



**GAY & LESBIAN NETWORK**

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NPO NO: 026-854  
PBO NO: 930006636

# Homophobia in schools in Pietermaritzburg



**Research Report October 2011**



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## List of Acronyms

DoE	Department of Education
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
GLN	Gay & Lesbian Network
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender
NGO	Non-government organisation



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***Adolescence is hard for everyone,***

***but agony if you're gay.***

***You're on your own to learn who you are,***

***to find others like you,***

***to search for acceptance.<sup>i</sup>***





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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background to the study

A previous multi-site qualitative study commissioned by the Gay and Lesbian Network (GLN) explored the incidence of hate crime and homophobia in Pietermaritzburg. The continued attacks on the LGBT community and in particular, the attacks on women perceived to be lesbian, coupled with the xenophobic attacks on foreigners reported in Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere in South Africa formed the backdrop and the impetus of that study. Amongst other findings, the questionnaire survey component of that study revealed a general lack of knowledge of what constitutes hate crime and homophobia (Stephens, 2010). A high percentage of respondents belonged to the 'youth to young adults' age category. In addition the majority of attacks and homophobic incidents reported to the GLN involve youth and young adults. Given that youth and young adults featured prominently in the previous study and in incidents of homophobia that are reported to the GLN, this current study constitutes a follow-up to the 2010 study and aims to expand existing knowledge of homophobia as it pertains to the youth in Pietermaritzburg.

Secondary schools in South Africa incorporate the General (Grades 8-9) and Further (Grades 10-12) Education and Training bands. Grade 10 learners represent an average age group for youth in secondary schools. Grade 10 learners were

targeted from ten ordinary<sup>1</sup> public<sup>2</sup> co-educational secondary schools in the Pietermaritzburg region, allowing for race, gender and socio-economic differences. This report presents findings from a questionnaire survey administered to Grade 10 learners from the seven schools included in the final sample. It also considers the theoretical constructs of the concept *homophobia* and how it relates to cognitive, behavioural and affective processes that are engaged when homophobic learners interact with learners thought to be gay or lesbian. International and national trends are reflected upon in assessing the local context and recommendations for future interventions are proposed on the basis of such analysis.

## 1.2. Homophobia as a social construct

Over the past 15 years, LGBT scholarship has included significant interest in the area of homophobia. *Homophobia*<sup>3</sup>, a term coined in the late 1960s by psychologist George Weinberg, is usually used to refer to heterosexual negative attitudes towards individuals perceived to be gay or lesbian. Until 1973, homophobia was listed as a psychiatric disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. This biomedical approach located homophobia as a psychopathology originating within a person. The focus was on the individual's irrational fear of homosexuality or of persons perceived to be homosexual. Subsequent to its removal as a diagnostic

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinary schools are schools that follow a mainstream curriculum, and do not cater specifically for learners with special educational needs.

<sup>2</sup> As outlined in chapter 3 of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996.

<sup>3</sup> The term homophobia is the most widely used term from the terms that are currently in use. This study employs the term to maintain consistency with the scale used in data collection. It was also assumed that learners were more likely to be familiar with this term than other less known terms. However, the limitations of this term, as discussed in the introduction, are acknowledged.



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category from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), empirical studies in issues relating to homophobia have served to expand current conceptualisations and theoretical understandings of the concept. Studies that explored aetiology, definition and the components of homophobia have resulted in a shift away from locating homophobia within the individual to now including the role of contextual factors. New terms have been proposed in this regard.

For example, the growing trend to use the terms *homonegativity* and *homonegativism* as an alternative to homophobia reflects an attempt to move away from the biomedical conceptualisation of the term. A distinction is drawn between the terms *homophobia* and *heterosexism*; the latter being used analogously to the terms *sexism* and *racism*. From this perspective, homophobia is positioned within the ambit of social psychology and is regarded as a manifestation of the systemic and institutionalised oppression of individuals who do not adhere to dominant heterosexual norms and ideologies. Whilst recognising the contributions of the term homophobia in making gay and lesbian issues visible, Herek (2000, 2004) argues that both homophobia and heterosexism are limited because of their respective focus on the individual or on societal ideologies. He proposes the term *sexual prejudice* which implies recognition of individual *and* group processes. In other words, sexual prejudice includes negative attitudes and negative actions towards a social group based on perceived sexual orientation.

Research has exposed the convoluted nature of homophobia and theories have been proposed in an effort to explain its complexities and dimensions.



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O'Donohue & Caselles (1993, as cited in Wright, Adams & Bernat, 1999) propose a tripartite theory of homophobia which advocates three components: negative affect (feelings), behavioural aggression (actions) and cognitive negativism (thoughts). These components are not constant and may interact differently in various contexts. For example, a person with strong negative thoughts about gay and lesbian individuals may not necessarily act upon those thoughts in contexts that are more accommodating of gay and lesbians. Conversely a person with neutral feelings towards gays and lesbians might be spurred on to act in a hostile or violent manner towards gays and lesbians if pressurised by members of a peer group. The *Homophobia Scale* (Wright, Adams & Bernat, 1999) used in the current study is based on the tripartite theory of homophobia and is discussed in more detail later on.

