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## **A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR A RELATIONSHIP-GUIDANCE PROGRAMME FOR PARTNERS IN A GAY MALE RELATIONSHIP**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The lack of indigenous research-based literature on relationship-guidance programmes for partners in a gay male relationship necessitates a needs assessment in this regard. A research project adopting a qualitative paradigm was undertaken to conduct an empirical study with samples of gay male couples in an attempt to do a needs assessment for such a programme by focussing, *inter alia*, on whether such a programme could benefit their relationship, and what it should include, who should present it, and in what format it should be presented. The study's principal results indicated that such a programme is needed and that it would aid gay partners with regard to a variety of issues raised by them. The findings provide a tentative guideline for a relationship-guidance programme greatly needed by gay men and service professionals alike.

### **1. INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION FOR THIS RESEARCH PROJECT**

Foucault (Goldstein 1994:23) states that "... the goal of homosexuality today is to advance into a homosexual "askesis" (i.e. self-mastery) that would make us work on ourselves and invent. I do not say discover a manner of being that is still improbable". According to Foucault, what is most significant about contemporary gay practices is that the homosexual mode or style of life, with its new forms of relationship, is a connection between "askesis" and a manner of being, or "gay consciousness", experienced through what Hay (Roscoe 1996:209) calls a "gay window". It is therefore an attempt to try and define and develop a new way of life, new forms of relationships, love and creation (Goldstein 1994:22).

This advancement towards a homosexual "askesis" is needed because gay men for far too long now have been the objects rather than the subjects of expert discourses on sexuality (Goldstein 1994:23). In these discourses the gay male subject is placed in a discursive field where he no longer has any authority over his subjective experiences and can no longer speak knowledgeably about his own life. It is time to hold out to gays, and to the rest of humanity, a radical and powerful possibility of a "gay science" considering the gay person not as an "object", but instead as a self-knowing "subject" speaking authoritative about his or her own unique homosexual experience. According to Halperin (Goldstein 1994:23) this gay science would offer the world the prospect of devising new and empowering strategies for conjoining forms of self-knowing with modes of self-constitution, shifting homosexuality from the status of "object" to "subject". Halperin (Goldstein 1994:23) aptly summarises the benefit of such a shift as follows: "It should be an eccentric positionality to be exploited and explored, not only by lesbians and gay men, but by anyone who might benefit in any way from assuming a 'queer' subject position, especially by those who feel marginalized by the dominant culture because of their sexual practices or identities".

According to McKendrick (Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992:84), the full spectrum of homosexual diversity in South Africa is still not clearly evident and figures estimating the incidence of homosexuality as being 4-10% of the population should be accepted with discretion. In view of this opinion, partners in a gay male relationship should be taken into consideration, irrespective of the number of people who are gay in a given society. Sourard (Moses & Hawkins 1986:124) suggests that there are an infinite number of patterns for relationships (for example heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual dyads, triads, lovers and friends) and owing to the pluralistic nature of our society, these should be accommodated. Sourard (Moses & Hawkins 1986:124) also raises the issue of social support, saying that the failure of society to recognise and legitimise the individuals' rights to experimentation within such relationships makes "life in our society unlivable for an increasing proportion of the population". This lack of social support for experimentation means that the visible guidelines by which gay people attempt to set up relationships are primarily based on those of the traditional heterosexual marriage model (Isaacs & McKendrick 1992:25). This model has, however, never really been appropriate or functional for gay male relationships owing to traditionally rigid gender roles of men and women in a marriage. Although many gay couples still try to adapt this model in one form or another, most have opted in favour of relationships in which roles are not so rigidly defined or formulated on the basis of gender-role stereotypes (Moses & Hawkins 1986:123).

Current research has gone well beyond the above-mentioned observation and promises to inform several audiences, especially those involved in the helping professions (De Cecco 1998; Dworkin & Gutiérrez 1992; Isaacs & McKendrick 1992; Moses & Hawkins 1986). It has been noted that the research and reflections on gay relationships are actually better at identifying than at solving relationship problems (De Cecco 1998; Dworkin & Gutiérrez 1992). The latter research focus, however, was not in vain, because knowing what the problems are, and even anticipating them, may be the crucial ingredient in learning how to make relationships work and last. Studies of gay male couples have further served to discredit stereotypes/myths about homosexuals that have been prevalent in both professional and folk thinking for a very long time (Long 1996:382-386). These studies also provided the basis for a factual description of homosexual relationships. Through this, many members of the gay community have been granted an opportunity to discuss their own relationship experiences in the context of the spectrum of possible relationships. Studies of gay couples (specifically) seem to provide an opportunity to test the generality of many social science theories of "human behaviour", for example, psychological theories, communication theories, and family therapy models, which were derived almost exclusively from heterosexual models and tested on heterosexual samples.

