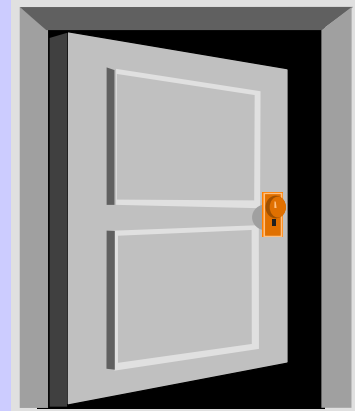


# SOUTH AFRICAN GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH: RIGHTFUL CITIZENS AND ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN NATION BUILDING AND SOCIAL CHANGE

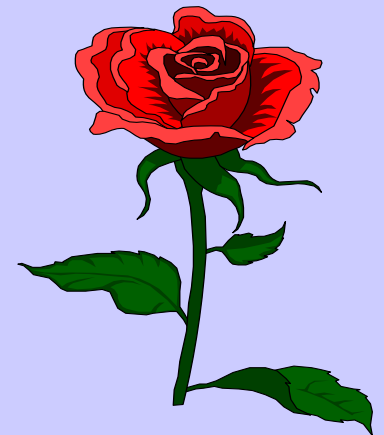
Childhoods International Conference  
Oslo, Norway 29 June -3 July 2005



Dr Allister Butler  
Canterbury Christ Church University

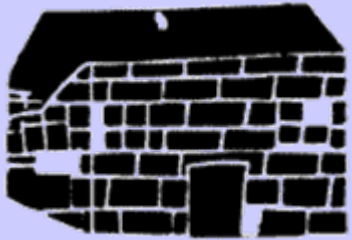
Dedicated to the memory of  
Matthew Shephard

1976 to 1998



promises

THERE SHALL  
BE HOUSES  
AND SECURITY  
FOR ALL



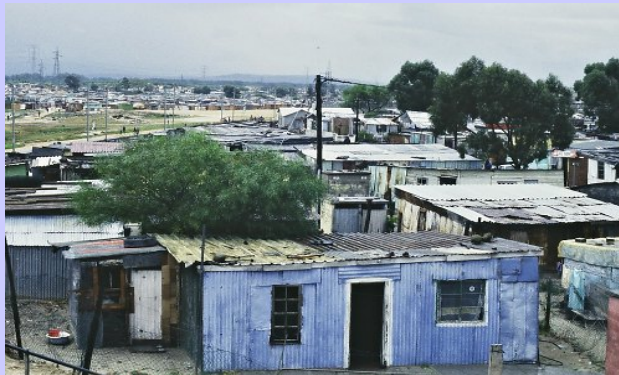
tourism

disappointment



SETTING THE STAGE

unrest



poverty

peace



# HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

## Legislating Apartheid (1948)

The National Party won the election (1948) and implemented apartheid, which was forced segregation based solely on race. Accomplished through legislation such as: Prohibition of Mixed marriages Act, Population Registration Act, and the Group Areas Act. In 1961 South Africa became a republic and withdrew from the Commonwealth.

## Soweto Rights (1976)

June 16, 1976, black youth of Soweto protested against Afrikaans being the official language for education. This was a turning point in the anti-apartheid struggle.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW (cont)



**Release of Nelson  
Mandela (1990)**

### **First democratic elections (1994)**

The greatest victory for a nation so besieged by intolerance, bigotry, and ignorance.

The birth of the Rainbow nation  
and a new multi-cultural, racially inclusive society.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW (cont)

### 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].

### A decade post Apartheid (2003)

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW (cont)

When the new Republic of South Africa, a formerly homophobic country under Apartheid, ratified its constitution, it became the first nation to incorporate sexual orientation in its anti-discrimination doctrine. Having experienced unending abuses, the framers and the people agreed that they wanted their new country to be a nation of human rights.

Wetzel (2001, pg. 19)

*“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.”*

*(EXIT, Issue 108, February 1999)*

*Clinton passed  
the Matthew Shephard Anti Hate Crime Bill (1999)*



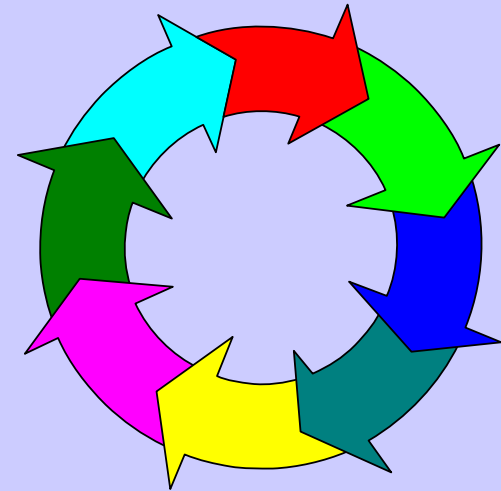
*Methodology*

*Qualitative interviews*

*Content analysis*

*Reflective sample*

*Emerging themes*



# Research Study

## Central Question

“What meanings and interpretations do gay and lesbian youth attribute to their coming out process in contemporary South Africa?”

