

Experiences of Black LGBTI Youth In Peri-Urban Communities in South Africa

Formative Research

For LGBTI Radio Drama Being Produced by Community Media for Development/CMFD Productions and The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)

By Tonya Graham
With
Sarah Kiguwa

Special Thanks for Support from Atlantic Philanthropies

Deborah Walter
Community Media for Development/
CMFD Productions
+27 (0) 73 132 7032
deb@cmfd.org
www.cmfd.org

Contact:

Brett Davidson
IDASA
6 Spin Street, Cape Town
021-467-5600
brett@idasact.org.za
www.idasa.org.za



EXPERIENCES OF BLACK LGBTI YOUTH IN PERI-URBAN COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	3
1.1 OBJECTIVE.....	3
1.2 GOAL	3
1.3 METHODOLOGY.....	3
1.3.1 OBSERVATIONS AND LIMITATIONS	3
2.0 FINDINGS	4
2.1 MAJOR THEMES.....	4
2.1.1 HATE CRIMES/HATE SPEECH/VIOLENCE AND ABUSE	4
2.1.2 FAMILY	6
2.1.3 RELIGION/TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.....	7
2.1.4 LAW AND GOVERNMENT	9
2.1.5 RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE	10
2.2 OTHER THEMES	12
2.2.1 ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE	12
2.2.2 HIV/AIDS.....	13
2.2.3 LACK OF COMMUNICATION	14
2.2.4 SUICIDE	15
3.0 BRIEF REPORT ON DESK RESEARCH	15
3.1 VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIANS.....	15
3.2 ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE	16
3.3 SUICIDE	16
3.4 HEALTH CARE AND HIV/AIDS	16
3.5 FAMILY AND CULTURE.....	17
3.6 PARENTING	17
4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	19
4.1 EDUCATION.....	19
4.2 COMMUNICATION	19
4.3 ORGANIZING	20
5.0 CONCLUSION.....	20
APPENDIX I – CASE STUDIES: GODWIN & EDDIE.....	22
APPENDIX II – SUGGESTIONS FOR RADIO DRAMA THEMES.....	27

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This research study was commissioned to uncover and explore the central issues facing the black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities in townships and semi-urban areas around Johannesburg. The results of this research will be used to create relevant and appropriate storylines for a 13 part, youth focused radio drama produced by The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) and Community Media for Development/ CMFD Productions and aired on community, and possibly mainstream radio stations.

1.1 OBJECTIVE

The major objective of this research study was to identify central issues facing the black LGBTI communities in peri-urban areas, specifically focusing on areas surrounding Johannesburg, as well as to gather particular stories and experiences that can be used to assist the scriptwriters in coming up with storylines.

1.2 GOAL

The primary goal of this research study is to provide the scriptwriters with a broad range of information and stories in order to ensure the development of a radio drama that is relevant, educational, and appropriate for its audience.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

We approached the research in several ways. Extensive desk research was done at the Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of the Witwatersrand. The researchers looked at transcripts of interviews conducted with black gay, lesbian and bisexual people, as well as academic papers and studies. Recent studies and theses were consulted, as well as various documentaries on the lives of black lesbian and gay people.

We also conducted audience research. A focus group discussion was conducted in Cape Town with lesbian and gay youth at the Triangle Project, and several face to face interviews were conducted with youth from townships in the Benoni area, just northeast of Johannesburg, as well as with representatives from various lesbian and gay organizations. In addition, we attended a press conference on the anti-hate crime campaign, "The Rose has Thorns," organized by the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW).

Both the desk research and audience research were conducted in English. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and all interviews either read or conducted were analyzed thematically.

1.3.1 Observations and Limitations

Some of the existing research, especially interview transcripts, was written in languages other than English. This proved slightly limiting for the researchers. As well, since interviews conducted by the researchers were done with participants whose first language is not English, it is possible that there were miscommunications or misinterpretations of questions and responses. As well, the participants may not have been able to express themselves as fully as they could have if they were able to speak their own languages. However, every attempt was made to ensure clear communication and understanding.

A second gap in our research is that it does not include much information about bisexual, transgender or intersex people, simply because there is little to no available data on these communities. Most of the existing research deals with lesbians and gay men and to some extent bisexual men and women.

2.0 FINDINGS

This section deals with the findings from interviews either read or conducted, the FEW press conference, and the various documentaries. They have been compiled and separated into themes. Wherever possible, direct quotations are used to further illustrate each theme.

2.1 MAJOR THEMES

2.1.1 Hate Crimes/Hate Speech/Violence and Abuse

Violence against a person because of their sexual orientation was one of the most frequently identified issues. Every person interviewed had experienced some form of violence against them that was attributed to their sexual orientation. Much of the abuse was carried out by a person known to the survivor. Often when abuse occurs, it comes with the implication that the survivor deserved it.

The majority of violence against gay men was either verbal or physical, although there were some reports of rape and sexual abuse.

A gay male respondent reported not being able to use the toilet at school for fear of harassment by schoolmates telling him, “why are you in the men’s toilet, you’re a woman!”

Another reported that “on the weekends I used to play with girls so much, the, the boys were teasing me, by name ‘stabane’, check bafana is (?) always with the women.”

A third reported two incidents:

"The last time I was fighting for -----, cause they, no, they were trying to take off his pants trying to see his, his, he's got balls or he's got a, a pussy, you know and things like that, so uh, I had to get into the fight just because, to, to, stop that shit from happening."

