professional attitudes and homophobia in their personal feelings (Sears, 1992).

With this personal information at hand, social workers could then begin to explore how their homophobia (which could simply be a case of lack of knowledge regarding adolescent homosexuality) impacts upon the quality of service rendering to this population of young people. The researcher supports Pederson's (1988) view toward training practitioners. Pederson (1988) identifies a tripartite approach to diversity training which begins with awareness of the counsellor's own attitudes and beliefs, moves into the acquisition of knowledge, and then toward the final stage of skill acquisition. Effective counselling with homosexual oriented youth or those questioning their sexual identity cannot happen if the provider has not first come to terms with his or her own feelings and attitudes about homosexuality.

- A follow up to explore one's own homophobia, would be to broaden this exploration to include examining social oppression towards homosexuals – this would need to include a historical overview of this oppression as well as focusing specific attention on the homophobia and discrimination inherent in various societal institutions, namely: religion, education, social welfare, health, and related governmental agencies. An integral component of this segment of training should include a discussion of the value premise of social work practice and the roles that practitioners should, and perhaps are presently not fulfilling on behalf of gay and lesbian youth. Based on the findings from this study, the researcher believes that the following two value premises of social work practice should be highlighted in this training.

- Unique and Inherent Worth

"Every person is unique and has inherent worth; therefore, interactions with people as they pursue and utilise resources should enhance their dignity and individuality" (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993:9).

In light of this guiding value base, social workers engaged in service provision to gay and lesbian youth should be trained to ensure that every effort is made to respect their individuality and inherent worth. This is even more critical when taking into account the erosive and negating attacks on their self-worth caused by various forms of homophobia. While this study has reported on a compilation of eighteen coming out stories, it is important for social workers to approach each youth's coming out within its unique dynamics and complexities. Engaging gay and lesbian youth with this value premise may well be the first opportunity for these youth to reconcile their internal and social dissonance, and facilitate their achievement of a more positive sense of coherence. The researcher notes that social

workers could be trained to reinforce this value premise by assisting gay and lesbian youth in developing effective interpersonal strategies in dealing with the negative effects of societal stigmatisation. Social workers need to come forward in advocating for the dignity and human rights of gay and lesbian people, including adolescents.

- Right to Self-Determination

People have a right to freedom insofar as they do not infringe on the rights of others; therefore, transactions with people in the course of seeking and utilising resources should enhance their independence and self-determination (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993).

As conveyed throughout Chapters 4-8, gay and lesbian youth have to overcome enormous obstacles that impinge upon their right to self-determination. Every phase of their coming out is fraught with fear and trepidation at the potential negative consequence of disclosing their sexual orientation to people in their social environments. Thus, social workers should be educated to safeguard that gay and lesbian youth are enabled to explore, negotiate and reconcile their homosexuality without having their independence and self-determination compromised.

- It is hoped that the information collected and discussed in this study would serve as a framework for social workers to develop, plan and implement assessment and intervention strategies for sexual minority youth. Thus, training would focus specific attention on these two areas of social work practice. This would include, but

not be limited to: examining the development of sexual identity in adolescents, developing an assessment strategy that would include all aspects of a homosexual youths experience (refer to a case example of a systems approach to assessment in a later discussion), exploring and developing intervention strategies that are deemed appropriate within each stage of the coming out process, developing strategies in working with families of gay and lesbian youth, exploring the impact of HIV/AIDS on this population, developing plans to create a safe school environment for these young people, and developing counselling and support programmes for individual as well as groups of gay and lesbian youth..

- As a commitment to continuing education the trainer should encourage social work practitioners to identify gaps or deficiencies in their knowledge base around the area of adolescent homosexuality. Thus, with this information at their disposal, more relevant and specific training programmes can be developed for practitioners on an on-going basis.

b) Format

The researcher suggests that the following formats be used for training social work practitioners in the field of adolescent homosexuality.

- Workshops – these workshops could be held for individual social service agencies, or as a means of creating more cost-effective training, workshops could be held as a partnership effort amongst various agencies (private, parastatal, NGOs, and governmental). However, the researcher errs on the side of training sessions with a limited number of practitioners (20 maximum) – so as to increase the

effectiveness of an experiential, didactic, interactive and honest appraisal and exploration of the topic of adolescent homosexuality.

- Continuing education and training sessions could form an integral component of social work practitioners commitment to increase their knowledge base through the means of continuing education. Thus, the topic of adolescent homosexuality, could be integrated into continuing education courses on a variety of issues, namely: youth-at-risk, HIV/AIDS awareness, community education, youth policy, school education regarding learners' concerns within educational settings, amongst others.

- Sensitivity and diversity training sessions could also be used as vehicle in discussing and exploring practitioners attitudes toward homosexuality in general, and more specifically, how their attitudes impact upon service rendering to their youth population consumer base. Sensitivity and diversity training has taken on greater significance in Post-Apartheid South Africa, especially in terms of creating greater awareness and sensitivity towards issues of race and gender. Thus, the researcher believes that these training methods would be effective in exploring the attitudes of practitioners toward sexual minority youth

- Train the trainer model – an additional benefit of education and training would be the fact that social workers could train other professionals by providing them with accurate and adequate information about homosexual adolescent issues. Thus social work practitioners could assist other mental health professionals to consider homosexual adolescent issues as a priority, as well as helping them to view homosexuality from a non-judgmental, non-pejorative perspective.

In concluding this section the researcher emphasises the fact that knowledge surrounding teenagers questioning their sexuality and coming

out and disclosing a homosexual orientation is critical, and should serve as on *a priori modus operandi* in planning any strategic intervention with sexual minority youth. Dismissive responses from social workers, for example, "you are too young to know that you are gay/lesbian", or "you are only going though a phase" or "you are just confused at the moment," will only serve to negate homosexual teenagers' authentic feelings of developing a homosexual orientation. It is hoped that this study will be able to provide social work and related helping professionals with a foundation knowledge base in order to gain deeper insight as to how gay and lesbian youth interact with their social environment. More specifically, the stage theory of the coming out process from this study could provide practitioners with knowledge regarding the challenges and required resources at each of these stages.

9.2.2.3 Social work curriculum development and implementation

The researcher has taught Human Behaviour in the Social Environment (HBSE) practice courses to social work students in both the United States and South Africa, and has found its universality to be the foundation from which all social work knowledge emanates. Furthermore, it provides social workers with a conceptual and practice oriented paradigm from which intervention strategies can be developed in working with gay and lesbian youth.

Hepworth and Larsen (1993) state that knowledge about human growth and development with particular emphasis on the life tasks encountered by individuals during different developmental stages is essential to practitioners. To assess and to work with human problems, practitioners must be aware of needs and resources associated with each developmental phase. Social work students thus need to be aware of not only the developmental stages of adolescence, but in the context of this

study, that these developmental processes may include adolescents questioning their sexuality. Cates (1987) notes that, considering the range of dynamics that may give rise to adolescent homosexuality, a single broad model of intervention appears inappropriate. Interventions must be tailored to meet the needs of individual adolescents based on their stage of development, chronological age, and areas of concern. In addition, the importance of obtaining a thorough psychosocial history and an informed understanding of the client's perceptions of homosexuality cannot be overly emphasized (Mallon, 1994). Thus, the researcher contends that knowledge regarding HBSE should form an integral part of both of the curriculum options, which will now be discussed.

Based on the findings in this study the researcher recommends that Schools/Departments of Social Work, as well as those Centers of Learning offering courses in Child and Youth Care, should develop and implement curricula, which explore adolescent sexual orientation from the perspective of:

- Individual identity and homosexual formation
- The impact of and the response of the community toward gay and lesbian youth
- Intervention strategies and specific roles played by social workers in this regard
- The role social workers can play in developing a multi-disciplinary team approach in addressing the challenges of gay and lesbian youth.

The recommended curriculum development and implementation could take one of two possible formats, namely:

- **Human Sexuality Programmes**

Social work curriculum could include aspects of homosexuality as an integral component of courses pertaining to human sexuality. It is suggested that social work training institutions enlist the assistance of specialists in the field of homosexuality to facilitate and provide expert guidance in the implementation of these courses.