### 1.3. Homophobia in schools

The pervasiveness of homophobia in schools and colleges is well documented in international scholarship (see for example, Chamberlain, 1995; Elia, 1993/4; Herek, 2000; Rivers, 2004). Research has informed the design, application, assessment and evaluation of programmes that focuses on homophobia within schools and colleges. Although there is a growing body of scholarship in the area of homophobia in South Africa, the focus tends to be guided by incidents and policy issues at a macro level and located within the discourse of 'democracy and rights' (Posel, 2005). Very little attention is focused on exploring homophobia within schools. A study commissioned by the Joint Working Group reported high levels of



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discrimination (verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and negative jokes) experienced by lesbians and gays in schools in KwaZulu Natal (Wells, 2005). Negative jokes were the reported to be the most common form of homophobia reported by both lesbian/bisexual women (63%) and gay/bisexual men (76%). The primary source of victimisation reported was learners themselves (65%) followed by educators (22%) and principals (9%). Issues relating to homophobia were not part of the formal curriculum although at times it was raised within the classroom. Despite the high prevalence rates reported, schools were not listed as sites in which homophobic incidents were rife. The dissemination of results from postgraduate research studies in relevant fields is also limited as results often go unpublished. For example, Cahill (2000) found significant levels of homophobia in a girls only school in Durban.

### **1.3.1. Schools as institutions of power**

Chamberlain (1985) asserts that the best way to understand homophobia in schools is to locate it within the domain of sexuality. How do schools approach the topic of sexuality? What role do schools play in limiting or controlling sexuality, especially amongst adolescents? A Foucauldian analysis of power identifies sexuality and the body as sites of control wherein " 'modern power' both produces and normalises bodies in ways that serve current social relations of dominance and subordination" (Blood, 2005, p. 50). Within this framework, schools may be viewed as institutions of control that serve to regulate behaviour and uphold dominant



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societal ideologies. Most modern societies, including South Africa, are characterised by well-established patriarchal ideologies and heteronormative practices. Within schools, adherence to heteronormative sex roles becomes a way of upholding these dominant ideologies (Allen, 2007). The hidden curriculum serves to control adolescent sexuality through the policies, practices and discourse that govern aspects of school life from subject choice, discipline, and dress code to participation in sport and extracurricular activities (Osborne & Wagner III, 2007). The structural, political and heteronormative nature of schools create environments that do not easily accommodate diversity, including sexualities that are alternative to the dominant male/female gender binary.

Schools go beyond being simply unfriendly places for gay and lesbian adolescents. They are also dangerous places as issues of power permeate peer groups. The school environment, in positioning adolescents as less powerful, creates contexts in which adolescents seek to assert their power in other ways (Chamberlain, 1985). Peer groups and social spaces within the school environment present opportunities for such demonstration of power. Adolescents who are perceived to be gay or lesbian, suffer a double oppression and become easy targets for adolescents wishing to assert their power and standing in peer groups. Bullying, name calling and other more physical forms of harassment of gay and lesbian adolescents are facilitated and condoned by a school environment that asexualises the learner. Because the school system, more often than not, view learners as non-sexual or sexless beings (Allen, 2007), it becomes easier to ignore acts of



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homophobia. Acknowledging such acts necessitates the recognition of learners as sexual beings. The situation is aggravated by ways of thinking that associate adolescents with child-like innocence, rendering homophobic actions as 'harmless' and 'unintentional'. For example, the 1984 murder of Charlie Howard in Maine by a group of teenagers was initially explained by the community as a practical joke that went wrong. Intense lobbying from the gay community challenged that misnomer (Chamberlain, 1985). In the end, the school environment often creates an enabling environment in the perpetuation of homophobia.

Gender differences suggest that a culture of hegemonic masculinity encourages less acceptance of alternate sexualities that allude to the existence of multiple masculinities (Connell, 2005). Males have been consistently shown to be more prejudiced towards gays and lesbians than females (Herek, 2000) and also more aggressive towards gays and lesbians than females (Franklin, 2000). There is also evidence to suggest that adolescents with more conservative beliefs on sex role stereotyping are more likely to be homophobic (Osborne & Wagner III, 2007, Whitley, 2001).



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### 1.3.2. Consequences of homophobia

The school context, as a site of power and control, place gay and lesbian learners at a particularly high risk for academic and psycho-social problems due to incidents of harassment and feelings of isolation and rejection. Research has indicated that gay and lesbian adolescents experience higher levels of underachievement, failure and dropout (O'Connor, 1993/4), loneliness (Martin & D'Augelli, 2003), substance abuse (Jordan, 2000) suicide and attempts at suicide (Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001) in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts.

The social stigma attached to sexualities that are alternative to the heteronormative gender binary, extends to educators as well. Heterosexual educators who are supportive of gay and lesbian adolescents may nevertheless be reluctant to engage in related issues at school for fear of being labelled as gay or lesbian. Schools, as a microcosm of society, often seek community approval. Educators involved in the promotion of gay and lesbian rights or in creating gay friendly spaces at schools run the risk of being discriminated against by the school management (administration) as well as the community. This may include forms of harassment and even job loss (O'Connor, 1993/4) This threat of discrimination also discourages gay and lesbian educators from disclosing their sexual orientation at schools. This has obvious consequences for adolescents who look to role models as a source of support.





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The issue of disclosure is linked to the issue of visibility. Post apartheid legislative reforms have increased the visibility of the LGBT community in South Africa, with consequent greater societal awareness of LGBT issues and also greater acceptance of the LGBT community. Many local NGOs have lobbied for the advancement of LGBT issues. More individuals have come 'out' as a result. This trend is observable in the international community as well. For example, research has shown that lower levels of homophobia are associated with persons who know others who are gay or lesbian (Brown & Groscup, 2009). However, increased visibility simultaneously puts gay and lesbians at a higher risk for harassment and incidents of homophobia, especially adolescents within the school context (Adams, Cox & Dunstan, 2004).