"I got a cut here...on my eyelid because uh, I wanted to go in the guy's toilet and they said no you're gay you can't get in, go to the girl's... Started like, you know, I couldn't get into the toilet because I'm gay, so, we fight for that and then they..broke a bottle and cut me right up in my eyes... It was ok because, uh, I never lost my eye."

Violence against lesbians ranged from rape or attempted rape and sexual assault to verbal and physical abuse. One lesbian reported an experience with a male friend:

"he said to me, 'if I can kiss you what will happen?' and I said, 'I won't even feel a thing.' Then he tried to kiss me, then, I'm like, no, you can't ... Then he forced himself to me then, ok. Luckily my friend came in, ok, then he went out.... I was thankful he didn't rape me."

Many lesbian and bisexual women interviewed reported either rape or attempted rape, most often by a person or people they knew. Gang rape was also common. The most frequently cited excuse given for lesbian rape was that the man needed to 'show her' she was a woman. This explanation points to, among other things, the confused notion that being a lesbian means believing yourself to be a man.

Psychological abuse is also widespread, as evidenced in the following, and has lasting effects such as depression, substance abuse and suicide, discussed further in later sections.

"People, they keep on pressing them down, are you gay, they keep calling them names, you can't grow up on that kind of environment, and live happy."

"So many lesbians have got so many issues."

"Nobody wants to be mocked and teased the whole life because they gay"

Possible characters/ story ideas

- Gay person who left school/ community because of teasing and abuse who possibly turns to substance abuse/ suffers from depression. Can recount the abuse in the story line and come to terms with the bullying.
 - Aims to show people who are being abused in school that things can get better, and to educate teachers/ policy makers about how abuse affects individuals. Touches on the issue of drug and alcohol abuse in the LGBTI Community

2.1.2 Family

Family was another frequently identified theme. Many respondents mentioned that their families would not be supportive if they came out, or were not supportive when they came out. There was frequent mention of the idea that of homosexuality is un-African and of the need to be 'cured of evil:'

"because you were with other – you went to school with other races it doesn't mean you are them. You Black, this is not a black thing"

One respondent noted that the family might feel they need to do "some traditional things for you, cause there is something wrong with you. You are abnormal or something"

There was often a total misunderstanding by family members of what a lesbian or gay person is. The common misconception is that homosexuals have two sets of genitals or the genitals of the opposite sex.

"My brothers held him and took off his clothes and took a look at him but they found out that he was [still a man.]"

Most of the people interviewed expressed some fear around being forced out of the house or disowned by their families if their sexual orientation became known, since having a lesbian or gay person in the house is seen as shameful and would bring down the family name.

"In black culture you tend to think if you come out, you're going to be thrown out of the house."

One mother of a gay man said, "I was excited even if they can kill him. I despised this thing. In my heart I took him as a dead person than living because I hated this thing."

In the documentary My Son, the Bride, there is a scene in which a mother catches her son in bed with his male lover and attempts to kill him with boiling oil. When this fails, she hires a girl to have sex with him and have his baby.

Also common was the fear that coming out will put the rest of the family at risk of anti-gay backlash from the community. In her documentary Simon and I, Bev Ditsie remarks that after making a public speech on lesbian and gay issues, her family was attacked in their home. As important as it was for her personally to stand up and be out as a lesbian, she later said, "I shouldn't have made that speech. Now I've put my whole family in danger."

There is also evidence of conflicting feelings by parents when they try to accept their children. Many respondents said that their parents eventually accepted them, but some remained unwilling to talk or hear about that part of their children's lives, and generally did not like it.

"Even though we didn't like him we just accepted him...I did not like this thing but I didn't want to embarrass him in front of his friends."

However, there were reports of supportive families as well. Some respondents did say that their families have been supportive from the beginning, or have come to terms with their child's sexual orientation and are completely supportive now.

Possible Characters/ Storylines

- Gay character whose family has fully accepted him/ her and go overboard in attempting to show their child this, like a parent who tries to show their child how "hip" they are by dressing like a teenager, only to result in their child being overly embarrassed. Could include scenes of family trying to understand what homosexuality is.
 ⇒ Uses comedy to show how important it is that families can accept and support their child, and the families' ongoing effort to understand could include conversation to help demystify homosexuality.
- Family of a gay individual is victimized by the community.
- Gay individual is reluctant to come out because of the victimization that their mother would suffer from within the community.
- Mother who will not allow her daughter's lesbian friends in the house. However, she has remarkably accurate "gaydar" for a straight woman.

2.1.3 Religion/Traditional Beliefs

Religion and spirituality were both found to be important to the lives of young lesbian and gay people. This manifested in both negative, destructive, and positive, supportive ways.

Some respondents reported that religion and/or traditional beliefs were often used against them when they came out to family or friends. One respondent reported being convinced by her family that she had a demon within her, and that she must pray to God to get rid of it. As mentioned earlier, others are simply told they are evil.

There was evidence of LGBTI people having a conflictual relationship with religion. Some become turned off of religion because of the church's anti-gay stance, as in the following: "there's a line where its written, gay people are not cared like, God created [indistinct] man and woman and for me it doesn't, make sense for me,"

For others being Christian is central to their lives, thought they may feel their freedom to religious expression is being limited because of their sexuality.