In this way research studies like the one under discussion will contribute not only to our knowledge about homosexuality, but also to the general knowledge about close human relationships (Peplay in De Cecco 1988:38). Hay (Roscoe 1996:231) underwrites research endeavours of this nature, and is of the opinion that in this way "heterosexual couples could learn a thing or two from homosexual couples".

As far as the relevance of this research to social work is concerned, knowledge gained from this study will hopefully inform the individual social workers, in their everyday practice, about the existence of gay male couples and their need for social work services (such as relationship-guidance programmes) as well as the format of such services. This research topic gains extra support in that it falls within the aim of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) and the general aim of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). In this White Paper the National Developmental Social Welfare strategy is based on the principle of non-discrimination, which states: "Social Welfare services and programmes will promote non-discrimination, tolerance,

mutual respect, diversity and the inclusion of all groups in society. Women, children, the physically and mentally disabled, offenders, people with HIV/AIDS, the elderly, and people with homosexual or bisexual preferences, will not be excluded”.

## 2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem, when clearly defined and demarcated, becomes the foundation of the entire research process and might result from situations causing concern, or those characterised by doubt and ignorance. (Cf. Cohen 1978:227; Grinnell and Williams 1990:62; Yegidis and Weinbach 1996:42,49; Rothery in Grinnell 1993:17.) The lack of a relationship-guidance programme for partners in a gay relationship was identified as a research problem, especially in light of the fact that no suitable role models are provided by society in this regard, apart from the traditional heterosexual model. This has been found to be an inadequate model on which to base a successful long-term gay relationship because of the rigid gender roles and socially accepted ways of relating between men and women, which gay men can never live up to, even if they assume “butch-femme” roles (Moses and Hawkins 1986:23; Driggs and Finn 1990; Dworkin and Gutiérrez 1992:81). Furthermore, the relationship needs of this minority do have to be taken into account by social workers and the organisations for which they work, especially those dealing with problems in human relationships, if they want to offer an all-inclusive service.

## 3. RESEARCH QUESTION

According to De Vos and Fouché (De Vos *et al.* 1998:104-105), research questions are appropriate to exploratory studies (or to studies which are qualitative by nature), or incidents about which there is a lack of knowledge which makes it impossible for the researchers initially to formulate a hypothesis. The research question that delineated the focus of this study is as follows:

*What format should a relationship-guidance programme take in order to address the needs of partners in a gay male relationship?*

## 4. RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The research methodology described refers to the way the researchers went about solving the research problem or, in this case, how the researchers set about answering the research question (Herbert 1992:01). The nature of the data and the problem (already mentioned) dictated the research method employed by the present researchers (Cozby 1993:36). The data obtained from the research study were verbal, so a qualitative method was used. The researchers decided to employ the framework presented by De Vos (De Vos *et al.* 1998:43-45), which delineates the qualitative research process in detail with respect to the specific phases involved in it. This particular framework was chosen because of its flexibility, as it incorporates the perspectives of various authors, viz. Mouton and Marais (1990), Rubin and Babbie (1993), Taylor in Grinnell (1993) and Creswell (1994). A brief overview of the phases in the qualitative research will be given, with specific reference to the manner in which they were employed in this research study.

### 4.1 Phase one: Choosing the research problem

The motivation for the chosen research problem has already been discussed in the previous section.

## 4.2 Phases two and three: Deciding to use a qualitative research approach and selecting the qualitative research design

Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell (1996:14) define qualitative research as: "The study of people in their natural environment as they go about their lives. It tries to understand how people live, how they talk and behave, and what captivates and distresses them ... More importantly, it strives to understand the meaning that people's words and behaviours have for them".