- **Specialised courses on Adolescent Homosexuality**

Specialised courses on adolescent homosexuality could serve as an elective for social work students, as well as offering these courses to other students enrolled in the Social and Health Sciences and the Humanities. The following are focus areas which would need to be highlighted in such a curriculum:

- Explore the emergence of sexual identity in adolescence, including the emergence of sexual orientation
- Recognise the stages of homosexual identity formation and the simultaneous stages of the coming out process.
- Identify risk factors for adolescents who self-identify as gay or lesbian
- Enable social work students to develop assessment models, which are appropriate to the challenges facing sexual minority youth. The assessment phase of practice should include the stressors, coping strategies, stage of coming out, available support systems, and hindrance and homophobic factors impacting on the life of these youth. This assessment component of the curriculum should also equip students with the skills in assessing the role of the family in the coming out and homosexual identity formation of the teenager.
- Explore the historical and contemporary societal and institutional attitudes toward homosexuality and their impact on the sexual identity development of gay and lesbian youth.

- Critique social service resources, especially prevention and risk reduction programmes, according to their effectiveness for youth that are gay and lesbian.
- Explore and define the roles, and develop a repertoire of skills that are relevant, appropriate, and sensitive in meeting the specific needs and challenges of sexual minority youth.

a) Format

The format for presenting these courses could include the following:

- Focus on experiential methods of learning should be a priority i.e. allow learners to explore and reflect on their feelings and attitude as an integral part of skills acquisition and development in this area.

- Use small groups as a foundation of learning, as this would enable learners to feel more comfortable in honestly appraising their personal perceptions toward adolescent homosexuality, as well as attitudes toward their own sexuality.

- As a means of ensuring that the issues discussed and explored in the curriculum are made as realistic as possible for learners, the researcher encourages the participation of gay and lesbian youth serving as guest speakers in these courses. The researcher notes that learners will be able to gain enormous insights into the experiences of coming out and homosexual identity formation by simply listening to the stories as articulated by youth themselves.

- Media/video/poetry/writing are additional methods that should be integrated into these courses so as to ensure that they are practical and contemporary.

- The use of professional journal articles could be used as providing learners with the most relevant and updated trends in the field of adolescent homosexuality. These articles should not only be used as

reading material, but should also be used as a means of critiquing and evaluating these current trends and relating them to the experiences of gay and lesbian youth coming out in a South African context.

9.2.3 Social Policy Development and Implementation

9.2.3.1 Introduction

Inherent in the goal of social work is promoting social justice, for if resources and opportunities are to be available to all members of society; laws, governmental policies and social programmes must assure equal access of citizens to resources and opportunities. Social workers thus promote social justice by advocating for clients who have been denied services, resources, or goods to which they are entitled. Social workers also actively engage in efforts to combat racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination that block equal access of clients to resources to which they are entitled (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993).

There is perhaps no greater example of social workers promoting social justice than in the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa. Subsequent to our transition to a democracy in 1994, social workers have continued to spearhead the struggle against racism, sexism, classism, poverty and children's rights, amongst others. However, the voice of social workers in promoting the social justice of young gay and lesbian people in South Africa has been very quiet, to say the least.

Hepworth and Larsen (1993) further state that in order to practice in full accordance with the mission and ethics of the profession, social workers have a responsibility to participate in the development of and to utilise social policies that enhance the social functioning of individuals, families,

groups and communities. Because of social work's commitment to social justice, knowledge of inequalities and the impact of these inequalities on minority and disadvantaged groups are essential to social work practitioners.

Given the injustices experienced and reported by gay and lesbian youth in this study, as well as the disenfranchised and marginalised status afforded them in South African society, it is indicative that social workers play an integral role in the development and adoption of social policies that speak directly to the reality of sexual minority youth.

Few of the policy debates regarding either the status of children or of lesbian and gay people directly addressed the status of gay and lesbian youth. Even the concept of gay children continues to be foreign to many policy makers and community members. However by increasing visibility of lesbian and gay people, social workers can expand public debate regarding homosexual rights to include the concerns of lesbian and gay youth (Berzon, 1992).

There are specific implications that can be drawn from this discussion for the profession of social work and social work practitioners. Traditionally, the profession of social work has held a primary concern for meeting the needs of different populations. The profession needs to take a more active role in generating knowledge which allows for sensitivity to, and understanding of the uniqueness of the life experiences and needs of gay and lesbian youth. It is only through knowledge generation that effective social policies can be promulgated in addressing the way in which our societal attitudes and prejudice negatively impact upon gay and lesbian youth. Social workers should commit their efforts in developing policies at

the interface of every institution that interacts and impacts upon gay and lesbian teenagers.

9.2.3.2 Relationship Between Social Work and Social Welfare

With respect to developing and implementing social policies which address the needs of gay and lesbian youth, the researcher regards it as important to demonstrate the relationship between social work and the social welfare system. This would hopefully highlight the various disciplines that interface with gay and lesbian youth throughout their coming out process, and the subsequent interrelatedness between these systems. Zastrow (1992:6) has defined social welfare as "the full range of organized activities of voluntary and governmental agencies that seek to prevent, alleviate or contribute to the solution of recognised social problems, or to improve the well-being of individuals, groups or communities. Such activities use a wide variety of professional personnel such as physicians, nurses, lawyers, educators, engineers, ministers, and social workers."

Furthermore, the social work profession regards the person-in-environment conceptualisation as its primary paradigm of practice. Thus, the researcher provides the following diagram to illustrate the various social institutions which social workers could target as policy agents of change in respect to gay and lesbian youth. This figure is adapted from Zastrow (1992:7).

a) Focus Areas

Based on the findings in this study, the researcher recommends that social workers focus their policy agendas on the following areas.

- **<u>Primary, secondary and tertiary education</u>**

The issues for policy consideration concerning gay and lesbian youth in present day South Africa retain much of the shroud, naivete and denial that once plagued the larger issue of homosexuality. While social policy changes regarding homosexuality overall have had positive effects on, and implications for, gay and lesbian adults, the unique needs of gay and lesbian youth have yet to be addressed. It is recommended that efforts to define and describe their special needs will be accompanied by increasingly intense public debate. The impetus for change should arise within the school district, in light of the professional and ethical obligations of teachers, administrators, and school-board members to provide school-based assistance and quality education for all students.   If such programmes are not initiated voluntarily within the schools, social work advocates for gay and lesbian youths' rights to equal educational opportunity have suggested that a litigation strategy should be pursued through the state courts. It is clear from the information available on the plethora of problems often experienced by gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents that intervention must occur immediately in every school in this nation. The pain and hardship suffered by adolescent gay, lesbian and bisexual youth is no longer invisible, and our lack of action is no longer professionally or ethically acceptable (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992).

This study suggests that social policies in the educational sectors prioritise the following:

- Thus social workers should play an active role in encouraging and enforcing educational institutions to focus attention on developing policies for sexual minority youth in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

- For example, social workers could facilitate the development and implementation of a Code of Ethics which includes discussions of acceptable behaviour as well as those sanctions which would be enacted upon both learners and educators if they discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

- **Health and Welfare**

The social work profession in South Africa has neglected this severely oppressed, invisible and outcast adolescent sexual minority population. It is time for the National Ministries of Health and Welfare and Population Development; in conjunction with national youth structures such as the National Youth Commission and Inter-Ministerial Committee on Child and Youth Care services, to invest the relevant resources in developing policies that are inclusive of the needs and challenges facing South African gay and lesbian youth.

