

GAY AND LESBIAN  
ISSUES:EXPLORING  
REALITIES AND  
EXPERIENCES IN THE UK  
AND SOUTH AFRICA

Oslo, Norway

November 2003

**Dr Allister Butler**

# Personal/professional exploration

- Heterosexism (don't assume all your clients/service users/cares are heterosexual)
- Explore your own (honest) levels of bias, prejudice and homophobia
- Self-education and professional responsibility
- Regard this field of practise as a challenge and learning opportunity

UNITED KINGDOM

# Clause 28 of the Local Government Act of 1986

- Prevent the “promotion of homosexuality” by local authorities in terms of:
  - Not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality
  - Not promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a preferred or alternative family relationship

# Reality of gay, lesbian bisexual teenagers in schools

- Childline UK (2000): 20 000 teenagers call about bullying - 800 Describe themselves as GLB.
- UK national research (Dr Ian Rivers, 1999) found that 46 000 secondary school pupils are being bullied because of their sexual orientation
- Effects of homophobic bullying:
  - 50% considered suicide
  - 40% attempted suicide
  - 75% attempted suicide more than once

# Reality of gay, lesbian bisexual teenagers in schools (cont)

- Dr Epstein (Goldsmith College in London) found that:
  - 82% of teachers were aware of homophobic bullying but chose to ignore it
  - 26% of homophobic physical abuse occurred nationally
  - While almost all schools had anti-bullying policies only 6% dealt specifically with homophobic bullying
  - “Homophobia is the real Cinderella of abusive behaviours. There is consensus about what you do about racism. That’s perceived as being bad and just not tolerated. Sexism isn’t tolerated either, but with homophobia, even schools who really want to do something don’t know what to do.” (Epstein, 2000)

# EXERCISE 1: LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- Divide into five groups (6 students per group)
- Each group represents a different Local authority (social services, health, education, housing, employment services) - choose one
- In each group discuss and analyse the following:
  - Individual and group analysis of Section/Clause 28
  - Social work response in working with young gay, lesbian and bisexual youth - from perspective of your LA (what are barriers to implementing your policy, how realistic is it, who will support your initiative, who will oppose it?)

SOUTH AFRICA



# HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

## New South African Constitution (1996)

The evidence of our new beginning. A legal mandate celebrating, rather than negating, our rich diversity and inclusivity, and a time of truth and reconciliation. It is the most liberal and morally inclusive constitution in our free world - an example for the world to follow [e.g. the only constitution which protects individuals against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation].

# Taxonomy of emotions

## Self-esteem

- Feelings of self-doubt
- Feelings of low self-confidence
- Feeling self critical
- Feeling unloved

# Taxonomy contd

- Inner Turmoil

- Feeling confused
- Crying and feeling pain
- Feeling bad inside
- Feeling depressed

# Taxonomy cont

## Fear

- Feeling afraid
- Feeling scared
- Feeling fearful

# Taxonomy cont

## Guilt

- Feeling guilty
- Feeling wrong about homosexuality
- Feelings of self-blame
- Feeling sinful

# Taxonomy cont

## Helplessness

- Feelings of being trapped
- Feeling devastated and destroyed
- Wanting to die/suicidal ideation

# Taxonomy cont

## Isolation

- Feeling invisible
- Feeling alone
- Feeling lonely

# Taxonomy cont

## Feeling different

- Feeling abnormal
- Feeling wrong



# Taxonomy cont

## Anger

- Feeling angry
- Feeling resentful
- Feeling being gay ruined my life

# EXERCISE 2: “BEAUTIFUL THING” VIDEO CLIP

- Watch the video clip from “Beautiful Thing” and in groups of four respond to the following:
  - Provide a taxonomy of emotions (internal dissonance) as experienced by Sandra (mother), Jamie (gay son) and Steve (gay neighbour)
  - What myths and stereotypes are being played out?
  - As a social worker how to start to break down these stereotypes?
  - Provide a social work intervention plan (just briefly) if you were working with (individually) - mother (Sandra), son (Jamie), boyfriend (Steve) and school teacher (Mrs Mcewan).