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# The five emerging themes are:

Theme 1: Mental Health Stressors and Coping Strategies

Theme 2: Stages of Coming Out

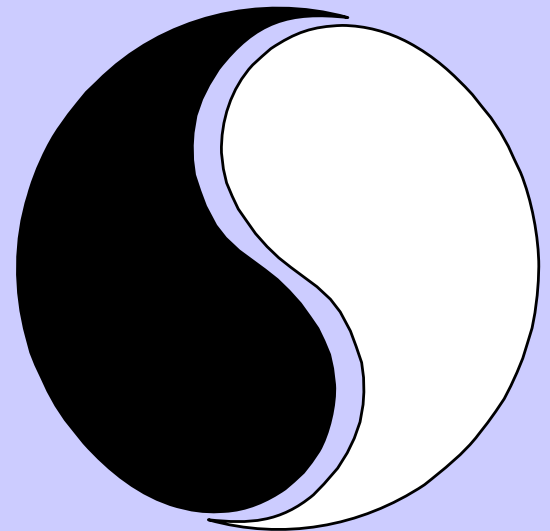
Theme 3: Homophobia and Hinderances

Theme 4: Support Systems

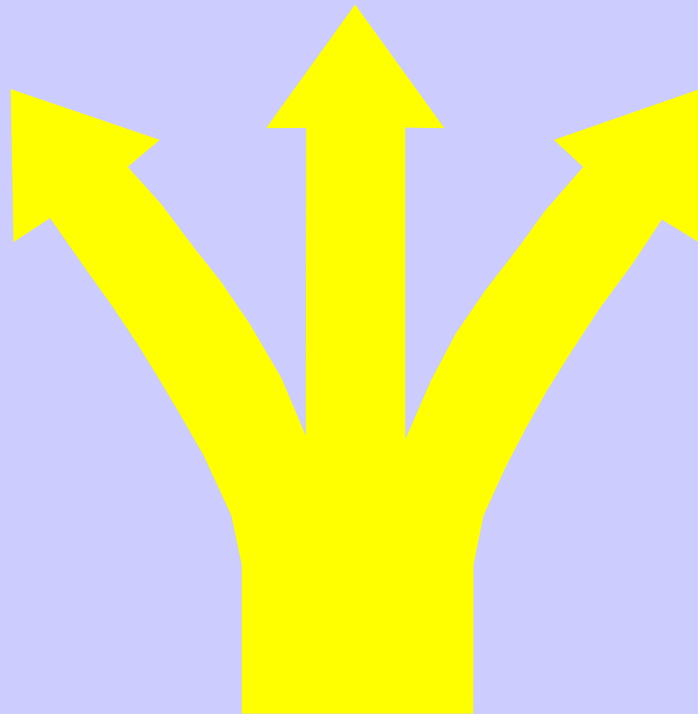
Theme 5: Recommendations

# Theme 1: Mental Health Stressors and Coping Strategies

1. Internal dissonance
2. Social dissonance
3. Coping strategies
4. Positive affirmation



## Theme 2: Stages of Coming Out



## Stage 1:

### Early Adolescent Exploration and Self Identification (10 - 14 years)

- \* Internal turmoil
- \* First self-realisation
- \* First sexual experience
- \* Gender differences

## Stage 2:

Mid-adolescent self-disclosure  
and validation  
(15 - 18 years)

- \* Coming out to self
- \* First coming out experience
- \* Access to lesbigay community
- \* Coming out to parents



## Stage 3:

Late adolescent consolidation  
and integration  
(18 - 22 years)

- \* Coming out to broader family members
- \* Coming out to broader peer networks
- \* Antonovsky's 'Sense of Coherence'

## SECONDARY EDUCATION

Participants spoke about the urgent need to educate (or re-educate) teachers and school counsellors about diversity issues, including homosexuality. They specifically suggested training related to changing teachers' homophobic attitudes and stereotypical perceptions, and thus transforming their responsiveness from a point of fear to a place of acceptance and support:

*"This sounds horrible I know but what is happening is the teachers are scaring the children. And when you get to the point where that isn't happening any more then I think you can actually make a change."*

*"I think if you changed the teachers' attitude hopefully it will rub off on the students in a positive way".*

# COMMUNITY

It was further suggested that gay and lesbian organisations and communities should become involved in addressing stereotypes and discrimination within the gay community in historically disadvantaged communities. One participant described his experience of discrimination from in his own community, thus expressing the need for township education about homosexuality.