"I believe in it all my life, and I would love to, one day, stand in front of the pulpit and being a preacher you know? But, I, I don't see it happening because of the, you know, the, the ideas that they have of the scripture that coats us wrong as gay people."

Many had very positive perspectives on religion and spirituality. In the case of the sangomas in the film Everything Must Come to Light, many said they were instructed by their ancestors to take a spouse of the same sex, and that it felt like the right thing to do.

Many of the people interviewed reported strong faith in the teachings of the Bible or the ancestors or both, but have chosen what to believe and what not to, and adapted their beliefs to suit what feels right for them.

"I'm on both sides, I'm on a ... ok, I also respect the ancestors, and I also praise God. So in my belief, it's like when I go to my ancestors and ask for things they take the message and they give it to God.... So I wouldn't cut some of the things in the Bible and say they are like this and I wouldn't cut some of the things from the ancestors and say they are like this, I just take it the way, the way things happen. Yeah.... choose what feels best for me."

There is also the feeling that despite what the church may say, the Bible says that God is love, so he must not hate lesbians and gays.

"[The Bible] says that love comes from God, and when you read about that love ... [you will] find out that God really loves us."

One respondent rationalized that if God hated homosexuals, He wouldn't have allowed them to exist in the first place. Since they do, God clearly loves them.

Some parents of lesbian or gay children used faith as a means to understand or at least accept their child's sexuality, rather than to deny it. One mother said, "I took it that he was created by God, and there was nothing I could do."

Some respondents expressed the need to find a church that would accommodate them, and the satisfaction that came with success. On going to the HUMCC (Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church) for the first time, one respondent reported having "this feeling of freedom, the feeling of like, 'this is something new, this is something beautiful."

Possible Characters/ Storylines

- Young individual who has grown up in the church and is a deep believer, but whose faith is shaken when the religious community he has been together with for life rejects him. His family though feels that God has made him that way and encourages him to have faith. He later joins the HUMCC
- Young woman is called to be a Sangoma by a male ancestor and she feels she is supposed to take female partners. Her very Christian family forces her to leave the house, but she eventually finds support from a relative who holds a mix of Traditional and Christian beliefs, and introduces her to other Sangomas in same-sex relationships.

2.1.4 Law and Government

Interviews showed that most black lesbians and gays have little faith in the criminal justice system and the government's ability to address their needs.

Some of the responses to questions about reporting violence to the police are as follows:

"Honestly, they [lesbians and gays] can do nothing. Some issues are not like, accepted when you go to police station they start making a joke of it before they help you. They think you, in some kind of drugs or, Satanism, yeah those kind of things."

"Ok, I didn't even go to the police cause, boys in township, they are, if you go to the police, his fella goes, and pay the police some money for the case and everything, you know?"

"We did report that but hey, it was like, [the police] were laughing about it, so it was never a good case anyway.... [they say] hey, who are you, doing things like that, just laughing, you know, making fun of it, instead of taking it seriously."

In response to a gay man telling about how he was raped:

Interviewer: Why didn't you tell the police?

Respondent: Who was gonna believe that?"

Wendy Isaack of the Equality Project spoke at the press conference about people not receiving case numbers when they make a report to the police. This prevents them

from accessing their case. She stated that sometimes the charges that were initially laid are changed or misreported, and the complainant has no way to check this.

It was also identified that black lesbian and gay youth in township areas are unaware of their rights, as is the rest of the community. For example:

“Interviewer: Do you think that a lot of people in the, in the township communities, do you think they know what rights they have as a gay person?

Respondent: No. No.

Int.: Do you think the rest of the community knows what rights a gay person should have?

Resp.: You know, I think the community thinks, the, gay people, you can do anything and get away with it you know? Cause if, somebody rape a gay person, ah, I raped a man, so what?”

“I’m telling you, people in the townships they don’t have a clue about gay rights, they don’t, so, to me, [the radio drama needs] to show them that you also have rights, like an animal has rights, you also have rights.”

At the press conference, Fikile Vilakazi spoke of losing patience with the minister of justice over a lack of response to proposed amendments to the Sexual Offences Bill. She brought up the fact that despite numerous phone calls and letters, the proposed bill has yet to be brought to parliament, and is currently not on the parliamentary agenda for this year.

All speakers at the press conference agreed that current legislation is not working in the favour of lesbian and gay people.

Possible Characters/ Storylines

- Lesbian who is raped who has huge problems in dealing with the police and with health workers. Maybe she gains strength by joining a group that advocates and educates about gay rights. (gay male rape can be highlighted here too.)
- ⇒ Her process of going through the systems will demonstrate how the system fails gay individuals; her process of becoming an activist can be used to begin to give information to inform everyone of gay rights.

2.1.5 Relationships and Marriage

There was some evidence from the interviews of a man/woman or butch/fem dichotomy in relationships. In the case of the Sangomas in Everything Must Come to Light, the women interviewed thought of their partnerships in terms of husband and wife, and played out their roles in the relationship accordingly. As well, there are gay

men who see themselves as women and when in a relationship take on the female role. They see themselves as being in a male/female relationship. In addition, in interviews, several respondents mentioned a similar dichotomy in the lesbian scene. There is an assumption that a 'butch' does not do tasks traditionally assigned to women, and a 'fem' does not do tasks traditionally assigned to men. However, there was also evidence that although this assumption exists, it is more of a stereotype than a reality.