The qualitative paradigm seemed to have been the more appropriate choice in respect of the research conducted, because there appeared to be a lack of basic information and research (within the ambit of social work) pertaining to this subject area, (i.e. the need for, and format of, a relationship-guidance programme for men in a gay relationship), especially within the South African context and from the perspective of gay men as subjects. The researchers found that qualitative research suited their quest to obtain subjective, personal data pertaining to the research problem, as the research paradigm in question was most certainly exploratory and descriptive in nature. It was also inductive, contextual, interpretative and idiographic in interpretation. Owing to this holistic and discovery-orientated approach (from the "what" perspective), it was primarily geared towards an interest in meaning, (i.e. it had a hermeneutic stance), or in other words, towards the way people make sense of their lived experiences, which provides a postmodern or social constructionist perspective to this study (Schurink in De Vos *et al.* 1998:242).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:202-203) propose that in qualitative research one does not use the term "research design" when referring to the detailed plan or the decisions one makes in planning the study (i.e. type of design, the sampling procedure, data collection, analysis and interpretation), but that one should rather refer to "strategies of inquiry" or "tools" that can be used in qualitative research. The researchers, however, chose phenomenology as the particular qualitative strategy of inquiry for the research conducted. De Vos and Fouché (De Vos *et al.* 1998:80) state that the aim of the phenomenological approach is to understand and interpret the meaning that subjects give to their everyday lives, so the researcher must be able to enter the subject's life world and place himself in the "shoes" of the subject by means of naturalistic methods of study. This was done by analysing the interviews that the researchers conducted with the chosen subjects. The rationale for the use of this design was to investigate, as thoroughly as possible, the phenomenon of the "gay relationship" and the need for a relationship-guidance programme by analysing the lived experiences of gay men in a relationship.

## 4.3 Phase four: Preparing for data collection

This phase embraced several decisions that were executed before the phase of data collection (phase five). It included the following:

- Identifying boundaries or parameters for data collection, including the setting (the magisterial district of Port Elizabeth; the interviews took place at the homes of the research participants, or any other appropriate location of their choice); the actors (gay men in a dyadic relationship who could be jointly interviewed); the events (what the actors would be interviewed about) and the process (the evolving nature of events undertaken by the actors within the setting). The last two parameters are discussed in detail in phase five.
- Defining the population or universum, which included all gay men who were currently involved in a gay male partnership within the magisterial district of Port Elizabeth.

The framing and development of a sample which was reflective of the population or the total set, or universum. There is, however, no such thing as a representative sample of gay couples, as this is an almost hidden or invisible population. For this

reason, together with the fact that this study is qualitative in nature, findings cannot be generalised to a broader population. In this regard a purposive (or judgmental), haphazard, non-probability, convenience (accidental or availability) sampling technique was employed (Rubin & Babbie 1993:367). The use of snowball sampling was complemented by theoretical saturation. Direct contact was made with couples and no gatekeeper was utilised.

- Delineating or planning what roles the researchers would assume was also undertaken. The role of the researchers in this study can be described as that of observer-as-participant or as “non-concealed, minimal participant” who identifies himself as a researcher and interacts casually with the subjects during the interviewing process. (Cf. De Vos in De Vos *et al.* 1998:47; Gold in Rubin & Babbie 1993:379; and Yegidis & Weinbach 1996:151-152.)
- Making contact with the subjects recruited by means of snowball sampling in order to screen them for inclusion into the research study, as well as preparing them for the semi-structured interviews, was the next step. The first couple approached were acquaintances of one of the researchers. Included in this step was the task of obtaining the co-operation of the interviewees, which in this case began with a phone call and then a letter to request an interview. In this sample letter the researchers explained the purpose of the study; under what auspices it would be conducted; why the couple in question was asked to participate; what would be asked of them; where the interviews would take place; how long they would take (e.g. length and number of interviews); the use and purpose of any mechanical recording devices; what else might be expected of them (e.g. reviewing transcripts or notes, discussing the interpretation); ethical issues of confidentiality management of the information (e.g. where tapes, notes and/or transcripts would be stored and what would happen to them when the study was concluded), and what would become of the findings. Handling volatile or illegal information was also discussed and research participants were informed of any personal risks connected to their participation. A voluntary consent form was also issued to each couple before the interviews took place.

The researchers designed a tentative protocol to note observations in the field, which included a single page with a dividing line down the middle, separating descriptive and reflective notes, which would serve as a guideline for the organisation of raw data obtained during interviews. The researchers also made use of a Dictaphone to record subjects' verbal and non-verbal comments, which took place on mutual agreement with the couple being interviewed, for ethical reasons.