### **1.3. 3. The South African school context**

South African schools reflect the numerous political, historical, social and economic changes that have marked the post 1994 landscape. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights in particular, has become the cornerstone of our democracy and preserves the rights of all South African citizens, regardless of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation. Perhaps one of the most significant changes within the school context is the diversity of learners. Posel (2005) argues however, that one of the most surprising changes of the post apartheid era has been the politicisation of sexuality which has its roots in the discourse of rights brought about by the new



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democracy. Although Posel's article focuses on women's (gender) and children's rights; her arguments are also applicable to the LGBT community. Perhaps more significantly, her arguments highlight the macro discourses that inform sexuality education in schools. Existing school-based programmes that address the area of sexuality are formulated within a 'heterosexual, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS preventative' framework. Harassment focuses on heterosexual, sexual abuse of females and children. This is powerfully illustrated in the *Protecting the right to innocence: The importance of sexuality education* report (Department of Education, 2002), which focuses almost exclusively on heterosexual abuse of female learners and teenage pregnancy; while making marginal reference to sexual orientation, framing it within the scope of Constitutional rights, diversity and acceptance. However, despite the macro discourse of rights and equality enshrined in the Constitution and in the South African Schools Act, contradictions are apparent in discourses within the education authority and within schools. It is argued that the stance adopted in the 2002 report is very neutral and conveys the sense that the Department of Education is separate from society. The report states that "The Department of Education follows the Constitution in espousing non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In doing this, it is confronting a sensitive issue in society. The dominant view in society has held that all sexuality is heterosexual..."(p.16). It seems that the DoE has failed to see the link between reports such as these which limits sexuality education to heterosexual relationships and its associated challenges, to the perpetuation of a discriminatory society. The



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importance of heterosexual issues is not negated here; however, the scope of sexuality needs to be broadened to be inclusive of alternative sexualities.

To compound matters, there is a trend to associate HIV/AIDS with gays and lesbians who are considered 'high-risk' groups (Wright & Yates, 1989 ) especially in light of early literature which identified gay men as the source of HIV/AIDS (Dowsett, 2003). The result is an escalation in homophobic feelings and behaviours. HIV/AIDS presents a massive challenge in South Africa. The school curriculum locates issues of HIV/AIDS within issues of sexuality. Associating HIV/AIDS with gay and lesbian learners will only serve to increase homophobia within the school. Furthermore, in South Africa HIV/AIDS is also associated with "cultural and racial contexts of behaviour..with blame being refracted through multiple prisms of race, culture, homophobia and xenophobia" (Petros, G., Airhihenbuwa, C.O., Simbaiy, L., Ramlagan, S., & Brown, B., 2006). This suggests that black learners who are perceived to be gay (or lesbian) are more at risk for harassment and discrimination in South African schools.



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## 2. The Research Study

### 2.1. Methodology

#### 2.1.1. Research questions

This study was guided by the following questions relating to homophobia in schools in Pietermaritzburg:

- How homophobic are learners at school?
- How prevalent are incidents of homophobia and what forms do such homophobic incidents assume?
- Do differences exist across race, gender, age and class?
- How supportive is the school environment of gay and lesbian learners?

#### 2.1.2. Sampling of schools

Schools in the Pietermaritzburg region are clustered into circuits, each of which is further divided into wards. Wards do not necessarily include schools that have learners from all race groups or a range of socio-economic classes. Sampling per circuit or ward carried the risk of selecting a sample that was not representative of all the race groups or socio-economic classes. Stratified random sampling was therefore used in which secondary public schools were firstly separated into categories using previous department of education authorities (Department of



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Education & Training, House of Assembly, House of Representatives, House of Delegates). All schools were ordinary, co-educational schools situated in one of three areas: urban (central Pietermaritzburg), residential and semi-urban (periphery of Pietermaritzburg) areas. Location was used in an attempt to obtain a sample of learners from a range of socio-economic groups. Rural areas tend to have lower income households. Two further categories for single sex schools were also included. A process of random sampling was then used to randomly select two schools per administrative authority and one school per single sex school (one boys only and one girls only school) resulting in a total of ten schools.

Although permission was obtained from the Superintendent General of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, and the circuit manger and ward mangers of the schools randomly drawn in the sample; access to schools and to the learners ultimately necessitated permission from the relevant school principals. Five of the ten schools responded favourably and promptly. Two schools required additional time to consult with the school governing bodies before decisions were made. Favourable responses were eventually received from these schools. Two schools declined to participate; one of which provided no reason for non participation and the other conceded that a topic such as homophobia could potentially upset the existing order at that school. The topic was seen as a particular threat because of issues relating to same sex relationships on previous occasions. Those decisions to not participate in the study impacted on the racial representativeness of the sample, although this was only highlighted during data analysis. Finally it was difficult to establish contact with



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principals from schools belonging to less urban areas due to a lack of tele-communication infrastructure. In the absence of electronic and facsimile facilities and after attempts to establish telephonic contact were unsuccessful, letters were forwarded. Contact was eventually established with one principal and permission obtained. Unfortunately the school was not included in the final sample as the time allocated for data collection had been exceeded. A total of seven schools were included in the final data collection process.