Among some of the lesbians interviewed, there was a sense that sex was somewhat dangerous. Some women felt that they wanted relationships more for emotional and physical intimacy than sexual intimacy. This is possibly a result of the high rate of sexual abuse and rape among lesbians. This idea is reinforced by one respondent, who said, "maybe, this what makes me more comfortable having sex with women, because I can be more in control, I can sit down with her and say, 'this is what I like, this is what I don't like.'"

As well, one Deaf gay male respondent remarked that his first sexual experience with a man was terrible because he did not know what to expect. He did not realize that intercourse between men involved anal penetration. Being Deaf, he received even fewer messages about what homosexuality means than those who are hearing.

Another issue for some respondents is the heterosexual assumption that because a person is lesbian or gay, they will be attracted to their heterosexual friends. During the focus group discussion at Triangle Project, respondents expressed frustration at the fact that once they came out to their heterosexual friends that assumption would put tension on a previously smooth relationship.

Relationships were also where people found their strength and solidarity, often one of the few areas in their lives where they were free to be themselves.

"Even if you go to the mall, going to watch movies, you don't act like, kay she's my friend, you know, no! We touch each other, and we kiss, and people are like you know, they are disgusted, you know, and we don't care. That's how we feel."

Many people stressed the importance of finding other people 'like them', and of having a place to go where they could be with other lesbians and gays and feel safe. One respondent spoke of a local saloon, saying: "in my community we have a saloon, which is run by gays. They throw parties and then that's where we meet in that place... That place is very safe".

Marriage was also a strong issue for many people. Many expressed the desire to be able to marry the partner of their choice. One respondent had gone so far as to plan what his wedding would look like.

“Oh, you know my wedding I want it to be traditional. Going back to my roots [inaudible] and doing the way you’re supposed to do, ah. Dressed in like [indistinct] not like in white and things like that, to walk barefoot you know? Yeah. I want that.”

Although marriage was seen as an important ritual and an important right to gain, some people feared that it would create further problems in the family.

“I think, in my family they won’t allow it, but I know the custom I know how they do things, so I don’t see that – there’s nothing that can stop me from doing it, because I know everything that is supposed to be done, you know? Yeah.”

Another issue that came up was the matter of lobola payment. Most of those who were seriously interested in marriage also felt it was important to uphold the tradition of lobola. They acknowledged, however, that this would not necessarily be taken well or understood by parents. One mother who was offered lobola by her son’s boyfriend remarked, “I just said R100 for buying cool-drink because I don’t know what was marrying I didn’t take it seriously.”

In a meeting with the Equality Project, Wendy Isaack brought up an interesting problem with current gay marriage legislation. She mentioned that under the current law lesbian and gay people can have one legal same-sex spouse under civil unions legislation. However, some South African cultures espouse polygamy. There is no legal framework for a lesbian or gay person who wants to have several legal same-sex spouses, though legislation does exist for heterosexual polygamous relationships under the Customary Marriages Act.

Possible Characters/ Settings/ Storylines

- Locality that shows the spontaneity, energy, and liveliness of the gay culture, such as a saloon in the community which is a safe place for people to be themselves.
- Gay couple planning a marriage, dealing with Lobola, ceremony logistics, family reactions – gay couple faces obstinate parents who don’t take lobola/marriage proposal seriously, but eventually relent (maybe one parent/set of parents doesn’t) and participate in the marriage
- Gay person who deals with their heterosexual friends’ reactions.

2.2 OTHER THEMES

2.2.1 Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Drug or alcohol abuse was identified by many respondents as a problem in the lesbian and gay community. One respondent estimated that approximately 90% of the LGBTI community has substance abuse problems and that “drug abuse is crippling the gay community in [township] areas – the use of [indistinct] and all of that, and how their

lives are just spiraling out of control. Especially people who are stuck in the townships. There is nothing sometimes for them to do. So, and because there's no avenue for them to address the issues, they sort of use drugs or alcohol or whatever – or sex – to deal with what they're feeling inside.”

Many asserted that substance problems were a direct result of all the other stressors that lesbian and gay people are faced with. Substances are often used as a coping mechanism; a way to find respite from daily abuses, as well as the constant pressure of being forced to hide one's identity.

Possible Characters/ Storylines

- A family tries to come to terms with gay child's sexuality in order to help child overcome alcohol or drug problem. Family originally unaccepting of sexuality, but when they discover their child is in serious trouble, they work to accept the child's sexuality and try to help him/her get clean. Perhaps an attempted suicide prompts the family to change their outlook.

2.2.2 HIV/AIDS

The main issue identified by interview respondents about HIV/AIDS was the idea that lesbians are somehow 'immune' to HIV because lesbian sex is considered low-risk. They identified a general lack of knowledge among lesbians about HIV/AIDS and its transmission and attributed this to that fact that there are no campaigns that target the LGBTI communities.

“Ok in that part, some of the gay and lesbian people they are so ignorant about that. They are ignorant about that issue, cause you know if you are a lesbian, people think that you are not in a high risk of having HIV or AIDS and I find that, you know, they don't have, much knowledge in how you can get AIDS even if you are lesbian. Cause they think if – only guys get it.”

“Yeah, no cam – even if there's a AIDS drama or movie, they don't include gay people, in most cases they don't.”

It was also implied that gay men are perhaps more aware of HIV/AIDS, since they have typically been identified as a group that engages in high-risk behaviour.