This study recommends that social policies in this regard prioritise the following:

- Creating a definitional status for gay and lesbian youth in the arena of health and welfare services
- Develop policies for gay and lesbian youth by including sexual minority as youth-at-risk. This study has demonstrated the enormity of adversity and risk factors, such as depression, isolation, suicide, and abuse, amongst others, which gay and lesbian youth experience in their coming out process (see Chapter 4). Social workers and policy makers can no longer ignore the reality of their experiences.
- Social workers should commit themselves to the establishment of policy forums in various sectors of the health and welfare arenas, which prioritise the needs and challenges of sexual minority youth, and ensure that policy implementation results in more equitable and

sensitive service rendering to this segment of South Africa's youth population.

- **Law, Safety and Security**

In many areas, recognition of the existence of gays and lesbians between the ages of 13 and 18 is limited to specialized sectors such as child welfare and probation departments. High schools are still the sites of official discrimination, frequent harassment and taunting directed at lesbian and gay youth (Harbeck, 1992). Children under 13 are usually assumed to be developing as heterosexuals. They are also generally expected to be protected, at a minimum, from information concerning homosexuality and, some would argue, from the presence of homosexuals (Krauthammer, 1993). Lesbian and gay youth over age 18 can be found in large numbers in institutions such as the military, and in colleges and universities. They are vulnerable to discrimination to varying degrees, depending on the policies embraced by these institutions. Social work and related professions as agents of protecting the rights of our gay and lesbian youth should target South African ministries of Law and Order, and Safety and Security.

This study recommends that social policies with regard to issues of law, safety and security be geared toward the following focus areas:

- Social workers should be in a position to spearhead revisiting the policy regarding the Age of Consent. As stated by the participants in this study, the Age of Consent should be equitable for both heterosexual and homosexual youth. The researcher does not recommend a blanket, across the board adoption of an Equal Age of Consent. However, it is strongly recommended that this policy be reviewed and debated and more importantly, that gay and lesbian

youth be granted full participation in revisiting this policy. This is not an issue that impacts upon the lives of politicians, but certainly impacts upon the daily lives of our country's sexual minority youth.

- In conjunction with revisiting the policy regarding Age of Consent, is the need to ensure that these policy considerations are discussed within the context of equal protection under the law for both heterosexual and homosexual youth.

- The social work profession is in an ideal position to ensure that policies are implemented within the law and safety and security segments of our society, in terms of safeguarding gay and lesbian youth from hate crimes and various forms of homophobia. The reader is reminded of the case of Matthew Shephard (discussed in the dedication section of this study), who was a victim of the most brutal form of hate crimes – and as a result he lost his life. The researcher strongly recommends that social workers serve as a voice for gay and lesbian youth, and lobby for the protection of their rights. This could include lobbying for the promulgation of an anti-hate crime bill in South Africa, which would hopefully begin to send the message that discrimination against people who are homosexual is unacceptable and intolerable within the mores our new democracy.

- Furthermore, social workers, as they begin to gain greater access and exposure to a population of gay and lesbian youth in their daily practice, should serve as monitors to ensure that these polices are in fact being upheld. They should serve as society's "watchdogs" in monitoring that the policy of protection of sexual orientation rights under the New Constitution (1996) is in fact not being violated.

- **Human rights**

The emphasis in developing policies for those who are homosexually oriented should take into consideration the trend in social work in which

the focus of intervention is shifting from treating those who are different to conform, to supporting their rights, including their rights to be different.

- **Social and community education**

Social policy tends to reflect "community standards" regarding a population's individual rights, expected conduct, and entitlement to public services (Levine, 1991). Populations, therefore, must be defined and acknowledged by their communities and by their policy makers if they are to be included in these codified standards. Lesbian and gay youth have yet to be clearly defined as a population. It is time for the social work profession to play an active role in educating South African communities that not only do sexual minority exist, but furthermore that they warrant a clearly defined status without our transforming society. Specific strategies regarding social and community education will be discussed in the section regarding social work practice recommendations.

- **Child Care Act**

Changes which empower children, such as changes in child abuse laws, foster care and legal rights for children especially, impact lesbian and gay youth. Lesbian and gay youth are at risk for significant conflict with their parents, especially as the sexual identity of these children likely becomes evident during adolescence. Parents may bring enormous, even abusive, pressure on lesbian and gay children, in order to thwart homosexual impulses or non-traditional gender role behaviours (Margh, 1993). Clearly defined and enforced child abuse laws should protect lesbian and gay children from such abuses of parental power (Taylor, 1994).

In reviewing the South African Child Care Act No. 74 of 1983, as well as the Amendment to the Act (March 1991/1996), the researcher observed that no provisions were made for gay and lesbian children/youth. This

omission of specific categorisation for the provision of services and protective rights for gay and lesbian youth should be of concern to social workers working in this field.

This study recommends that social workers scrutinise the Child Care Act (1983) and its subsequent amendments, and focus their efforts on the following policy issues:

- Social workers could adopt the roles of advocacy and activism in revisiting the need for legal reform on behalf of gay and lesbian youth.
- The Child Care Act has as its premise the protection of children from abuse and neglect, as well as ensuring that policy and practice decisions are made in the best interests of the child. Thus the researcher notes that social workers and related policy makers should re-evaluate this Act with a view to developing mechanisms which protect gay and lesbian adolescents from abuse and neglect, and various forms of homophobia.

b) Format

The researcher recommends that social workers adopt the following strategies in developing and implementing the aforementioned social policies on behalf of gay and lesbian youth.

- **Social workers should influence social and environmental policy**

Although direct practitioners work primarily in providing direct service, they also have a responsibility to work toward improving the quality of life by promoting policies and legislation that enhance physical and social environments (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). In relating Hepworth and Larsen's (1993) views to the coming out process of gay and lesbian youth, one only has to start with the case of Metthys Strydom's expulsion from Otto du Plessis High School in Port Elizabeth (discussed in Chapter 1).

While the researcher acknowledges that this was primarily a case which should have been dealt with by the relevant educational authorities, the researcher further contends that professional territorialism should not be forwarded as a justification for inaction on the part of the social work profession. Schools are situated within communities, and as such social workers are responsible for the overall wellbeing and development of the communities they have been commissioned to serve. This would surely include gay and lesbian learners in secondary education institutions, in their respective community domains of service provision.

Therefore, social workers should not limit themselves to remedial activities but should also seek to discover environmental causes of problems and to sponsor or support policies aimed at enhancing the environments of gay and lesbian youth. Social workers should fulfill this objective by reviewing, analysing and influencing social policy as it relates to the lives of gay and lesbian youth. These should encompass policies at all levels of South African society. The task of developing appropriate policies and services for gay and lesbian youth and their peers is complex, because knowledge about the development of sexuality is still somewhat limited. However, it is hoped that this study will be a catalyst, engendering further policy development in this field.

If teenagers self-identify as homosexual and, despite all pressures to conform, insist on this identity, then policy makers should be persuaded that a legitimate population of lesbian and gay youth exists.

- **Social workers as Advocates**

The role of advocacy is a directive role in which social workers are advocates on behalf of the needs and significant challenges that gay and lesbian youth encounter. Zastrow (1992) explains that when a client or a

citizen's group is in need of help and existing institutions are uninterested (and sometimes openly negative and hostile) in providing services, then the advocates' role may be appropriate. In such a role, the advocate provides leadership for collecting information, for arguing the correctness of the client's need and request, and for challenging the institution's decision not to provide services.

This study has demonstrated numerous social institutions and organisations (education, religion, communities, and mental health professions) that have portrayed gross negligence on behalf of sexual minority youth. Not only were acts of homophobia disturbingly prevalent in these institutions and organisations, but of greater concern is the fact that these incidents of homophobia are continuing unabated and unchecked.

Because the majority of adolescents with sexual identity concerns will remain hidden throughout their school careers, systems advocacy on their behalf is critical. In this regard, social workers focusing on adolescent populations as well as school counsellors can work in concert to develop and implement school policies which provide safety from physical and verbal threats and abuse, and acknowledge the existence and legitimacy of individuals with homosexual or bisexual orientation. According to Fontaine & Hammond, (1996) such measures often provoke controversy, the alternative is to perpetuate an environment which places lesbian, gay and bisexual youth (as well as those uncertain about their orientation) at risk of mental health problems and school dropout.