### **2.1.3. Participants**

According to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, adolescence marks the stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion. It is a stage characterised by change and inner turmoil as adolescents grapple with issues of identity, including sexual identity. In their attempts to forge individual identities within society, independent of their families, they are often faced with negotiating unfamiliar terrain as they consider issues of social salience, morality, spirituality and ethics. Transitions are not necessarily easy and adolescents may experience Role Confusion when challenges or 'unfamiliar terrains' are not adequately or successfully negotiated. Peer groups play a prominent role during this stage as adolescents seek support, approval and understanding. Through their shared experiences, peer groups also provide safe spaces within which new identities may be experimented with. In this way they also realise their agency.

Secondary school learners include adolescents between the ages of 14 - 18 years, although there are also cases of younger and older learners. Grade 10 learners, positioned in the intermediate grades are considered to be representative of the average age of learners in secondary school. In addition, given the complexity and sensitivity of the focus of this study, learners from lower grades (8-9), who would be dealing with the challenges of puberty and the early teenage years, were considered to be less suitable as they were likely to be more socially and emotionally immature. Grade 10 learners were also more likely to enjoy privileges such as access to social networks and the internet which suggests greater exposure to social issues and issues relating to sexuality. Grades 11-12 were not considered due to curriculum demands.

#### **2.1.4. The Homophobia Scale**

The Homophobia Scale was developed and validated by Wright, Adams & Bernat (1999). The scale is based on the tripartite theory of homophobia proposed by O'Donohue & Caselles (1993, as cited by Wright, Adams & Bernat, 1999). They argued for a more comprehensive definition and conceptual exploration of homophobia. Scales in use focused on the affective and cognitive dimensions of homophobia only. A third dimension, viz., a behavioural dimension, was also



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necessary as homophobic acts, whether they entailed avoidance or physical harm, were behaviours.

The Homophobia Scale comprises a 25 item self-report questionnaire that uses a 5-point Likert rating scale (1= strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree). It consists of three factors; a factor assessing mainly negative cognitions regarding homosexuality; a factor that assesses primarily negative affect and avoidance of homosexuals and a factor that assesses mainly negative affect and aggression towards homosexuals. The items for each factor are shown below. Minor changes to the wording of two phrases were effected in order to be more consistent with the South African context. The word 'moffie' was added to Item 9. The original wording of Item 17 reads "I have damaged the property of gay persons, such as keying their cars." The latter part of the sentence was removed as learners might not be familiar with the term. The validity of the scale was not compromised by these negligible changes.

## Factor 1: Negative Affect

1.*	Gay people make me nervous
2.*	Gay people deserve what they get.
4.*	If I discovered a friend was gay I would end the friendship.
5.*	I think homosexual people should not work with children.
6.*	I make derogatory remarks about gay people.
7.	I enjoy the company of gay people.
9.*	I make derogatory remarks like 'faggot' or 'moffie' or 'queer' to people I suspect are gay.
10.*	It does not matter to me whether my friends are gay or straight.
11.	It would not upset me if I learned that a close friend was homosexual.
23.	It does not bother me when I see two homosexual people together in public.





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## Factor 2: Behavioural Aggression

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12.*	Homosexuality is immoral.
13.*	I tease and make jokes about gay people.
14.*	I feel that you cannot trust a person who is gay.
15.*	I fear homosexual persons will make sexual advances towards me.
17.*	I have damaged property of persons that I think are gay.
19.*	I would hit a homosexual for coming on to me.
21.*	I avoid gay individuals.
24.	When I see a gay person I think, "What a waste."
25.*	When I meet someone I try to find out if he/she is gay.
26.*	I have rocky relationships with people that I think are gay.

## Factor 3: Cognitive Negativism

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3.	Homosexuality is acceptable to me.
8.	Marriage between homosexual persons is acceptable.
16.	Organisations which promote gay rights are necessary.
18.	I would feel comfortable having a gay roommate if I ever needed to share accommodation.
20.	Homosexual behaviour should not be against the law.

\* *Reversed scored (items = 20)*

Since participants were accessed via schools, it was considered prudent to obtain information about the school context. In other words, how supportive and accommodating are school contexts of gay and lesbian learners? Are there opportunities for learners who identify as heterosexual to also engage with learners who identify as homosexual? How homophobic do learners perceive the school environment to be? For this reason, a fourth factor, 'the school context' was included. In order to encourage more accurate and truthful responses, items were mixed with



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the original scale. Thus the numbering of items in the original scale changed for some items, although items were scored according to the original factors.

### Factor 4: School Context

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22.	Information about homosexuality should be provided at school.
27	The school environment is gay friendly.
28	I have seen gay learners at the school I attend.
29.	Gays should not be allowed at school.
30	I am not bothered whether a person is gay or not.
31	There should be support services such as counseling and discussion groups for gay learners at school.
32	I have a good understanding of gay issues.
33	There is a high incidence of discrimination towards persons who are gay at school.
34	There should be programmes to educate the community about gay issues.
35	Gay issues are not important.

### 2.1.5. Ethical Issues

Researching sensitive issues such as sexuality and sexual orientation poses many methodological and ethical issues that require negotiation throughout the process. Every effort was made to adhere to current ethical codes that guide social science research. Confidentiality and anonymity were critical issues. Questionnaires were anonymous and participation was voluntary. Parent letters provided information about the study and the methodology but signed consent forms were not requested as those could be used to trace participants. Parents were simply asked to inform their children if they could participate or not; hence parental consent was assumed upon participation. The actual questionnaire was not given to parents as this might have influenced how learners responded to items. The possibility of



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parental influence was also one of the reasons why the questionnaire was administered in groups at school and not given to learners to complete at home. The names of the schools that participated are not included in this report.

Participants were not required to identify their sexual orientation although such information may have yielded rich and insightful data. It is possible that learners might have felt threatened or vulnerable if they were required to identify their sexual orientation in a classroom setting.