“I think me and ----- we very aware of what's going on. We talk about it, uh, we try to use protection as much as we can. Most of the time we go to the clinic and just do the blood test.... I think [the gay community is] more aware, because I think that's when it's easy to get it. I think we are more aware.”

At the FEW press conference, it was brought up that post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is no longer being provided free of charge for survivors of rape. This prophylaxis includes drugs which prevent the transmission of HIV. Survivors are now expected to pay for the treatment, which is often out of affordable reach for many people, especially black women.

Several other issues around HIV/AIDS were identified in the OUT LGBT Well-being study conducted by Helen Wells. This study found, among other things, that black lesbians and gays were less likely to go for testing, they were less likely to understand their results, and that lesbians are actually at an increased risk of contracting HIV because of the possibility of previous male partners, as well as the high instances of lesbian rape. The findings of this study are discussed in further detail in section 3.0.

Possible Characters/ Storylines

- Lesbian couple engaging in unprotected sex, they decide to go for testing to support a gay friend, one discovers she has contracted HIV from a previous partner. They no longer know how to be intimate, but eventually find support from other HIV+ lesbians, find ways they can still enjoy being sexual.
 - ⇒ Will highlight issue of lesbian 'immunity' to HIV, and that safe sex is an option for lesbians and can still be as enjoyable as unprotected sex
- Gay character worried he is HIV+ because of unprotected sex/condom broke, but afraid to go for testing because of previous experiences with health workers, eventually goes with support of HIV+ friend and finds he is still negative.
 - ⇒ The character's journey will demonstrate the reticence that many LGBTI people feel in getting tested. His supportive friend can be used to inform about the importance of going for regular testing, as well as the need for support from friends/ family/ community members when getting tested.

2.2.3 Lack of Communication

Most respondents identified a lack of communication and understanding around sex and sexuality. Many reported that they or their families understood homosexuality to mean that a person has two sets of genitals, or the genitals of the opposite sex. That belief has been illustrated throughout this report in several contexts. Many respondents admit to feelings of confusion as a youth because they had homosexual feelings, but only one set of genitals.

Almost all of the respondents confessed an inability to confide in family and/or friends because they did not believe they would be understood. They reported that there was

very little or no positive communication about sexuality through school, community organizations or the media. One respondent remarked that the only really positive message he received from television was through an *American* sit-com, 'Will and Grace.'

2.2.4 Suicide

There was some evidence from the respondents that suicide is a problem in the LGBTI community, due to the amount of stress they face. One respondent said: "you know, eish, people they commit suicide, gay people they commit suicide, especially blacks, they kill themselves because of these things." 'These things' being discrimination, violence, lack of respect and understanding, etc., essentially all of the themes previously discussed.

This theme was explored in detail in the OUT LGBT Well-being study, discussed in section 3.0.

3.0 BRIEF REPORT ON DESK RESEARCH

This section comprises a synthesis of all articles, theses, or studies read. It is also discussed thematically and, where possible, specific studies are cited. Themes in which the audience research was very comprehensive, or where no new information was found in the desk research have not been repeated here, for the sake of brevity.

3.1 Violence against Lesbians

The desk research showed that lesbians face a kind of double trauma or even triple trauma – for being women, black and lesbian. It was stated that lesbians are women first and should be viewed historically in South Africa from the apartheid era to present times. Under apartheid, were already facing victimization as blacks, then as women within their patriarchal cultures and then as women who have adopted abnormal 'white' sexual practices (lesbianism).

Research shows that lesbians are at increased risk of being raped or violently attacked. Studies have shown that lesbians face violence twice as much as heterosexual women. This violence is usually in the form of verbal abuse, threats of assault, murder and rape. The majority will not report a hate crime like rape to the police because they fear they will face revictimization from the police, the courts and even the media. They are often not taken seriously by police officers, who believe they got what they deserved for acting 'abnormally.' Research and reports have shown that some police officers deliberately victimize gays. Lesbians often feel they have to be careful where they go and how they behave, since just looking like a lesbian or 'acting' like one can prompt an attack.

Research also shows that gay male rape does occur, though it is less frequent than lesbian rape. Again, the perpetrator is usually a person known to the survivor, even trusted by him, and is often identified by the survivor as 'straight.' Gay men are also extremely unlikely to report abuse – especially rape – for fear of revictimization by police.

3.2 Alcohol and Substance Abuse

A study by OUT LGBT Well-being found that many more black females than white females and somewhat more black males than white males get drunk either daily or more than three times per week. However, comparatively few respondents, both black and white, considered themselves alcoholics. 23% of respondents considered themselves to be drug users, 2% saw themselves as abusers, and 1% said they were dependent on drugs. 1.7% admitted to using drugs daily, 4% weekly, and 12.7% at least once a month. OUT noted that these figures may be an under representation due to the fact that drugs are illegal and respondents may be afraid to disclose fully.

3.3 Suicide

The study by OUT LGBT Well-being found that 31% of South African LGBTI people had thought about committing suicide and 21% had actually attempted it (OUT 2004). The study found positive correlations between thoughts of suicide and the following: fear and/or experience of victimization in any sector of daily life and alcohol abuse. The study also mentioned that youth may be more at risk for suicide attempts due to their lack of resources, lack of support, as well as the stress of being different from the norm at a time developmentally when fitting in is seen as extremely important. Thoughts of suicide were highest among white males (9.5%), followed by black females, black males and with white females thinking about suicide the least (5.6%). These figures are for people who think about suicide often or always.