Advocacy must therefore be a part of ethical, responsible and effective social policy and planning for gay and lesbian youth.   Where misinformation and sectarian moral conceptions are themselves the problem, they must be confronted as such and their influence put in a

perspective that improves equity and increases the developmental prospects of a minority that has already given much evidence of resilience.

The social worker has to advocate for these youth and their needs. Advocacy efforts could include, among other things, bringing to the attention of programme administrators the reality that sexual minority youth exist and need services that their agency is not providing. Social workers should insist that agencies enforce sexual orientation and non-discrimination policies where they exist and help develop such policies where they do not. Furthermore, social workers must work to dispel negative stereotypes, myths, and discrimination aimed at lesbian and gay individuals. Social workers must become role models of respect and acceptance of diversity among people, including gay and lesbian people (Morrow, 1993).

Thus, the researcher recommends the adoption of the clinical activist model of practice which emphasizes the role of social workers as advocates "on behalf of the exploited or those harmed by today's social system" (Waltz & Groze, 1991:503). The constant silence which gay and lesbian youth endure as a result of fear regarding their homosexuality only serves to perpetuate the homophobia within all our social institutions. In committing themselves to serve as advocates for the youth of our nation, social workers should be cognisant that the notion of all of South Africa's youth includes being a voice for the needs and challenges of sexual minority youth. Selective advocacy is no longer tolerable.

On a broader scale, social workers individually and collectively can facilitate in "delabelling" homosexuality as an illness and crime, and thus

help to decrease the unnecessary suffering associated with homosexual choice and behaviour.

- **Social workers as activists**

According to Zastrow (1992), an activist seeks basic institutional change; often the objective involves a shift in power and resources to a disadvantaged group [for example gay and lesbian youth]. An activist is concerned about social injustice, inequity and deprivation. Tactics involve conflict, confrontation and negotiation.

South Africa has a long history of activism in addressing a myriad of oppressive ideologies and systems which have permeated our society. Hence the researcher believes that the social climate in South Africa is "ripe" for social workers to focus activist strategies on the needs and rights of its sexual minority youth. The National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality has made significant strides in ensuring greater legal protection for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in South Africa. However, these enlightened policies and laws apply predominantly to adult homosexual populations.   Thus, policy development and implementation efforts by social workers have to target specific resources on the experiences and reality of sexual minority youth.

9.2.4 Social work practice

Focus Areas
- Prevention
- Intervention

9.2.4.2 Format

Based on the aforementioned focus areas specific intervention recommendations will be now be discussed. These focus areas will be categorised into various levels of social work practice, namely:

Prevention

Micro level of practice (individual, group and family)

Mezzo (agency)

Macro (community outreach and school intervention)

Systems practice

a) Prevention

Prevention involves the timely provision of services to vulnerable persons before dysfunction develops (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). In reviewing the themes in Chapters 4-8 the reader should be left in little doubt as to the plethora and complexity of challenges that face gay and lesbian youth every day of their coming out process. Hence it would appear logical and cost effective, when considering the limited social work resources in South Africa, to adopt a preventative strategy of responding to these youth's unique needs.

- Given that gay and lesbian youth could fall within youth-at-risk of mental health concerns it would be appropriate for social workers to address their needs within all facets of working with youth populations, for example, sexuality education workshops at both a school and community level. In developing a preventative strategy through the use of these workshops, social workers should commit themselves to portraying the message that being young and homosexual (or even just questioning one's sexuality) is a normative, acceptable and mentally healthy developmental task of adolescence.

- Furthermore, social workers should co-ordinate their efforts with those of teachers, guidance counsellors, psychologists and school principles in addressing the multiple layers of homophobia enacted upon gay and lesbian youth in school settings. The researcher strongly recommends the promulgation and adoption of a standard Code of Conduct in all secondary education institutions throughout South Africa. It is intended that this Code of Conduct be a binding contract for all school pupils in which there is a zero tolerance for any form of prejudice and discrimination. There should be an equal weighting of consequence for all forms of discrimination, that is, the action taken against a pupil for passing a derogatory racist or sexist comment should be viewed as severely as homophobic comments targeted at gay and lesbian learners. Furthermore, teachers and school administrators should be bound to the same Code of Conduct as learners. The recurring theme of teachers' homophobic attitudes and actions toward gay and lesbian learners in this study can only be viewed as deplorable. If school authorities and administrators are not willing to embark upon developing a culture of tolerance and respecting diversity within school settings, the onus rests with social workers to draw the attention of school authorities to these serious threats to learners' self-esteem and self-worth.

b) Micro level of practice

At this level, the population served by practitioners is various client groups, including individuals, couples, families, and groups. Practice at this level is designated as *direct* practice because practitioners deliver services directly to clients in face-to-face contact. In adopting a micro level of practice social workers have the opportunity of interfacing with gay and lesbian youth and their families at various levels of intervention:

- *Individual counselling*

- Goal

To provide counselling and supportive services for gay and lesbian youth as they negotiate their coming out process and development of a homosexual identity.

- Assessment

Social workers should explore the following issues as part of the assessment phase of intervention:

= **Identify resources and intrapersonal strengths**

= **Identify support systems (or lack thereof)**

= **Explore hindrance factors and the impact of homophobia**

= **Identify coping strategies**

= **Identify present stage of the coming out process. The stage theory proposed in chapter 5 could be used as a framework.**

= **Explore and assess the role of the young persons family in his/her coming out**

- Intervention

Once a thorough assessment has been completed social workers should focus on the following areas as part of the intervention process.

= **Crisis intervention (if necessary)**

= **Increase awareness of strengths and competencies**

= **Assist youth in developing a sense of assertiveness**

= **Assist them in viewing the difficulties surrounding their homosexuality from a fresh perspective**

= **Mobilise coping resources (intrapersonally and interpersonally) that would offer them support in their coming out;**

= *Enhance their self-awareness regarding their sexuality and in so doing increasing their sense of competence in facing stumbling blocks in their coming out.*

= *Teach problem-solving strategies and interpersonal skills which would equip gay and lesbian youth to deal with homophobia (internalised and societal), from their friends and family, as they negotiate various stages in their coming out journeys.*

= *Provide a forum for youth to ask questions regarding homosexuality. This should include sharing accurate information and literature regarding coming out.*

= *Explore the emotional taxonomy developed in this study, with a view of enabling youth to gain deeper insights into the way they are feeling and coping with their homosexuality.*

= *Assist youth in developing informed decision-making criteria regarding sexual activity. This should include information regarding safe sex practices.*

= *Provide relationship counselling for gay and lesbian youth and their partners.*

= *Where possible use peer counselling as an intervention strategy. This could assist youth in decreasing their feeling of isolation and sense that "I am the only one who feels this way."*

= *If youth present issues that are not within the social workers expertise domain (sexual abuse, substance abuse, depression, amongst others) appropriate referrals should me made.*

- **Family counselling**

Family counseling with gay and lesbian youth and their families. The need for supportive family counselling would be most appropriate at the time of youth disclosing their orientation to their parents. As participants reported,

this invariably leads to a family crisis, with communication patterns severely impaired (see Chapter 5).

- Goal

To provide gay and lesbian youth and their families with supportive counselling in negotiating the process of self-identification and self-disclosure by their child.

- Assessment

Social workers should explore the following issues as part of the assessment phase of intervention with families:

= Explore the present level and patterns of communication and conflict resolution within the family system.
= Identify support systems, for example, religious affiliations.
= Explore each family member's attitude and knowledge level regarding homosexuality.
= Encourage the family to develop a genogram as part of the assessment phase. This would hopefully give the social worker and the family a pictorial representation of the conflict and strength areas, as well as the relationships between various members of the family.
= Assess the nature of the child coming out to his/her family i.e. when and how it occurred.

- Intervention

Once a thorough assessment has been completed with the family social workers should focus on the following areas as part of the intervention process.

= Employ a strategy of crisis intervention if the family is in the midst of experiencing significant levels of conflict and stress at the time of seeking social work services.