### **2.1.6. The process of data collection**

The process of data collection was relatively flexible and uncomplicated. In order to minimise disruptions at schools, the process of data collection was co-ordinated by an educator at each school. Most of the educators were Life Orientation educators although other subject educators also assisted in the administration process at some schools. Information about the study, its aims and methodology was made available to each school representative and the process of data collection explained. Questionnaires and parent consent forms, where applicable, were delivered to schools in closed boxes on agreed upon dates. Completed questionnaires were collected in the same closed boxes.



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## 2.2. Results

### 2.2.1. Participants

Grade 10 male and female learners from all race groups were targeted. A total of 1301 learners participated in this study with a fairly even distribution between males (50.96%) and females (49.04%). Distribution per race and gender are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number of participants per race and gender

Race	Males	Females	Total
Black	<b>257</b> (38.76%)	<b>297</b> (46.55%)	<b>554</b> (42.58%)
White	<b>40</b> (6.03%)	<b>6</b> (0.94%)	<b>46</b> (3.54%)
Indian	<b>291</b> (43.89 %)	<b>263</b> (41.22%)	<b>554</b> (42.58%)
Coloured	<b>66</b> (9.96%)	<b>67</b> (10.50%)	<b>133</b> (10.22%)
Other (unspecified)	<b>09</b> (1.36%)	<b>5</b> (0.78%)	<b>14</b> (1.08%)
Total	<b>663</b> (50.96%)	<b>638</b> (49.04%)	<b>1301</b> (100%)

According to the *Report on the Annual School Survey* (Department of Basic Education, 2010), the number of learners in ordinary schools in Kwazulu-Natal in 2008 comprised of 92.3% Blacks, 1.9% Whites, 4.8% Indians, and almost 1.0 % Coloureds. The same report also states that the majority (70.4%) of Indian learners



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in ordinary schools attend schools in KwaZulu-Natal which might explain the high participation rate of Indian learners in the current study. Current learner migration trends might also partially explain the over-representation of Indian learners and the under-representation of white learners. There is a general trend for learners from higher income groups to attend independent ordinary schools. The under-representation of white female learners in particular is also likely due to the non-participation of one of the schools which was selected in the original sample because of its high white female learner composition. Finally, it must be noted that the number of participants per race does not necessarily indicate the racial composition of learners per school as this was a voluntary study. Under-representation of white learners may simply indicate that fewer white learners decided to participate in this study.

### **2.2.2. Socio-economic status**

Household situation, household income and parental / guardian occupation was used to obtain an estimate of socio-economic indicators across races. Although KwaZulu-Natal is rated as the third wealthiest province in South Africa, disparities



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exist in income distribution, poverty rates and unemployment levels across race groups. There is significantly lower poverty rates reported among Whites (almost zero) and Indians (6.0%) races in comparison to Blacks (64.4.%) and Coloureds (17.2%) (PROVIDE, 2005). Socio-economic indicators were included to observe if any relationships exist between socio-economic status and homophobia. For example, one would expect youth from higher income households to enjoy greater access to information via the media (internet, newspapers, television, etc.) which might influence perceptions about gay and lesbian individuals.

Generally, participants in this study reported average to above average income levels, although the standard deviation was the highest among Black learners. Improved employment opportunities for Blacks may account for the higher socio-economic standards reported. The exclusion of data from learners in semi-rural areas may have also contributed to this fairly even distribution of socio-economic rates among race groups. Socio-economic variables were not statistically analysed but used to obtain an idea of the standard of living and access to information of participants.



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Table 2: Socio-economic indicators across race

Race	Standard of living and Income		Parent Occupation	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Black	3.1	1.68	3.2	1.02
White	3.6	0.537	3.1	0.86
Indian	3.5	0.54	3.3	1.45
Coloured	3.2	0.77	2.9	0.99
Other (unspecified)	3.1	1.21	2.8	0.98

### 2.2.3. Homophobia Factors per race, gender and age

Item responses were scored per factor (negative affect, behavioural aggression, cognitive negativism and school context) as indicated in section 2.1.4. with the maximum score for each factor being 50, except for 'negative cognition' which had a maximum score of 25. Item responses were then summed per factor and mean scores obtained. Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of homophobia. Data was treated as interval data and Kruskal-Wallis (nonparametric ANOVA) tests were used to compare the mean differences of each factor for race and gender. Mann-Whitney U tests were applied for age.

#### 2.2.3.1. Race

##### 2.2.3.1.1. Factor 1: Negative Affect

No significant differences exist between races ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Mean ranks suggest highest levels of negative affect among Blacks and Indians, followed closely by



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Coloureds. Whites scored the lowest from all race groups. Medians for scores indicate fairly high scores (Blacks = 2.800, White = 2.600, Indian = 2.800, Coloured = 2.800 and Other = 2.500). Post tests were not calculated because the P value was greater than 0.05.

Table 3: Race: Factor 1: Negative Affect

Race	n	Sum of ranks	Mean of ranks
Black	554	358599	647.29
White	46	26899	584.76
Indian	554	346465	646.39
Coloured	133	83721	629.48
Other	14	8002.5	571.61
Kruskal-Wallis statistic- KW	1.969 (corrected for ties)		
P	0.7414		

## 2.2.3.1.2. Factor 2: Behavioural Aggression

Table 4: Race: Factor 2: Behavioural Aggression

Race	n	Sum of ranks	Mean of ranks
Black	554	355862	642.35
White	46	30289	658.45
Indian	554	368996	666.06
Coloured	133	83140	625.11
Other	14	8665.5	618.96
Kruskal-Wallis statistic- KW	1.968 (corrected for ties)		
p	0.7416		

No significant differences were observed between races. Indians and Whites had the highest mean ranks suggesting that they are more likely to engage in or have engaged in aggressive behaviours towards the gay and lesbian learners.