#### 4.4 Phase five: Data collection & data analysis

The in-depth semi-structured (or focused) interview was selected as the method of data collection in this study. Interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately after they were completed (De Vos *et al.* 1998:48). Interviewees were given an opportunity to “warm up” by being asked some general questions that gave them some practice in talking to the researchers and in turn allowed them to organise their thoughts. The interviews were scheduled for a maximum of 1 hour per interview, but were terminated when information became redundant or when the interviewees started to repeat themselves (Lincoln & Guba 1985:271).

Data collection and data analysis took place simultaneously. According to Yin (Krueger 1994:140) data analysis consists of “examining, categorizing, tabulating or otherwise recombining the evidence, to address the initial propositions of a study”. This is a creative, eclectic process and there is no set recipe (cf. Marshall and Rossman 1989: 23; Schoeman and Botha 1991:56; Tesch

in Creswell 1994:153). Creswell (1994:153) contends that the researchers should be engaged in several activities during qualitative data analysis. These include collecting the data; sorting the data into categories; formatting the data into a coherent story or picture; and writing the qualitative text. Rose (1982:118) states that the process of moving from data to conceptualisation and theorisation is the most distinguishable aspect of qualitative research. This study employed the eight steps provided by Tesch (Creswell 1994:155) to analyse the data systematically by segmenting them into words or categories that subsequently formed the basis of the emerging story or picture.

#### 4.5 Phase six: Data verification

The process of data verification was carried out according to Guba's model of trustworthiness (Krefting 1991:215-222), which identifies four criteria and strategies for ensuring and establishing trustworthiness and are therefore used to assess the qualitative research process undertaken in the study.

The first criterion addressed to establish trustworthiness is that of truth value to determine to what extent the findings are a true reflection of the gay couples' life-worlds, as described and experienced by them. The strategy for establishing truth value is credibility. The particular actions taken to achieve credibility included triangulation, peer examination, interviewing techniques and researchers' authority. The second criterion is applicability or the degree to which findings can be applied to other contexts or settings and groups (i.e. generalisability). Transferability was the strategy employed to attain applicability. Two perspectives of applicability for qualitative research were delineated (Krefting 1991:216). The first perspective holds that applicability is not seen as being relevant to qualitative research, as it proposes to describe experiences or phenomena which cannot be generalised to other experiences or phenomena (Krefting 1991:216). The second perspective proposed by Guba in Krefting (1991:216), however, claims that "fittingness" is the criterion against which applicability of qualitative research can be assessed. As was the case in the study in question, findings fit into contexts outside the study situation, which were determined by the degree of similarity and goodness-of-fit between the two contexts. Based on the literature reviews, it appeared that many of the findings of this study were supported by studies conducted in other contexts or sites. In this study, transferability was achieved by documenting dense descriptions of the research methodology and by working contextually, so that procedures could be duplicated accurately.

The third criterion of Guba's model (in Krefting 1991:215-222) is termed consistency, which is concerned with the extent to which the replication of the study in a similar context, or with similar subjects, will lead to the same results. Dependability was the strategy used to ensure consistency. The actions that were taken to ensure dependability in this study included peer examination of the research methodology and implementation, triangulation, a dense description of the research methodology and finally the implementation of a code-recode procedure (Krefting 1991:216-217). Neutrality is the final criterion and refers to the extent to which the study's findings are free from bias. Lincoln and Guba (Krefting 1991:217) propose that neutrality in qualitative research should consider the neutrality of the data rather than that of the researchers, and thus suggest conformability as the strategy to achieve neutrality. In this study, triangulation was employed to achieve conformability (Krefting 1991:221-222).

## 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data were collected from four semi-structured interviews or from four couples, totalling eight individual subjects. The research /grand tour question that delineated the focus of this study read as follows:

“What format should a relationship-guidance programme take in order to address the needs of partners in a gay male relationship?”

Subsequently, the following open-ended questions were asked at each interview:

- What challenges do you as a couple experience in your relationship and how do you manage them?
- In what way, if any, would a relationship-guidance programme benefit your relationship?
- What should be included in such a programme, who should present it, and in what way should it be presented?

The answers to these questions were transcribed verbatim and analysed according to the eight steps provided by Tesch (Creswell 1994:153). Two primary categories, with their related sub-categories, emerged during the data analysis. Table 1 provides an overview of these categories, which are tabulated in no specific order. The primary categories were labelled: factors influencing the relationship and programme outline.