*"I think gay people themselves are disintegrated. / ...It is like in our black community there is discrimination./ ... I think we are still racially divided. / ...I have never been in a gay bar where I have met all people from different races".*

# COMMUNITY

Participants perceived the lesbigay community in South Africa as lacking integration, along both racial and gender lines. They proposed that the lesbigay community make concerted efforts to develop a culture of diversity and acceptance within their own communities, thus forming a more integrated culture of gays and lesbians in South Africa:

*" ... there are [sic] fairly good racial mix but definitely not representative, it's definitely more white."; "I think that gay people as a whole should try and be integrated as well".*

Participants recommended that they gain exposure to adult gay and lesbian role models.

*"More role models, more people standing out in the community, who weren't ashamed".*

# SOCIAL EDUCATION AND LEGAL / CONSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS

The participants recommended various forms of social education, which would assist them in their coming out process. They often related the need for social education to constitutional and legal concerns for sexual minority youth. Participants stated that any form of social education should be presented from the standpoint of developing a culture of zero tolerance for homophobia in contemporary South African culture:

*"... it is similar to a race issue as well. If we can turn the tables and not discriminate, then obviously we can do it for sexuality as well".*

## SOCIAL EDUCATION AND LEGAL / CONSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS

It was suggested that social education might be expedited through parliamentary discussions on homosexuality in general, and youth issues more specifically:

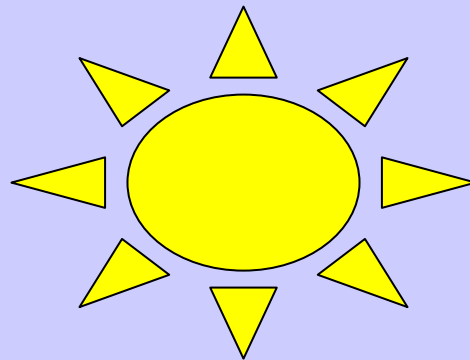
*"... like for instance, if you watch the parliamentary broadcasts on ... on like TV...about being gay, they don't even mention things like that. And probably most of the members of parliament are from the old school ... so they wouldn't understand like gay youth issues and things like that".*

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

(MAMA CASS)



Nobody can tell ya  
.. there's only one song worth singin'  
They may try and sell ya  
'Cos it hangs them up  
... to see someone like you





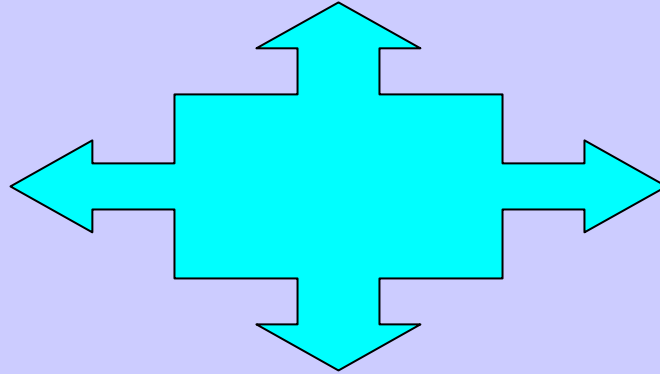
But you've gotta

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

Sing your own special song

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

Even if nobody else sings along



You're gonna be nowhere  
The loneliest kind of lonely  
It may be rough goin'  
Just to do your thing's  
... the hardest thing to do

But you've gotta

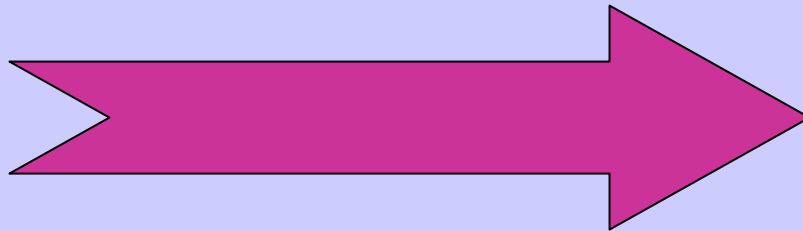
MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

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 goin'  
I will understand



But you've gotta

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

Sing your own special song

MAKE YOUR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

Even if nobody else sings along

*South Africa's gay and lesbian youth have  
a profoundly unique story to tell.  
This, in most part in their words, is the  
unveiling of their coming out stories.  
The researcher has simply been granted  
the opportunity to tell these stories  
of extraordinary self will, courage,  
fortitude and resilience,  
leaving one  
with the renewed belief and confidence  
in the power and the beauty  
of the human spirit*