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However, mean scores for this factor were much lower than for Factor 1: Negative Affect (Black  $X = 1.76$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ; White  $X = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ; Indian  $X = 1.78$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ; Coloured  $X = 1.74$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ; Other  $X = 1.74$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ), suggesting that learners with strong negative feelings and thoughts towards gays and lesbians might not necessarily act upon those feelings and thoughts.

### 2.2.3.1.3. Factor 3: Cognitive Negativism

Table 5: Race: Factor 3: Cognitive Negativism

Race	n	Sum of ranks	Mean of ranks
Black	554	307296	554.69
White	46	31213	678.54
Indian	554	424330	765.94
Coloured	133	75793	569.87
Other	14	8320.0	594.29
Kruskal-Wallis statistic- KW	95.573 (corrected for ties)		
p	< 0.0001		

The P value is < 0.0001, considered extremely significant. Variation among column medians is significantly greater than expected by chance. Dunn's Multiple comparisons test revealed significant differences between Indian and Black (-211.25,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Indian and Coloured learners (196.07,  $p < 0.001$ ).



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### 2.2.3.1.4. Factor 4: School Context

Table 6: Race: Factor 4: School Context

Race	n	Sum of ranks	Mean of ranks
Black	554	349802	631.41
White	46	28448	618.42
Indian	554	342801	639.55
Coloured	133	93707	704.56
Other	14	8930.0	637.86
Kruskal-Wallis statistic- KW	4.506 (corrected for ties)		
p	0.3419,		

No significant differences observed between races although average median (2.800 - 3.00) suggests that learners perceive the school environment to be quite homophobic.

### 2.2.3.2. Gender

#### 2.2.3.2.1. Factor 1: Negative Affect

The Mann Whitney non-parametric test was used to compare the medians of males and females. The two-tailed P value is  $< 0.0001$ , considered extremely significant. This suggests that male learners have more negative feelings towards gays and lesbians than their female counterparts. The P value is an estimate based on a normal approximation. The 'exact' method would not be exact, due to tied ranks.



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Table 7: Gender: Factor 1: Negative Affect

Mann-Whitney U-statistic = 137604

U' = 285391

### Summary of Data

Parameter	Males	Females
Mean	3.010	2.668
Sum of ranks	505507	341445
No of points	663	638
Std deviation	0.6276	0.4397
Median:	2.800	2.600
Lower 95% CI:	2.963	2.634
Upper 95% CI:	3.058	2.702

## 2.2.3.2.2. Factor 2: Behavioural Aggression

Table 8: Gender: Factor 2: Behavioural Aggression

Mann-Whitney U-statistic = 194689

U' = 228305

### Summary of Data

Parameter	Males	Females
Mean	1.843	1.780
Sum of ranks	448421	398530
No of points	663	638
Std deviation	0.4325	0.3973
Median:	1.800	1.600
Lower 95% CI:	1.810	1.749

Mann-Whitney calculations reveal significant differences between the medians of Males and Females. The two-tailed P value is 0.0124, considered significant suggests that female learners are less likely to engage in aggressive behaviours towards gays and lesbians than their male counterparts.



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## 2.2.3.2.3. Factor 3: Cognitive Negativism

Significant differences area also observed between males and females with regard to cognitive negativism. The two-tailed P value is 0.0012, suggests that male learners have more negative thoughts about gays and lesbians than female learners.

Table 9: Gender: Factor 3: Cognitive Negativism

Mann-Whitney U-statistic = 191233

U' = 234951

Summary of Data

Parameter	Males	Females
Mean	3.136	3.015
Sum of ranks	458397	395074.
No of points	668	638
Std deviation	0.5441	0.6451
Median:	3.200	3.200
Lower 95% CI:	<b>3.095</b>	<b>2.965</b>
Upper 95% CI:	<b>3.178</b>	<b>3.065</b>

## 2.2.3.2.4. Factor 4: School Context

Mann-Whitney calculations (two-tailed P value = 0.3033) yielded no significant differences in the medians of males (2.882) and females (2.736). This suggests that there are no gender differences in how learners perceive the school environment. Nonetheless scores were quite high suggesting that learners generally perceive the school environment as not well supporting of gay and lesbian learners.



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## 2.2.3.3. Age

Four age categories were formed in order to observe any correlations between age and levels of homophobia. Numbers per age group are indicated below.

Table 10: Number of participants per age range

Age Group	Number of learners
≤ 15,0 - 15,11	427
16,0 - 16, 11	794
≥17, 0 - 17,11	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>1301</b>

### 2.2.3.3.1. Factor 1: Negative Affect

The P value is < 0.0001, considered extremely significant. Younger learners have significantly more negative affect towards gays and lesbians than older learners.