= Assist families adjusting to their child's self-disclosure regarding his/her homosexuality.

= Assist families in improving and developing effective communication patterns. This should include focusing on developing strategies of resolving conflict. As one participant in this study shared, writing letters between the homosexual child and members of their family was an effective strategy of maintaining communication, so this may be a suggested strategy for the family to consider see Chapter 8).

= Enable the family to provide support to their child in the subsequent stages of his/her coming out. It would be advisable to share the stages of coming out, as developed in this study, with the family. This would hopefully enable them to "think ahead" and assist their child in negotiating the next phases of his/her coming out process.

= Assist parents in dealing with their feelings of denial, guilt and anger. This would include the social worker reinforcing the fact that no one is to blame for his or her child's homosexuality.

= Share accurate information with entire family systems regarding homosexuality, as well as ensuring a safe and honest forum for asking questions and sharing information.

- **Groupwork**

Social support groups are among the most valuable new resources for gay and lesbian adolescents. Grounded in the theory that problems arise from isolation, rejection, and social impediments to healthy development, groups offer a chance to practice social skills, exchange information, and to find friendship, positive role models, and safe diversion. Social groups may have a place in the treatment, as well as the prevention, of problems.

(Remafedi,1990). As participants have articulated in this study, they achieved a significant amount of comfort, understanding and information in hearing other young people's coming out stories. Thus, the researcher suggests that support groups would be an appropriate modality in increasing gay and lesbian youth's competency and problem-solving skills.

- Goal

To provide gay and lesbian youth, their families, and other stakeholders with supportive groupwork opportunities in exploring their feelings and attitudes toward adolescent homosexuality.

- Assessment

Assessment should take the following two forms:

= Assess whether or not support groups exist for gay and lesbian youth and their families. If they do exist, then referrals should be made to these relevant support groups.

= If support groups are not presently in existence then social workers should prioritise the establishment of support groups for sexual minority youth and their families. Based on reporting in this study, gay and lesbian youth feel it is most appropriate to organise support groups outside of the school setting (see Chapter 8). Thus social work agencies and non-governmental organisations, for example, Child Welfare, FAMSA, ATICC, amongst others, should partnership their skills in establishing such support groups around the country.

- Intervention

As a primary method of social work practice, groupwork can be an effective approach in a diversity of ways, namely:

= Parents and Families of Gay and Lesbian Children (PFLAG)

This could be run along the lines of PFLAG, which is an effective support programme implemented throughout the United States. Support for families of gay youth is an essential, but often neglected, component of care. Most parents need information about homosexuality. The myth that blames parents for a child's homosexuality should be directly confronted and replaced by more reliable information. Most parents need to grieve the loss of their child's heterosexual identity and the anticipated loss of their own identity as grandparents, before they can accept their son's or daughter's homosexuality (Remafedi, 1990). PFLAG support groups could address these issues and provide parents with an opportunity to gain support and information from other parents of gay and lesbian children.

= **Support groups for gay and lesbian youth**.

These may be community, agency or school-based. This practice strategy could further serve to increase their feeling comfortable and confident within their own homosexuality; decreasing their sense of isolation, sharing ideas and strategies from other youths coming out stories, develop peer networks, decrease their feeling of "I am the only gay or lesbian person in the world", increase competencies with regards to assertiveness and coping skills, amongst others.

= **Educational groups**

With various mental health and related professionals. Social workers could facilitate these groups as information-sharing sessions regarding homosexuality, as well as developing a multidisciplinary team approach to intervention with gay and lesbian youth.

c) Mezzo level of practice

According to Hepworth and Larsen (1993) mezzo level practice involves the process of *administration*, which entails assuming leadership in human service organizations directed to enabling the effective delivery of services in accordance with the values and laws of society. Direct practitioners are necessarily involved to some degree in administrative activities. Knowledge of administration, therefore, is vital to direct practitioners. Interventions at the mezzo level of practice could be achieved in the following ways:

- It is critically important for direct social work practitioners to inform their administrators as to the need to invest the appropriate resources in developing a plan of action in supporting gay and lesbian youth in their coming out process.

- It is indicative that social work administrators make their own efforts in gathering policy and practice information from related agencies and organizations working in the field of adolescent homosexuality.

- Social workers should ensure that social service agencies are responsive to gay and lesbian youth and their families. This strategy assumes greater importance when considering that only one of the eighteen participants in this study recalled counseling services being responsive to their needs (see Chapters 7 and 8). Hepworth and Larsen (1993) state that in order to accomplish this objective, practitioners must assume the role of expediter or troubleshooter by scrutinising the policies and procedures of their own and other organizations to determine if clients have ready access to resources and if services are delivered in ways that enhance the dignity of clients. The fulfillment of this practice strategy relates to an earlier discussion pertaining to homophobia within mental health professions (Chapter 7 – Theme 4). It is imperative that social workers don't just refer gay and lesbian youth to other agencies simply because they believe they are

not sufficiently equipped to deal with the needs presented by this youth population. Rather, it should be viewed as an opportunity by social workers (administrators, direct service practitioners and support staff) to appraise why their agency which includes social workers with a four year degree (or at least a three year degree) are unable to address needs and challenges of gay and lesbian youth. This opportunity for authentic appraisal should in some way result in a commitment to developing services that are responsive to gay and lesbian youth, and ensuring that these services are provided in a non-homophobic, non-heterosexist context; and furthermore; in a manner that maintains and enhances the dignity of gay and lesbian youth.

- One way of achieving this objective is by systematically obtaining input from gay and lesbian youth as a method of monitoring an agency's responsiveness and effectiveness.

- A gay/lesbian-positive therapeutic milieu must be created, not only by eliminating heterosexist and homophobic assumptions but also by providing a concrete gay and lesbian presence. This can be accomplished by having printed materials and information about gay/lesbian community resources both visible and readily accessible to clients, doing outreach to gay and lesbian communities, including a specific statement in the institution's mandate about service to gay and lesbian clients, and including "out" gay men and lesbians on both the board of directors and the staff.

d) Macro level of practice

Hepworth and Larsen (1993) explain that at this level of practice social workers serve as professional change agents who assist community action systems composed of individuals, groups or organisations to deal with social problems. In light of this, it is imperative that social workers acknowledge the fact that young people are coming out more frequently

and at a younger age than at any other time in South Africa's history
see Chapters 4 and 5). Thus, one could regard the eighteen participants
in this study as only the tip of the iceberg of young people self-identifying
as gay and lesbian. Therefore, it would be indicative of social workers to
conceptualise their strategic plans in engaging with gay and lesbian youth
from a macro level perspective. The following are recommendations
which highlight strategies which practitioners could adopt at this level of
practice.

- **Development of and work with community groups and organizations**

- Numerous governmental, parastatal, private and non-governmental
  organizations are presently engaged in working with youth populations
  in a diverse range of communities throughout South Africa. Social
  workers could play an active role in facilitating dialogue between these
  agencies, and in so doing highlighting and hopefully prioritising work
  with a particular segment of this broad youth population – sexual
  minority youth. Building partnerships would be a critical initial
  endeavour in developing a multi-disciplinary and team oriented
  approach to working on behalf of gay and lesbian youth.

- Programme planning and development - Social workers certainly have
  the repertoire of skills and access to various communities in order to
  play a leading role in planning and developing programmes with regard
  addressing the needs which gay and lesbian youth have articulated in
  this study.

- Implementation of programmes - In order to ensure comprehensive
  macro level intervention, social workers are in an ideal position to

implement programmes for gay and lesbian youth at a community, provincial and national level.

The following are recommendations for community outreach programmes.

- **Community Outreach to High Schools**

- Goal
= To present life skills programmes and workshops regarding adolescent sexuality and relationships.
= Train teachers, school counsellors and principals regarding these issues that impact on the lives of gay and lesbian learners.