3.4 Health Care and HIV/AIDS

A US study found that most lesbians are afraid to approach healthcare workers because they fear homophobic reactions once their sexual orientation has been revealed. They fear hostility and that their confidential information will be breached. The OUT LGBT Well-being study found similar results, reporting that black LGBTI people often delay seeking treatment for fear of discrimination. In addition, six percent of LGBTI people consulted in the study had been refused treatment because of their sexual orientation. Most of those who had been refused were black females and black males (8.4% and 7.6% respectively). Also noted in the study is that black LGBTI people were more likely to use the public health care system than whites who more often used private health facilities. They therefore are less likely to have control over who they consult, and how LGBTI-friendly their health care practitioner will be.

In terms of HIV status, the OUT study found that the number of HIV+ people is almost double among blacks than whites. As well, there were a number of blacks who did not

fetch or did not understand their test results. This category was nonexistent for whites. There were a great number of black respondents who were too afraid to even go for testing – 61% of black females versus 14% of white females and 57% of black males versus 23% of white males. In addition, the study found that the number of HIV+ lesbians is high. This is contrary to the belief that lesbians are at a very low risk of contracting HIV. The high instance of lesbian rape, and the fact that lesbians could have bisexual partners or have had male partners themselves puts them at a higher risk than commonly thought.

3.5 Family and culture

Desk research also showed that LGBTI people often have little family support. For example, some lesbians are afraid of being married off against their will if their orientation is discovered by parents. When parents do find out, the fear that they will not get any lobola can become an issue. As well, many LGBTI people do not want to cause conflict in the home and thus, keep their sexual orientation a secret. They don't want their parents stigmatized in the community and also want to protect their mothers, who are usually blamed for their children's 'misdemeanors'.

It was found that lesbian and gay youth feel invisible and misunderstood in black culture. Homosexuality is often seen as a white or foreign import and not African. Research shows that many feel uncomfortable showing affection in public for fear of being attacked either verbally or physically.

Churches can also be problematic for LGBTI people. Church officials have told survivors of violence or HIV+ LGBTI people that it is their punishment from God for practicing homosexuality.

Many black gays and lesbians experience racism from white gays and lesbians who do not like mixing with them or do not want them in predominantly white clubs, for example.

3.6 Parenting

There is very little data on the experiences of black LGBTI parenting. The information we received was written by white lesbians and gay men from South Africa and the United States. There is no question that race plays a role in access to adoption and parenting information and support, as well as how lesbian and gay parents are received by their families, communities, children's schools, etc. However, black South African LGBTI people would confront many of the same issues that white LGBTI people do; the existing research is worth noting.

In addition to the problems and issues that bringing up a child in a heterosexual family raises, existing research shows that lesbian and gay parents face additional problems because of their sexuality. Simply having a child is considerably more difficult. In the documentary Paternal Instinct, the gay male couple had decided to use a surrogate

mother. It took the mother a full year of monthly artificial inseminations before she conceived. This was very distressing for both her and the couple wanting the child. Adoption can be a difficult process as well, and many LGBTI people fear they will be rejected for adoption because of their orientation. Both of these options are time-consuming and can be very costly, making them out of reach for many.

Most of the additional problems faced by LGBTI parents in raising a child are due to societal prejudices and heterosexist assumptions about the 'unnaturalness' of same-sex relationships. Many people assume that homosexuality precludes having children; that because a couple cannot reproduce 'normally,' they will not reproduce at all. Once a person does have a child, there are considerations such as what school to send the child to; where will they be least at risk for gay-bashing? How 'out' will you be to your child? How do you prepare your child to deal with the homophobic or heterosexist comments they will inevitably hear at school? How do you establish parental titles with your child?

Another problem lesbian and gay parents face is the traditionalist claim that a child needs a mother and a father to develop normally. Similar to this is the false assumption that a child of homosexual parents will also grow up to be homosexual. These assumptions put incredible pressure on LGBTI parents to be 'perfect' parents and to have 'perfect' children. Many people feel they are under constant public scrutiny, that the rest of society is simply waiting for them to fail, and that any fault, 'abnormality' or misbehaviour in their child will be attributed to the parents' sexuality.

Despite the almost total lack of support they receive – Joyce Williams' article mentioned that many lesbian and gay parents do not feel the sense of community and camaraderie that heterosexual parents have – there is no evidence that LGBTI people make worse parents than heterosexual people. In fact, in Williams' article, one parent argued that LGBTI people perhaps make better parents because they feel they have to be so careful in their parenting. Everything they do must be done in a thoughtful and intentional way because of the large amount of homophobic discrimination they face.

Possible Characters/ Storylines

- Straight youth with gay/lesbian parents. The individual has many gay friends, and their house is a focal point for LGBTI youth in the community. However, s/he faces discrimination because of community's homophobic assumptions. Youth struggles with wanting to just be a normal kid, but also feeling the need to stand up for his/her parents and friends.
- Gay/lesbian couple wanting a child, find that people who supported their relationship now do not necessarily support or understand their decision to have children. Having to deal with adoption agency homophobia, laws that do not allow two people of the same sex equal parenting rights.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the research process, recommendations for improving the situations facing young black lesbian and gay people were identified. Many of the people interviewed had strong ideas about what needs to be done, and how the community could be better supported.

4.1 Education

Most of the people interviewed agreed that education was crucial for creating an environment of understanding and acceptance. Education included the integration of positive lesbian and gay characters and issues into school classrooms, as well as onto television and radio.