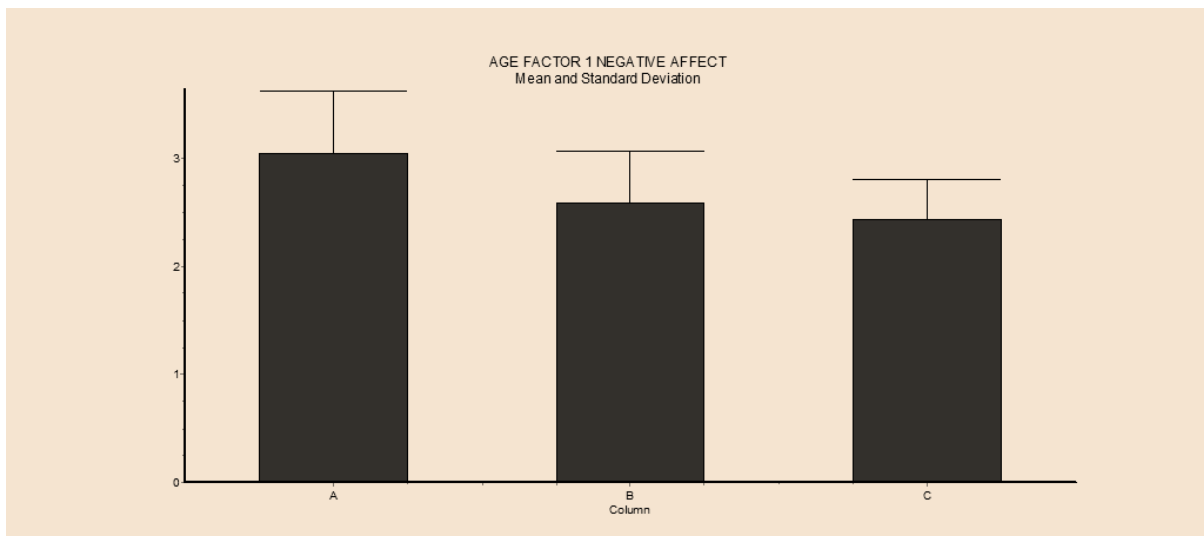
Table 11: Age: Factor 1: Negative Affect

Age Group	n	Sum of ranks	Mean of ranks
≤15,0 - 15,11 (A)	427	369407	865.12
16,0 - 16,11 (B)	794	440981	555.39
≥17,0 - 17,11 (C)	80	36564	457.05
Kruskal-Wallis statistic- KW	219.85 (corrected for ties)		
P	< 0.0001		

#### Dunn's Multiple Comparisons Test

Comparison	Mean Rank Difference	P value
A vs. B	309.73	*** P<0.001
A vs. C	408.07	*** P<0.001
B vs. C	98.341	ns P>0.05

Figure 1: Age: Factor 1: Negative Affect - Mean and Standard Deviation



### 2.2.3.3.2. Factor 2: Behavioural Aggression

Kruskal-Wallis statistics revealed no significant differences ( $KW = 3.135$ ,  $p = 0.2086$ ) among the medians of the different age groups. The 16,0-16,11 age group had the highest mean rank (641.40) followed by the 17,0 - 17, 11 and older age group (590.33). Perhaps this suggests that as adolescents get older and become more emotionally mature, they are also less likely to engage in aggressive behaviours towards gay and lesbian learners?

### 2.2.3.3.3. Factor 3: Cognitive Negativism

Significant differences ( $P$  value is  $< 0.0001$ ) were observed between age groups, with younger learners having higher levels of cognitive negativism than the other age groups.



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Table 12: Age: Factor 3: Cognitive Negativism

Age Group	n	Sum of ranks	Mean of ranks
≤15,0 - 15,11 (A)	427	322629	755.57
16,0 - 16,11 (B)	794	481489	606.41
≥17,0 - 17,11 (C)	80	42834	535.42
Kruskal-Wallis statistic- KW		(corrected for ties)	
P		52.587 < 0.0001	

### Dunn's Multiple Comparisons Test

Comparison	Mean Rank Difference	P value
A vs. B	149.16	*** P<0.001
A vs. C	220.15	*** P<0.001
B vs. C	70.990	ns P>0.05

### 2.2.3.3.4. Factor 4: School Context

No significant differences ( $p = 0.0886$ ;  $KW = 4.846$ ) were noted between the means of learners from the different age groups. Post tests were not calculated because the P value was greater than 0.05. Learners in the 17,0-17,11 and older age group had the highest mean rank (732.22) followed by the youngest age group (658.17) and finally the 16,0-16,11 years age group (638.96).



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### 2.3. Limitations

#### 2.3.1. Sampling

Female white learners and learners from semi-rural areas were under-represented in this sample. The participation of both groups would have strengthened the findings of this study. Do significant differences exist between learners from lower socio-economic groups and more rural areas in comparison to their more affluent, urban counterparts? What bearing might have the inclusion of more white female learners had on the findings with regard to gender for all factors?

#### 2.3.2. Bias in responding

As with all Likert scale measures, there are forms of bias that may come into play which may decrease the validity of the results. The results may contain instances of central tendency bias wherein learners may have avoided choosing extreme response categories (such as 1 or 5), opting for the middle response category (3). Acquiescence bias may have also played a part if learners simply agreed with statements as presented. The reverse scoring of 20 items in the Homophobia Scale attempted to decrease such bias. Finally, given that the questionnaire was administered at school by a teacher, it is possible that learners responded in a manner that portrayed them in a favourable light (social desirability bias).





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### 2.3.3. Language

Completion of the questionnaire requires proficiency in English. Many of the participants were second language learners. Thus it is likely that learners may not have understood all items correctly or adequately. Nonetheless, all schools were English medium schools and Grade 10 level indicates a fair understanding of the English language.

## 3. Discussion

The Discussion section integrates observations and salient issues noted throughout the research process with the actual results.