- **Strategies**

= **Life skills training for high school learners**

To provide high school learners with information regarding the following:
✴ Human sexuality growth and development
✴ Sexuality, choices, and decision making
✴ Relationships and friendships
✴ Continuum of human sexuality (heterosexuality – bisexuality – homosexuality)
✴ AIDS and HIV education
✴ Zero tolerance for prejudice and discrimination
✴ How to deal with your friend coming out to you and saying that they are gay or lesbian
✴ Exploring alternative lifestyles
✴ Human rights education
✴ Sensitivity and diversity training
✴ Dispel the myths and stereotypes regarding homosexuality

= **Teacher, counsellor and principal training**

✶ Focus specific attention for high school teachers, principals and counselors on the following:

✶ Provide accurate information regarding adolescent homosexual development

✶ Address homophobia and heterosexist bias in their school

✶ Confront and address their own homophobia and attitudes toward homosexuality

✶ Create awareness, with the use of the emotional taxonomies developed in this study, and focus on the effect that a negative school environment can have on the self-esteem of gay and lesbian learners (see Chapter 4)

✶ Assess and provide recommendations regarding how sexuality and life skills curriculum should be developed and presented in high schools

✶ Provide training with regards to meeting the needs and challenges of these learners as they encounter different steps in their coming out process

✶ Assist teachers and counsellors in identifying risk factors, which would enable them to identify those gay and lesbian learners who are most at-risk. Subsequent to this, social workers should continue to serve as an on-going referral base for supportive counselling.

✶ Emphasise the importance of creating a school environment which is safe for gay and lesbian learners, as well as for learners from other minority groups.

- **Format**

= **Life skills training for gay and lesbian learners**

Life skills training workshop sessions will be presented using the following format:

✶ Workshop sessions

These would include didactic and dialogue oriented discussions in the format of seminars

✶ Group Discussions

In order to emphasise and value the experiences of gay and lesbian learners, focus will be placed on outcome based group discussions and debates around the issue of sexuality.

✶ Drama/Role Play Scenarios

In terms of experiential learning, gay and lesbian learners will be encouraged to role-play the life skills, which they have acquired. This would be in the form of dramatic role-plays or sketches.

= **Teacher, counsellor and principal training**

These training sessions will be presented using the following format:

✶ Workshops

✶ On-going referral base

✶ Specialised training courses will be provided as per requests from schools regarding specific areas of adolescent homosexuality

• **Multi-resource community centre**

Another recommendation for community outreach programmes is the establishment of multi-resource community centres for gay and lesbian youth.

A community centre of this nature could:

✶ Seek to empower sexual minority youth to take responsibility for their present life circumstances and facilitate a positive transition into adulthood.

✸ Create a safe environment were youth can acquire, nurture and develop life skills that would equip them as a vital voice in their personal, social and spiritual development.

✸ The Centre's target group could be twofold, namely: youth aged 12-18 years, and young adults aged 18-23 years. Furthermore, the target should focus on youth and young adults enrolled in secondary and tertiary education as well as out of school gay and lesbian youth.

✸ In terms of building a multi-disciplinary effort the Centre should network and work in alliance with all organisations (NGO, CBO, Statutory, Parastatal bodies) who share the vision of the development and empowerment of gay and lesbian youth.

- **Aims and objectives**

= Provide gay and lesbian youth with an eclectic range of programmes which will serve their various intrapersonal needs (identity, personal, spiritual) and interpersonal needs (same-sex, family, peer, friend, community relationships).

= Provide a safe, secure and enabling environment for gay and lesbian youth, especially as they have so often experienced significant levels of displacement and abandonment.

= Facilitate the development of a range of skill repertoires, which will equip gay and lesbian youth in their everyday lives.

= Develop a programmatic infrastructure that has as its primary goal the commitment to gay and lesbian youth empowerment, enrichment and education, and to empower gay and lesbian youth with life and interpersonal skills.

= Serve as a node of information and systematic access to community resources.

= Assist gay and lesbian youth in developing a vision and path for their respective lives and to find their rightful place in both mainstream adult gay culture and within their communities.

= To provide supportive, counselling, and recreational programmes and services for gay and lesbian youth.

= Facilitate the establishment of a multi-disciplinary team effort in addressing the needs and challenges of sexual minority youth

- **Focus areas**

The following seven areas could be the focus of service provision within a multi-resource community centre:

✴ Life skills training
✴ Counselling and support
✴ Job creation and income generation
✴ Outreach
✴ 24 hour phone in service
✴ Student training
✴ Research Development

- **Strategies**

= **Life skills training**

This programme would focus social work efforts on enabling gay and lesbian youth to:

✴ Develop a positive self-esteem and set realistic life goals and to develop strategies to achieve these goals.

✴ Assist youth in negotiating the various stages of their coming out process, and develop and nurture self-assertiveness, competency building and problem solving skills.

✶ Develop skills in conflict resolution, and sexual decision-making skills.

✶ Provide information regarding sexuality (human growth and development, understanding human sexuality, AIDS and HIV education, and negotiating safer sex choices) .

= **Counselling and support**

These services would include provision of a diverse range of counselling and supportive strategies namely: pastoral/spiritual, social/psychological, psychiatric, financial, family and family reunification, group identification, identity and individual development, medical, trauma issues (physical, emotional and sexual abuse), substance abuse, isolation and abandonment issues, legal, and relationship counselling.

The format in providing counselling and support services will take on one or more of the following modalities: Individual counselling, peer counselling, family counselling, group therapy, partners counselling, seminars and workshops

= **Job creation and income generation**

This programme would focus specific attention on the following:

✶ Enhance and provide a forum for skills development.

✶ Increase their self-esteem through the enhancement of skills development.

✶ Develop income-generating projects through the Centre within a framework of capacity and partnership building.

✶ Develop an entrepreneurial ethos within the Centre, and in so doing develop a sense of self-sufficiency within gay and lesbian youth, especially those who are out-of-school and unemployed.

= **Outreach**

The following format will be utilised to achieve the goals and aims of the outreach programme, namely:

✶ Condom distribution.

✶ Make gay and lesbian youth aware of services offered through the Centre.

✶ Distribute literature and information regarding safe sex practice and promote HIV/AIDS and STD testing.

= **24 hour phone line service**

In order to provide gay and lesbian youth access to a help-line service, the Centre could set up a 24 hour help-line.

Volunteer counsellors will be trained to handle calls from youth in need.

= **Student training**

This component of the project could provide a training base for under graduates and post graduate students in conducting their practical training.

This programme aim would be to:

✶ Expose students from all disciplines (social work, nursing, religious studies, education, psychology, amongst others.) to a wide range of practical training opportunities.

✶ Enable students to carry a caseload of gay and lesbian youth in terms of conducting case management plans.

✶ Students could become involved in the life skills training curriculum, counselling programmes, as well as development of the outreach component of the multi-resource Centre.

✶ Students could combine there practical training with specific research projects.

= **Research development**

This programme will be able to provide a continued commitment to research. Furthermore, it could produce a body of information that will feed directly into policy formulation and direct practice.

A Centre of this nature could be viewed as a vehicle to produce qualitative research regarding:

✶ A longitudinal study of the coming out process of gay and lesbian youth.

✶ The spiritual needs of gay and lesbian youth with in the context of coming out.

✶ Focus group interviews with helping professionals (ministers of religion, social workers, policy makers, psychologists, nurses, teachers and counsellors) regarding the role helping professionals, in addressing the needs of gay and lesbian youth.

✶ Factors affecting positive family reunification.

✶ A study of a gay and lesbian high school learners curriculum regarding life skills training.

It could also produce quantitative data regarding:

✶ Statistical data base regarding gay and lesbian youth attending the centre (age, race, gender, income, education, employment, family composition etc.).

✶ Attitude and perception survey studies – victimisation, traumatisation, homophobia, amongst others.

9.2.5 Systems practice intervention

A systems perspective emphasises looking beyond the presenting problems of a client in order to assess the complexities and interrelationships of problems. Through a systems analysis of a case, the most effective intervention targets and strategies can usually be identified (Zastrow, 1992).