The primary categories were derived from an awareness of the information obtained from the aforementioned interview questions. These questions can be broken down into the following topics:

Question 1: Relationship challenges	- topic one
Managing relationship challenges successfully or productively	- topic two
Question 2: Benefits of a relationship guidance programme	- topic three
No benefits at all	- topic four
Question 3: Programme content	- topic five
Programme facilitation	- topic six
Programme format	- topic seven.

Based on the data collected from these questions, the accompanying seven major topics were grouped into two primary categories. Topics one and two were grouped under the primary category labelled “Factors influencing the relationship”. Topics three and four provided content for the question regarding programme necessity, and topics five, six and seven were direct questions providing content for the primary category labelled “Programme outline”.

The researchers became aware of the fact that there was an overlap in terms of “relating” topics. The section should thus be read with an awareness of synergy, which means that the whole is more than the sum total of its parts (Covey 1994:262-263). For example, topics one and two would provide the essence or core for topic five, and once again, topic two would lend support to topic three. It was easy to see how topics one and two were related; and topics three and four; and five, six and seven. These in turn were then labelled as primary categories or simply as answers to questions. One “unique” topic (or theme) was extracted that could not be assimilated into the already existing topics, i.e. diverse populations.

In view of the fact that this article is focused mainly on a needs assessment for a relationship-guidance programme for partners in a gay male relationship, the ensuing discussion will focus mainly on the primary category “Programme outline” and its related sub-categories.

**TABLE 1**  
**THE PRIMARY CATEGORIES AND SUB-CATEGORIES THAT EMERGED FROM THE DATA**

1.	Factors influencing the relationship	1.1	Absence of role models
		1.2	The need for role division
		1.3	Lack of parental support
		1.4	Communication difficulties
		1.5	Lack of social support systems
		1.6	Life experiences or lack thereof
		1.7	Jealousy
		1.8	Financial disputes
		1.9	Sexual exclusivity
		1.10	Differing values and goals
		1.11	Relationship rules
		1.12	The role sex plays in the relationship
		1.13	Partners' low self-esteem
		1.14	Managing relationship challenges
		1.15	Unique theme
		1.15.1	Diverse populations
2.	Programme outline	2.1	Programme content
		2.2	Programme facilitator
		2.2.1	qualifications of programme facilitator(s)
		2.2.2	sexual orientation of programme facilitator(s)
		2.2.3	relationship status of programme facilitator(s)
		2.3	Programme format
		2.4	Programme necessity

*Programme outline:*

It has already been mentioned that the following section deals with the answers that participants gave to specific questions posed by the researchers during the semi-structured interviews. This section deals with what gay couples believe should be included in a guideline for a relationship-guidance programme for gay partners. According to Tulloch (1993:665), guidelines (which in this case pertain directly to a programme outline) serve to provide advice and information, assist with resolving problems and difficulties, and lastly, give cause to proceed in a certain direction. A programme outline (or guideline) therefore includes the *content* of the programme; who should present the programme or who should be the programme *facilitator*; and how the programme should be presented or what *format* it should take. These will be discussed separately.

### A) PROGRAMME CONTENT

According to the research participants interviewed, the following topics of discussion should be included in the programme:

- "Communication"
- "How to deal with parents about the issue of being gay"
- "How to understand different opinions and points of view"

- “How gay men can work on themselves as unique human beings”
- “The role sex plays in a gay relationship”
- “How to teach partners not to be too possessive”.

The sub-categories given in Table 1, next to the primary category regarding the factors influencing the relationship, can also be taken into consideration when compiling the programme outline and contents of a relationship-guidance programme for couples in a gay male relationship.

## B) PROGRAMME FACILITATOR

With regard to the person facilitating or presenting the programme, the couples gave the following suggestions which can be grouped according to three sub-categories, namely:

- Qualifications of programme facilitators: Programme facilitators should be in possession of degree qualifications in sociology, social work, psychology (clinical or counselling) and psychiatry;
- Sexual orientation of programme facilitators: Gay presenters were given priority although it was also stated that a straight presenter (or a straight couple) who could remain objective and not be homophobic would also suffice;
- Relationships status of programme facilitators: Gay couples with “stable”, “healthy” relationships of approximately 10 to 15 years were given priority as it was stated that such relationships could act as a role model for other gay couples.