# SERVICE PROVISION for GLY in RESIDENTIALCARE

- Don't assume all young people are heterosexual
- Explore your own myths and stereotypes re: homosexuality
- Don't pigeon hole young people - remember that some young people may simply be questioning and /or experimenting with their sexuality
- Equal age of consent - provide equal and consistent model of anti-oppressive practise

# SERVICE PROVISION for GLY in RESIDENTIALCARE (cont)

- Educate other practitioners/professionals as well as heterosexual young people re: acceptance and zero tolerance around homophobia
- Risk assessment re: victims of sexual abuse within the residential setting
- Advocate on behalf of GLB youth in the care unit re: their rights and needs.
- Recruit, hire and train openly gay and lesbian staff so as to increase visibly and acceptance in the organisation

# EXERCISE 3: RESIDENTIAL CARE PLAN

- You are doing your placement in a residential care programme for young people who have been deemed to be “at risk.” You observe signs of homophobia (overt bullying by peers and covert attitudes by staff) toward three young people (two boys aged 12 and 17, and a girl aged 16).
- Given what you have learnt in this session (and from the literature) in groups of five discuss, analyse and finally develop a strategic plan of addressing homophobia in your unit (from a micro and macro level) I.e. from an individual level as well as from an organisational level.
- How will you get the support of your colleagues in implementing this plan?
- How will you monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your plan?

# SERVICE PROVISION

## Community Services

- Peer support programmes
- Access to gay and lesbian literature and information
- Community/youth drop in centre
- Phone line services
- Confidential and anonymous counselling
- Out-of- school social networking
- Job skills training

# SERVICE PROVISION contd

## Secondary education

- Supportive environment
- Curriculum development
- Support groups
- Teachers allowed and encouraged to “be out”
- Dispel myths and stereotypes regarding homosexuality
- Zero tolerance for homophobia

# SERVICE PROVISION contd

## Secondary education contd

- Train teachers
- Gay and heterosexual social interaction
- Educate all students regarding homosexuality and heterosexuality
- Discuss religion and homosexuality in class
- Start with primary school education
- Older school learners as role models



# SERVICE PROVISION cont

## Tertiary education

- Support groups
- Counselling services
- Gay and lesbian table at orientation
- Discussion on campus radio
- Zero tolerance for homophobia and prejudice on campus

# SERVICE PROVISION cont

## Family

- Family support groups
- Family counselling
- Writing as a means of communication in the coming out process

# SERVICE PROVISION cont

## Religion

- Discuss religion and homophobia and homosexuality in schools
- Confront homophobia in churches
- Educate ministers of religion
- Integrated churches

# SERVICE PROVISION cont

## Communities

- Organise Gay Youth Pride marches
- Lesbigay community integration
- Community education
- Gaining access to positive adult gay and lesbian role models

# SERVICE PROVISION cont

## Social Work/helping professions

- Commitment from statutory agencies
- Youth organisations to prioritise gay and lesbian needs and challenges
- Counselling and support services

# SERVICE PROVISION cont

## Social education/legal concerns

- Section 28 - teach about homosexuality in schools
- Develop a culture of tolerance
- Zero tolerance for hate crimes and violence
- Human rights education
- Implement training and education around equal age of consent
- Lobbying re: services for gay and lesbian youth

# AFRICAN SKY BLUE

(Johnny Clegg and Jaluka)



African sky blue, your children wait for  
the dawn

African sky blue, soon a new day will be  
born

African sky blue, African sky blue  
Will you bless my life

African sunshine, soon you will warm your  
children's eyes

The African sunshine will dance and meet  
your morning light

African sunshine, African sunshine  
Will you bless my life

Oh will you bless my life, oh will you bless  
my life

Oh will you bless my life

What can I know, what can I dream  
What can I hope, what will the  
future bring  
You shine through me, but will you  
see me through  
African Sky Blue

African thunderstorm  
Your soldiers march through the air  
The African rain will fall  
And wash away all your tears  
African falling rain, African falling  
rain  
Will you bless my life  
Oh will you bless my life







The warrior is now a worker, and  
his war is underground

With his eyes caught in the  
darkness, he looks the bleeding  
veins of gold

When the smoking rock face  
murmurs, he always thinks of  
you

African Sky Blue, will you see me  
through

In memory of Nkosi Johnson, AIDS warrior  
and role model, aged 12.