Ecological model of intervention

The researcher briefly discussed in Chapter 1 the social work profession's transition from a medical model to an ecological model of practice. This section will expand upon that prior discussion as it relates to the themes which emerged in this study.

Zastrow (1992) explains that an ecological approach integrates both treatment and reform by conceptualising and emphasising the dysfunctional transactions between people and their physical and social environments. In this regard gay and lesbian youth should be viewed as developing and adapting through transactions with all elements of their environments, as an ecological model emphasises both internal and external factors. The challenges of adolescence are daunting for all youth, but can be especially disheartening for gay and lesbian youth, who face special and difficult tests on their way to adulthood. Many of the clinical manifestations of emotional distress presented by these youth in treatment are the result of attempts to cope with being different in a homophobic society. Consequently, it is important for youth workers, social workers, and other mental health professionals to be aware of, and sensitive to, the unique environmental stressors which impact gay and lesbian youth (Mallon, 1994).

One merely has to review the frequency and intensity of internal and social dissonance experienced by gay and lesbian youth in their coming out
process, as well as the adoption of a comprehensive coping management strategy (Chapter 4 – Theme 1) in dealing with their feelings of dissonance, to conceptualise a "good fit" between the problem statement and the model of practice – between the experience of coming out and the subsequent problems it presents and the adoption of an ecological model as an entry point for clinical intervention.

This "good fit" is further emphasised by Zastrow's (1992) contention that an ecological approach tries to improve the coping patterns of people and their environments so that a better match can be attained between an individual's needs and the characteristics of his/her environment. An additional benefit of adopting an ecological model from within a system's perspective is the fact that social workers can focus on three separate areas of addressing the needs of gay and lesbian youth.

▪ It can focus on the person and seek to develop his/her problem-solving, coping and developmental capacities (Zastrow, 1992). Thus, social workers should be in a position to employ a comprehensive life skills training programme (either individually or in groups) in assisting gay and lesbian youth in coping with the developmental tasks and obstacles in their coming our process e.g. communication, coping strategies, assertiveness, positive self-image, conflict resolution, and decision-making skills with regard to informed sexual choices.

▪ It can focus on the relationship between a person and the systems he or she interacts with and links the person with needed resource services and opportunities (Zastrow, 1992).   The employment of the

aforementioned social work roles of broker, enabler, advocate, and case manager would enable practitioners to address this component of an ecological strategy as a priority. Theme 3 (Chapter 6) clearly demonstrated the lack of support systems available to gay and lesbian youth in their coming out. This lack of supportive intervention structures has to be viewed as a priority for social workers working in this field. Specific recommendation of increasing supportive intervention structures at the micro, mezzo and macro level of practice have already been provided.

▪ It can focus on the systems and seek to reform them to meet the needs of the individual more effectively (Zastrow, 1992). As other minorities have learned, questions concerning the welfare of minority children cannot be divorced from the larger issues of human rights and community development. This is no less true for sexual minority children. Once we come to that recognition, there is no turning back, for to turn back would consign these children to perpetual marginality and degradation. Countering a legacy of neglect and denial will require the application of developmental knowledge together with an ecological analysis of the context of that development to devise strategies geared to the amelioration of institutionalised disadvantage (Sullivan, 1994). While accepting the enormity of the task, social workers have to commit themselves to addressing the needs of gay and lesbian youth within the entire social welfare framework. The researcher believes that it is only through the employment of an education and training approach that effective and reformative changes can be achieved within these systems. It is only through social workers sharing accurate information regarding homosexuality and the fact that gay and lesbian youth do exist in all systems of our society, that these systems will begin to

understand and address the needs and challenges that face gay and lesbian youth.

Another issue worth noting with regard to adopting an ecological model in working with gay and lesbian youth is "to articulate the transitional problems and needs of individuals, families and small groups. Once these problems and needs are identified, intervention approaches are then selected and applied to help individuals, families, and small groups resolve the transitional problems and meet their needs" (Zastrow, 1992:19). It is intended that the stage model of the coming out process (Chapter 5 – Theme 2) which was developed in this study, would provide social workers with insight and knowledge with regard to the needs and challenges encountered by gay and lesbian youth at each phase of their coming out. Thus, social workers and related mental health professionals would be able to develop appropriate intervention strategies which are targeted at each developmental and transitional phase of the coming out process.

9.2.5.1 Strengths perspective

In concluding this discussion, the researcher emphasizes the importance of focussing on strengths in working with gay and lesbian youth. It is essential that social workers include strengths and competencies in the assessment process with sexual minority youth. As Zastrow (1992) explains, in working with clients, social workers should focus on the strengths and resources of clients to help them resolve their difficulties. In order to utilize clients' strengths effectively, social workers must first identify those strengths.

Malucci (1979) found that many social workers focus too much attention on the perceived weaknesses of clients and underestimate or are blind to

their strengths. Malucci (1979:401) concludes that there is a "need to shift the focus in social work education and practice from problems or pathology to strengths, resources, and potentialities in human beings and their environments." The reader would have noted that the researcher has utilised strength-based terminology throughout this study, for example: problems have been replaced by challenges, and limitations have been replaced by opportunities, amongst others.

The mere fact that gay and lesbian youth were able to report a sense of positive affirmation (pride, happiness, contentment, empowerment, liberation, amongst others) as well as negotiating the arduous task of coming out to friends, peers and family members, speaks volumes of their strength, resilience, fortitude and competencies. Ignoring these characteristics would undermine the value commitment of social work practice discussed earlier – especially the value base of respecting the unique and inherent worth of sexual minority youth.

Zastrow (1992) further contends that attending to client's strengths is important as many clients need help in enhancing their self-esteem. The same could be said for gay and lesbian youth in this study as they reported feelings of worthlessness, no sense of belonging, low self-confidence, and self-critical, amongst others (see Chapter 4). Thus, if social workers have a commitment to enabling gay and lesbian youth to feel more positively about themselves and their homosexuality, "social workers must first view their clients as having considerable strengths and competencies" (Zastrow, 1992:58). The only honest and authentic way gay and lesbian youth would be able to reach their full potential, is through identifying, encouraging, nurturing and giving credibility for their strengths and resolve.

Given the backdrop of the relationship between social work and social welfare and the interconnectedness between these professional systems, as well as social work's transition toward the adoption of an ecological perspective, the researcher will now relate key components of systems theory in working with gay and lesbian youth.

9.2.5.2 Systems theory

A systems perspective is based on systems theory. Key concepts of general systems theory are wholeness, relationship and homeostasis (Zastrow, 1992). The researcher will now relate these systems concepts to the role of social workers in assisting gay and lesbian youth throughout their coming out process.

In terms of wholeness, it is of critical importance to view each gay or lesbian youth that has sought professional services, as a whole being – as someone whose life and challenges are encapsulated within a larger social system. For example, a gay teenager reporting being ridiculed and teased in high school should be viewed by analyzing all the particular systems (teachers, counselors, principal, peers, broader school community) that encompass the entire school culture, and how this whole system perpetuates homophobic harassment (teasing and ridicule).

Relationship in this context refers to the ways in which different systems (family, peers, school, religion, and community) relate to the presence, or perceived non-existence, of gay and lesbian youth. It is important to assess whether these relationships between and within various systems are positive or negative in their attitudes toward gay and lesbian youth. Homophobia, for example, has been reported as overwhelmingly prevalent within all of the aforementioned systems. Thus, any intervention strategy has to maintain cognisant of the systemic interrelatedness and the negative impact it has on gay and lesbian youth. By the same token it is important to identify those systems in a gay teenager's social environment which could serve as a positive relationship. Furthermore, the researcher deems it critical to emphasise Zastrow's (1992:71) statement that "a systems approach is not a 'Band-aid' approach." Social workers will be required, in collaboration with other mental health

professionals, to develop and implement a strategic plan of action for gay and lesbian youth which is systemic, inclusive, diversified and holds an ecological viewpoint as it's starting point.