“We should have programs at school addressing gay people’s issues, and young people, young gays more especially, they need to be comfortable with going to schools, interacting with some activities, because not yet they are.”

“I mean like now we do have some kind of programs on TV, about gay and lesbian people, it comes once maybe in a month. We should have that, like, once in a week. Yeah promoting gay people and lesbian people. Yeah. I think that will help.”

A study by Teresa Dirsuweit and Graeme Reid also pointed to education as a strategy for change, saying that it was sorely lacking. They recommended further police training on homophobia and homophobic violence.

To take their recommendation one step further, it is evident that sensitivity training for educators and health workers is also needed.

4.2 Communication

Many of the people interviewed pointed to open communication as integral to the understanding of gay and lesbian rights and issues. This includes communication between individuals, for example parent to children, or friend to friend, as well as mass communication such as radio and television. Communication in this way is closely related to education, since mass media is popularly used as an educational tool.

“I wished that I could have – I would have had communication with me and my elders.”

“Parents should have a lot of communication with their kids.”

“Communication, actually, in television in radio, having - [indistinct] to make people understand, you know, you don’t choose it, and you don’t create it, it’s in you, you know, it’s..what, what you are, what you’re born with.”

It was noted that the media has portrayed gay men as promiscuous. Two male interviewees responded that they were no different from heterosexuals, who also have one night stands, the exception being the media and society do not find that as noteworthy.

There is also a sense that the LGBTI organizations that are currently in existence are not communicating to or reaching the people they are meant to support. One respondent in particular said that “even the organizations that you’re talking about they do nothing.” Another spoke of the Equality Project, saying she found out about it last year, and is happy she now knows where to go for legal help. However, the Equality Project has been in running for many years. Both of these statements point to a communication breakdown. Many of the existing organizations are doing good work, but it appears people either don’t know about them, or don’t know what they are doing.

4.3 Organizing

Organizing the lesbian and gay community was also a strong point for some people. Many felt that they didn’t get enough support, and that they had no one to rely on but themselves. More than once they brought up the idea that the only person who will be strong for you and support you is yourself. They also felt there was no unity within the gay community, that people are isolated, and therefore are afraid to come out.

“I think we should have more of organization, everywhere. And people should come out and talk about themselves... each and every township they should gather together and stop listening to people who are crushing them down, and start lifting their heads and doing what they feel.”

“Honestly, if you want to get things done, in a proper way here in South Africa I think we should have some kind of a protest, yeah, to the media and our government people, to address gay issues. They do have those but I feel they are not strong enough, because not yet we are heard there. It’s still a long way to go, before we are heard.”

Also, in terms of organization on a policy level, both Dirsuweit and Reid and Charlene Smith (FEW press conference) recommend free, prompt and effective administration of anti-retroviral treatments and PEP to rape survivors

5.0 CONCLUSION

Despite the promise of full constitutional rights and freedoms, black LGBTI people in South Africa experience discrimination and harassment on many levels on a daily

basis. Research has shown that their rights are generally not upheld, and, in fact, often unknown. Organizations that currently exist are not necessarily reaching their target audiences effectively, and communication and effective legislation around sexuality are sorely lacking. However, one cannot neglect the positive stories. LGBTI people are finding support – research has shown that they are usually able to find other LGBTI people in their communities, and several people reported having families or heterosexual friends who accepted their sexual orientation right from the very beginning, or have since come to accept it fully. People have also said that it is easier to be lesbian or gay now than it was in the past, and that there is limited communication around LGBTI issues where there never was before. Nevertheless, as one respondent said: “It’s still a long way to go, before we are heard.”

APPENDIX I – Case studies: Godwin & Eddie

Both of these men are friends.

On being gay:

- They see themselves as men but whose feminine side comes out stronger.
- People want to know if they have slept with women. They find this question offensive because it implies they are different from other people.
- They do not want to be drag queens.
- A lot of white gays are racist.
- They have to watch out for straight guys who are just looking for a little bit of fun with gay men or who believe the myth that sleeping with a gay man brings you luck.
- Sleeping with a straight man makes them feel used in the morning.
- Straight men go to gay clubs looking for a thrill and even pretend to be gay sometimes, but it is easy to spot them.
- The guys who are most homophobic are usually the ones hiding their sexual feelings towards gay men. Godwin gave an example of a cousin's boyfriend who used to tell him he hated gay men but began to phone Godwin regularly and instigate meetings behind his girlfriend's back.

On relationships:

- They are women in their relationship and deal with what a lot of women deal with, like infidelity from partners, being picked up late for a date, etc. They have been in steady relationships for a while.
- Eddie is planning to get married soon but won't wear a white dress but will wear a feminine suit. Godwin is still not sure about wanting to settle down. Eddie wants a home with kids, to look after his husband.
- Eddie and his partner want to adopt kids but will be expensive for them. He feels the whites can afford to be gay more than blacks.
- It is common for gays to have a steady boyfriend and a "roll on", someone else they are dating but whom they are not serious about.

On health matters:

- They practice safe sex and have never experienced prejudice or hostility from health workers that they see regularly. They are treated like anyone else, are taught about safe sex and STDs.