### 3.1. Issues of power: Levels of participation and access to information

It is encouraging to note that the majority of schools from the original sample were willing to participate in a study of this nature, despite its usual constricted associations. However, the non-participation of some schools reflects the issues of control that were discussed earlier on. Non-participation at this stage begs the question: will these schools then participate in any future relevant programmes within the school environment? By choosing to not participate as a school, whether it is in a study such as this one or an educational programme, members of management are



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also choosing to deny learners access to information. Studies, such as this one, are often used as a platform to develop and implement needs-based interventions. Non-participation denies learners an opportunity to contribute to the creation of more valid and authentic information. In addition, the exercise of participating in this study creates the space within the school environment to initiate dialogue about issues of sexuality, diversity and prejudice for example.

### 3.2. Race

No significant differences were observed between race groups for negative affect, behavioural aggression and school context. Means for all groups were considerably high for negative affect and school context, indicating that learners do feel negatively towards persons perceived to be gay or lesbian. The school context is also shown to be an environment that is not supportive of gay and lesbian learners, although these mean scores were not as high as for negative affect. However, it is noted that responses are also subjective and differences exist in the degrees of 'support' perceived by learners. The means scores for Factor 2: Behavioural Aggression was much lower than the scores for the other factors. It is possible that learners responded in a manner that portrayed them in a positive light (social desirability bias) since the questionnaire was administered at school.



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Indian learners scored significantly higher in the Cognitive Negativism factor. It is likely that these high scores are a reflection of cultural influences and conservative ideologies. Religion plays an integral role within the Indian community; however conservative religious beliefs may have the effect of increasing levels of cognitive negativism towards the gay and lesbian community.

### 3.3. Gender

Significant differences were noted between males and females for the all factors, except the School Context. Male learners are more likely to be aggressive towards gays and lesbians than females. Females are also more tolerant of gays and lesbians than males. On a less formal note, some female respondents took the liberty of writing in explanatory notes for some items. In particular, respondents clarified that while they were 'anti-gay', they didn't particularly mind same-sex women/female relationships. This indicates a narrow understanding of the word 'gay' to refer only to homosexual men. Perhaps more importantly, it alludes to females being more tolerant of same-sex female relationships. This may be a consequence of socialisation which allows and encourages expressiveness and a 'show of love' among girls. Girls often enjoy close friendships within tight circles and may therefore associate such positive feelings and attributes with same-sex female relationships.



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### 3.4. Age

Significant differences were noted for Negative Affect and Cognitive Negativism. In both instances, the youngest group (15,0-15,11 and younger) showed significantly higher levels of negative feelings and thoughts towards gays and lesbians. It is possible that issues of emotional maturity as well as access to information play a part. As a result, learners in this age group may be unfamiliar with gays and lesbians and hence feel prejudiced towards them. Younger people also tend to be more impressionable and often adopt the views of other more influential persons in their lives.

## 4. Recommendations and Conclusion

It is clear that any intervention within schools will need to consider contextual and individual factors. Although there is evidence on a macro level of a move towards the creation of a more accommodating and inclusive educational context, schools in Pietermaritzburg appear to lag behind.

### 4.1. An integrated, curriculum-based approach

For change to be effective, it has to be meaningful for all parties involved. It is therefore important to engage with communities, the provincial and local departments of education, principals, educators and the learners themselves.



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Getting buy-in from all sectors is likely to have more positive and long-term outcomes for programmes within schools. Given the pervasiveness of homophobia within society, any such intervention would work best if led by organisations in authority. The Department of Education should play an integral role in formulating an appropriate curriculum that recognises sexual diversity and which seeks to address challenges associated with it. Input from all stakeholders in the formulation of such a curriculum will have more relevance for learners and communities alike.

### **4.2. Identifying a need within schools**

An essential starting point of any such intervention necessitates the identification of a need by members of management and members of the community. The effectiveness of any school-based intervention will be limited if schools do not acknowledge homophobia as a salient issue. Members of management are more likely to address issues and attempt to create a supportive environment if they acknowledge learner diversity and the corresponding links to incidents of bullying and harassment for example. It will be important for persons in positions of power (such as Department of Education officials, principals, school governing body members, etc) to assess their own levels of prejudice and feelings as these are likely to influence the decisions made.



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### 4.3. Educator development, support and resources

Educators need support in order to do the same for learners. Support should take multiple forms: firstly, support should be provided by management to enable educators to support learners without the threat of discrimination due to their involvement in LGBT issues within the school. Secondly, educators need to be provided with contexts in which they can safely explore their own feelings and thoughts about LGBT issues and homophobia before having to deal with learners. Training should therefore include information on LGBT issues and also provide contexts for dialogue and sharing with other educators.

### 4.4. Challenging gender, group and cultural stereotypes

Brown & Groscup (2009) maintain that it is essential to challenge gender, group and cultural stereotypes. They argue that even non-homophobic persons may accept positive *and* negative stereotypes about gays and lesbians. Learners need to be given formal opportunities to talk about and challenge negative stereotypes, especially as they relate to diversity, especially in cases where differences exist across gender, race and age. As schools become more supportive of gay and lesbian learners, it is possible that more learners may disclose their sexuality. Many educational programmes abroad are based on the contact hypothesis which posits that direct contact with a minority group decreases stereotypes and negative feelings held against that group (Lance, 2002, cited in Rogers, McRee & Arntz, 2009).



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<sup>i</sup> "Growing up Gay", *Star Tribune*, Sunday December 6, 1992, cited in O'Connor, 1993/4.

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## GAY & LESBIAN NETWORK

equality | tolerance | respect | acceptance

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