Homeostasis is an integral component of any gay or lesbian youth's decision to self-disclose their homosexuality. In fact, the moment a gay or lesbian teenager enters into their first coming out experience is the exact point at which the use of silence, denial and hiding to maintain their secretive homeostasis is broken. Thus, it is incumbent upon a social worker to support gay and lesbian youth as they attempt to reconcile their internal and social dissonance. Furthermore, social workers should position themselves so that they are able to assist and guide gay and lesbian youth in re-establishing homeostasis at each and every level of their coming out. It is intended that an understanding of the ways in which homeostasis is interrupted in the coming out process, will provide social workers with insights in enabling gay and lesbian youth to achieve a sense of coherence and an integration of a positive homosexual identity.

The notion of homeostasis is equally pivotal when considering the emergence of a state of family imbalance, subsequent to youth disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents. Thus social workers have a critical role in enabling families to cope with their initial imbalance and crisis, and ultimately restore homeostasis within their family system. The continuum of parental responses in hearing of their child's homosexuality, which was developed and discussed in Chapter 5 (Theme 2) could provide social workers with a framework from which clinical engagement can be initiated.

To understand how to use systems theory and systems analysis, one can work from many systems models. According to Zastrow (1992) the most

publicised systems model in social work literature is the Pincus-Minahan (1973).

9.2.5.3 Pincus-Minahan model

Pincus and Minahan (1973) theorise that there are four basic systems in social work practice: a change agent system, a client system, a target system and an action system. The *change agent* system is composed of professionals who are employed specifically for the purpose of creating planned change. Also part of the change agent system is the employing organizations of the change agents (Pincus & Minahan, 1973:54).

The *client system* is composed of the people who sanction or *ask* for the change agent's services, who are the expected beneficiaries of the service, *and* who have a working agreement or contract with the change agent (Pincus & Minahan, 1973:56).

The *target system* is composed of the people, agencies, and/or organizational practices whom one wishes to change in some *measurable* way in order to reach the goals of the change agent(s) (Pincus & Minahan, 1973:59).

The last defined system is the *action system*. This term is used to describe those with whom the social worker works to accomplish the tasks and achieve the goals of the change effort (Pincus and Minahan, 1973:61). The following figure illustrates the aforementioned systems theory model developed by Pincus and Minahan (1973).

Given the commitment of the researcher to presenting recommendations and strategies which are practice oriented and user friendly, a case study will now be developed and analyzed as a clinical example of applying

Pincus and Minahan's aforementioned systems theory model in working with gay and lesbian youth.

9.3 Summary

This chapter has attempted to draw conclusions based on the research findings, as well as providing specific recommendations for social work intervention on behalf of gay and lesbian youth. Recommendations pertaining to the following four areas of social work were provided.

- Future research endeavors
- Education and training
- Social Policy and Development
- Social Work practice

Each of these will be briefly summarised.

9.3.1 Future research endeavours

The researcher recommended a variety of future research endeavors which would make a significant contribution to the sparse body of knowledge with regard to the experiences of gay and lesbian youth, their families, and those professionals and institutions with whom these interact on a daily basis.

Specific suggestions were forwarded with regards to:

- **Types of future studies.** Research studies should include focus group interviews, survey studies, longitudinal studies, as well as action participatory research.
- **Target groups to involve in future research are** social work and related mental health practitioners, parents and siblings of gay and

lesbian youth, secondary education (high school) and tertiary education comminutes, and gay and lesbian youth.

- **Foci of future research studies should be on:** present status, utilisation and effectiveness of service provision, levels of understanding and attitudes toward homosexuality (including levels of homophobia), culture of tolerance and curriculum regarding adolescent sexuality, longitudinal exploration of the milestones of coming out for gay and lesbian youth and their integration of a homosexual identity.

9.3.2 Education and training

Recommendations regarding education and training were focussed on two specific areas, namely:

- **Training social work practitioners**

Primary focus areas of training in this regard were: sensitising practising social workers to the phenomena that gay and lesbian youth do exist in all of our communities and schools, address the methods of intake and statistical evaluation of clients, explore practitioners own levels of homophobia and the impact this has on their service rendering, exploring and examining social oppression towards homosexuality, development of assessment and intervention models which would enable social work practitioners to address the challenges which face sexual minority youth, as well as encouraging the identification of gaps in practitioners knowledge base as this could become the focus of on-going training).

The format of training were also suggested, for example: workshops, continuing education seminars, sensitivity and diversity training, and train-the trainer.

9.3.3 Social work curriculum development and implementation

Based on the findings in this study the researcher recommends that Schools/Departments of Social Work, as well as those Centers of Learning offering courses in Child and Youth Care, should develop and implement curricula, which explore adolescent sexual orientation from the perspective of:

- Individual identity and homosexual formation.
- The impact of and the response of the community toward gay and lesbian youth.
- Intervention strategies and specific roles played by social workers in this regard.
- The role social workers can play in developing a multi-disciplinary team approach in addressing the challenges of gay and lesbian youth.

Furthermore, it was recommended that curriculum development and implementation could take one of two possible formats, namely:

- **Human sexuality programmes/courses**

Social Work curriculum could include aspects of adolescent homosexuality as an integral component of courses pertaining to human sexuality.

- **Specialised courses on adolescent homosexuality**

Specialised courses on adolescent homosexuality could serve as an elective for social work students, as well as offering these courses to other students enrolled in the Social and Health Sciences and the Humanities. The following are focus areas which would need to be highlighted in such a curriculum: the emergence of sexual identity in adolescence, stages of coming out, risk factors for gay and lesbian youth, homophobia,

prevention and risk-reduction programmes, intervention strategies, and the roles social workers could play in addressing the challenges facing gay an lesbian youth

9.3.4 Social policy development and implementation

The researcher discussed the relationship between the social work profession and social welfare as a frame of reference in developing and implementing social policies on behalf of gay and lesbian youth. Thereafter, specific policies were postulated for social work consideration. Suggestions and recommendations were forwarded in the following areas of social policy for gay and lesbian youth:

- Primary, secondary and tertiary education
- Health and Welfare
- Law, safety and Security
- Human Rights
- Social and Community Education
- Child care Act

Recommendations were also forwarded as to the roles that social work practitioners should adopt in developing and implementing these policies, namely:
- Influence social and environmental policy
- Social workers as advocates
- Social Workers as activists

9.3.5 Social work practice

Recommendations were offered with regard to the following areas of social work practice:

- **Prevention**

  Sexuality education workshops were suggested at both a school and community level

- **Micro level of practice (individual, group and family)**

  Assessment, intervention and implementation strategies were proposed with regard to offering individual, family and groupwork services to gay and lesbian youth and their families.

- **Mezzo (agency)**

  Suggestions were provided for mezzo level of intervention, for example: the need to invest the appropriate resources in developing a plan of action in supporting gay and lesbian youth in their coming out process: gathering policy and practice information from related agencies and organizations working in the field of adolescent homosexuality, scrutinising the policies and procedures, of systematically obtaining input from gay and lesbian youth as a method of monitoring an agency's responsiveness and effectiveness.

- **Macro (community outreach and school intervention)**

  Macro level of practice highlighted the need for social workers to:

  Work with community groups and organisations; develop community outreach to high schools, which would include life skills training for high school learners and teachers, counsellors and principal training.

  Another recommendation for community outreach programmes is the establishment of multi-resource community centres for gay and lesbian youth.

- **Systems practice**

The researcher recommended the adoption of an ecological, systems and strengths perspective in working with gay and lesbian youth.

The researcher related ecological and strengths systems to the role of social workers in assisting gay and lesbian youth throughout their coming out process, by presenting a case study as a clinical example of applying Pincus and Minahan's model in working with gay and lesbian youth.

This chapter (9) has attempted to demonstrate that with knowledge regarding the emotional taxonomies, stages of the coming out process, support and hindrance factors, and recommendations as postulated by gay and lesbian youth themselves; that social workers and related mental health professionals could begin to develop and implement intervention strategies in responding to the needs and challenges which face these young people every day of their adolescent lives.