## C) PROGRAMME FORMAT

The following suggestions were made regarding the way in which the programme should be presented (i.e. the programme’s format):

- “No lesbian or straight women as presenters or members”
- “Seminars, workshops, support groups”
- “Group work with couples”
- “Counselling for individual couples”
- “Telephonic counselling”
- “Friends talking together in a relaxed environment (with beverages), not too clinical, but warm and inviting”
- “Counselling with or without parents present”

### *Programme necessity*

All four couples interviewed, mentioned the fact that such a programme would be beneficial to the gay community in general. However, only one couple stated that it would benefit their relationship.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations that can thus be made based on the research findings highlighted above are as follows:

- **Clarifying misconceptions regarding a relationship guidance programme:** All the subjects interviewed had various misconceptions regarding what a relationship-guidance programme actually entails. Most couples assumed that there needed to be a “problem” in the

relationship before one should consider attending such a programme. The researchers were aware that most couples responded in a socially desirable manner and, although they tried to present their relationships as "perfect role models", they often assumed that other gay relationships could benefit from such a programme (refer to "Programme necessity" above). These couples seemed to rule out many options - like the fact that such a programme could simply enrich their relationship or allow them to compare or normalise their relationship experiences. In retrospect the researchers realised that they would have received more affirmative responses with regard to the programme's necessity if they had phrased the question more broadly, as follows: "Do you think gay relationships in general would benefit from such a programme?" instead of "Do you think your relationship would benefit from such a programme?" In this way partners would have felt more at ease mentioning personal relationship issues while maintaining a sense of privacy, not specifically stating that they as a couple were experiencing certain challenges.

- With regard to what has already been said, the researchers recommend that, if such a programme is ever compiled, the presenter should clarify any misconceptions regarding the purpose of such a programme by exposing various myths about relationship-guidance programmes (to which many heterosexuals also prescribe). The question posed should rather be, "What needs to happen in a relationship before a gay couple (or any other couple for that matter) would want to attend a relationship-guidance programme?" Answers to a question like this could open the door for comparisons between gay and straight couples, normalising and validating relationship experiences in general.
- **Further research in this field:** After conducting the literature review, the researchers became aware that much research has been conducted with regard to gay relationships in general, especially in the United States of America (De Cecco 1998). South Africa, with its unique blend of cultures, does pose unique challenges brought about by differing traditional beliefs, values and opinions. Apart from this diversity, though, the researchers did not come across any literature or research findings pertaining to the outline or implementation of a relationship-guidance programme for gay male couples. At best such information had to be inferred from self-help books with step-by-step guidelines (i.e. the rigid "cookbook" approach). Experiential or mutual learning opportunities were not given high priority in terms of being documented theoretically in the form of a detailed outline. The researchers therefore recommend that further research conducted in this field be aided by the tentative guidelines - in the form of categories mentioned earlier on - presented in this study, to test their applicability or viability in a relationship-guidance programme.

For example, this could be accomplished by developing a relationship-guidance programme around the skeleton (or guideline). Such a future study should also include a pilot study, member checking and focus groups, areas which were not included in this study. This inclusion would enhance the effectiveness of such a study by providing the researchers in question with the opportunity not only to create a programme, but to implement it (i.e. by means of a pilot study) and receive feedback from its members (i.e. by means of member checking and in focus groups) as a means of evaluating its applicability and effectiveness. The researchers also recommend that various service organisations (like FAMSA) become involved in the planning of such a programme.

- **A postmodern development challenge:** The researchers also became aware of the apathy and cynicism of many of these gay couples. Ignorance is not bliss in this case. These gay participants were unaware of their responsibility or duty to the gay community at large. Postmodernism advocates that we create our own identities in the face of any form of social

resistance. With regard to South Africa's development challenge, gay couples need to stand together and seek out and present themselves as role models in their own community at large. Postmodern times provide gay couples with the perfect opportunity to effect change, to challenge professionals' hypotheses regarding sexuality as it pertains to intimate relationships among gay male partners, and even to show a heterosexist (or heterocentric) society that worthwhile contributions can be made by the gay community.

Heterosexual couples may even have something new to learn from homosexual relationship models. Gay men should take up this unique opportunity to become experts on their own lives and leave speculations to those who are not gay. Research studies such as the one in question provide gay men with such an opportunity. The researchers, in closing, recommend that a relationship-guidance programme should build a gay couple's capacity as far as relationship skills are concerned, so that they may become empowered to further the development of their own community (Barr 1998:121-132). Such a programme should therefore motivate couples to tap into undiscovered resources to find the confidence to contribute responsibly.

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