On family:

- Their families accepted them as gay from an early age. Godwin's father even used to introduce him as his daughter to guests and bought him girl's stuff. It is the same with Eddie who enjoys a close relationship with his parents. Some relatives think it is not right but they don't care as long as their immediate family loves them.
- Family is important to them and that is why they are incredibly lucky to have supportive ones.

On community:

- They have never really faced hectic hatred from their respective communities but Godwin prefers the city as he feels freer there to be who he is.

RESEARCH SOURCES

Desk Research

Altman, D. "Fear and Loathing." Issue 201 November 1989
www.newint.org/issue201/fear.htm (accessed on 31 March 2005)

Arndt, M and Helena Hewat. "The Experiences of Stress & Trauma: Black Lesbians in South Africa." Research Thesis (Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of the Witwatersrand)

Bestall, Clifford. "True Colours of the Rainbow Nation?"
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/li/programmes/this_world/3664859.stm (accessed on 31 March 2005)

Defiant Desire. Edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron. 1994.
 Johannesburg: Ravan Press

Dirsuweit, Teresa & Graeme Reid. Understanding Systematic Violence: Homophobic Attacks in Johannesburg and its Surrounds. Research Thesis: 2002 (Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of the Witwatersrand)

Hames, Mary. "The Women's Movement and Lesbian and Gay Struggles in South Africa. www.mask.org.za (accessed on 31 March 2005)

Hate Crimes in Gauteng: Executive Summary of Findings. OUT LGBT Well-being. 2004.

HIV and STIs: Prevalence and Testing Practices. Pamphlet. OUT LGBT Well-being. 2004.

Interviews conducted by the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA), Witwatersrand University.

Interview transcripts from research for "Apostles of Civilized Vice." Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of the Witwatersrand.

Kwa-Thema Lesbian and Gay Support. Meeting transcript; Date unknown.

LGBT People and the Health Care Sector: Satisfaction and discrimination experienced. Pamphlet. OUT LGBT Well-being. 2004.

"My Story." www.gaysouthafrica.org.za/browser99.asp (accessed on 31 March 2005)

Neophytou, Vanessa-Lynn. "Lesbian Mothers" from Agenda. No. 22, 1994.

Overall research findings on levels of empowerment among LGBT people in Gauteng, South Africa. OUT LGBT Well-being. 2004.

"Religion, Ideology and Homophobia."

www.mask.org.za/sections/religion/religion1.html (accessed on 31 March 2005)

Reporting Practices to the Police: Results from Levels of Empowerment amongst Gay and Lesbian People in Gauteng. Pamphlet. OUT LGBT Well-being. 2004.

SIECUS. "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Issues." February 28 2004 (accessed on 31 March 2005)

Suicide among LGBT people in Gauteng: prevalence and risk factors. Pamphlet. OUT LGBT Well-being. 2004.

Tatchell, P. "Sexual Apartheid." www.petertatchell.net/discrimination (accessed on 31 March 2005)

The Invisible Ghetto: Gay & Lesbian Writing From South Africa. Edited by Matthew Krouse. 1995. London: The Gay Men's Press

"The Rose Has Thorns." Forum for the Empowerment of Women. Press conference, 27 April 2005.

Williams, Joyce. "Parenting in a Fishbowl: Gay Parents Feel Pressure to Be Perfect." Lesbian News. Vol. 28, Issue 4. November 2002.

Films

A Page from My Journal. Dir. Fanny Tsimong. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

Betwixt & Between. Dir. Bridgette Oliphant. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

Confusion. Dir. Thulisife Portia Msipha. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

Dark & Lovely, Soft & Free. Dir. Graeme Reid and Paulo Alberton. GALA, 2000

Everything Must Come to Light. Dir. Mpumi Njinge and Paulo Alberton. GALA and Out of Africa Film Fest, 2002.

I Have Two. Dir. John Meletse. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

Liberation. Dir. Lazarus Molelekwa. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

Simon and I. Dir. Bev Ditsie. See Thru Media, 2001.

Muted Screams. Dir. Lindiwe Nkutha. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

My Life in 12 Frames Per Minute. Dir. Carl Collison. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

My Son, the Bride. Dir. Mpumi Njinge. 2001.

Paternal Instinct. Dir. Murray Nossel. 2003.

Perception. Dir. Bongiwe Louw. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

Possessed By Demons. Dir. Nokuthula Dlhadhla. Just a Minute Film, 2004.

Interviews

Conversations with lesbians of different races. April - May 2005.

Focus group discussion. Triangle Project, Cape Town. May 2005

Godwin and Eddie. Personal Interview. May 2005.

Lucky. Personal Interview. 7 May 2005.

Paul*. Personal Interview. 7 May 2005.

Zanele*. Personal Interview. 7 May 2005.

*Pseudonym

APPENDIX II – Suggestions for Radio Drama Themes

The following is a list of themes interview respondents said they wanted to see dealt with in the radio drama. This list is in no particular order, and is in no way an exhaustive list of relevant themes.

- Same-sex marriage
- Adoption/gay parenting
- Longevity in LGBTI relationships
- Loving yourself – self confidence; self worth
- Your rights as an LGBTI person
- Coming out – the importance of coming out
- The need for communication and support from parents and community
- Violence against LGBTI people
- Lack of sexuality education
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Lesbian issues – lesbians are even more under represented than gay men; lesbians need some positive role models
- Break down the butch/fem dichotomy; show a diversity of LGBTI people (i.e. to be gay does not always mean ultra-feminine, to be lesbian does not always mean ultra-masculine)