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## 7. LGBTI RIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES IN THREE SOUTHERN AFRICAN NATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

LGBT people already have God's full love and acceptance—they are his children too. But they need our acceptance, our love. And to the extent that legal discrimination, those old laws and statutes that make them inferior still exist, it is up to all to work to change those laws. I have no doubt that in the future, the laws that criminalise so many forms of human love and commitment will look the way the apartheid laws do to us now—so obviously wrong. Such a terrible waste of human potential. Desmond Tutu 2012 (NCBI, 2012)

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of basic information pertaining to LGBTI rights, issues, experiences and activism in Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland. The original data presented here were collected during fieldwork conducted from December 2014 to May 2015 in these three Southern African nations. My research was facilitated through my position as a visiting scholar with the Namibian based NGO, Positive Vibes Trust (PV). This organization, founded in 2004, envisions open, equitable and healthy societies in Southern Africa in which civil society organizations play a key role in influencing progressive social development in partnership with government and the private sector. PV facilitates and promotes positive social change through a process of personalization, dialogue and voice, working mainly with and promoting the rights of Key Populations.

PV has developed a curricula and process called LILO (Looking in, Looking out), which is a personalized approach to exploring gender identity and sexual orientation with the hopes to move people towards a positive LGBTI identity, a strong self-concept and a high regard for themselves as LGBTI individuals (Church, n.d.). With the permission and support of PV, I attended LILO workshops and administered questionnaires and conducted interviews. The fieldwork data presented in this chapter is augmented with extensive desk research.

With good reason, many articles, reports and books addressing LGBTI issues in this region accentuate the negative, such as lack of legal rights and the obstacles to obtaining social and legal equality (Selemogwe & White, 2013; HRW, 2011). This chapter will summarize these struggles while also highlighting recent social and legal developments that suggest a more promising outlook. My data bolsters a more optimistic outlook, suggesting that despite legal restrictions in Botswana and Swaziland and discrimination and prejudice in all three countries, many young

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LGBTI people in in Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland are informed and exhibit a high degree of self-determination and self-esteem.

#### BACKGROUND OF LGBTI ISSUES

The workshop changed my life under my own skin. It boosted my confidence so that I can't tolerant stigma and discrimination. Now I can just walk away because I know who I am. (26 year old gay male from Botswana)

#### *Factors Impacting LTGBI Identity*

It is important to situate any discussion of LGBTI people in Southern Africa in a global context. For example, in the following overview of LGBTI rights and experiences, lack of legal protections and discrimination, including hate crimes will be discussed. Yet, to put this in perspective, it should be noted that LGBTI rights in the West were lacking or incomprehensive until recently and experiences in regards to discrimination and being victimized by hate-crimes is still all too real. For example, although "gay" marriage became legal in the United States in 2015 and was, according to polls back by the majority of Americans, 17 transgender people were murdered in the first eight months of 2015 (Rogersaug, 2015).

It is common in activist and academic literature refer to the LGBTI "community," implying that that LGBTI people are somehow automatically members of a cohesive group.<sup>1</sup> However, secrecy and fear of familial and societal rejection promote isolation and sometimes inhibit people from revealing their nonconforming gender and sexual identities even to other nonconformists. Furthermore, in Southern Africa, as in most parts of the world, there is significant variation and sometimes tension between and even within LGBTI populations. Keeping with the patriarchal dynamic that permeates African culture gay men are usually at the top of the LGBTI hierarchy. Lesbians, for the mere fact of being women have lower status. Many gays and lesbians dismiss bisexuality as an unauthentic sexual identity. During two of the workshops I attended, when it came time to discuss the "B" part of LGBTI, bisexuality was dismissed out-of-hand and no one protested. One facilitator simply said, "We know there is no such thing." Transgender people often consider themselves to heterosexual so do not fit neatly in with homosexual identity of lesbians and gays. Within the groups, people who are "out" sometimes stigmatize those that are still in the closet.

I learnt that as much as I am transgender, whichever group you fall under, each and every one of us has challenges and it helped in sharing these challenges and provided comfort amongst one another. (23 year old transwoman from Swaziland)

As the quote above suggests, what binds LGBTI people together is the commonality of their experiences as sexual minorities. During the workshops post-workshop

interviews, many participants were exuberant because they had met like-minded people. Phrases such as “Now I know that I not alone” were common.

Gender and sexual identity are fundamental aspects of who we are as humans. The vast majority of people in the world are heterosexual and cisgender.<sup>2</sup> Heterosexism and heteronormativity runs deep in most cultures, sometimes forcing nonconforming people to live in secrecy, denial and/or fear. The idea of sexual rights as human rights is still a largely contested notion, and human rights violations against people with gender and sexual nonconforming identities have been well documented in Southern Africa (Cloete et al., 2010; ILGA, 2014). LGBTI people routinely face stigma, discrimination and marginalization in terms of access to healthcare, and employment and educational opportunities. In addition, they are often subject to harassment from the police, including arrest and detention, physical threats and abuse, blackmail and ridicule (UNAIDS, 2014). All nonconforming persons whether it be their sexual identity or gender identity are at risk of violence, particularly in the townships and rural areas (Vice, 2015). Lesbians, in particular, face and fear violence, including “correctional rape” (Hunter-Gault, 2015; Mkhize et al., 2010; van Dyk, 2011; Wesley, 2012).<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to determine the prevalence of such violence. It has been reported that many of these crime go unreported due to fear of retaliation or lack of cooperation from the police (Vice, 2015).

In Southern Africa legal, cultural and religious policies, beliefs and dynamics negatively impact the lives of LGBTI people. Below is a brief summary of some of the religious and cultural issues. The legal issues will be dealt with in a later section.

### *Religious Issues*

The majority of the people in Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa identify as Christians and believe that same-sex relations are in direct conflict to Biblical teachings. Although this chapter began with a heartening message from Desmond Tutu, not all religious leaders in southern Africa embrace LGBTI identities and sexual practices. The following statement by Botswana Pastor Matlhaope, made in 2013, is also part of the dialogue: [It is] the church’s strong view that homosexual practices [are] a distortion of God’s blueprint for human sexuality and should not be tolerated in a God fearing nation” (thevoicebw, 2013). Hence, discrimination and prejudice toward LGBTI individuals is often thought to have a scriptural basis and justification. Many of the participants in the workshops cited their parent’s strong religious beliefs as the reason why they could not come out to them.

### *Culture Issues*

Cultural dynamics affect the self-determination of LGBTI individuals. Traditionally, Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland have, as do most other cultures, strict norms regarding appropriate male and female behavior and dress (LaFont, 2015). There is also a prescribed gendered division of labor, where men are expected to perform

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certain tasks, while women are expected to perform others. All young people are expected to marry and have offspring. Parents often exert considerable pressure on their children, even those who are “out” to follow this tradition. During the workshop I attended in Botswana, one lesbian explained that she was “out” to her family and although they acknowledged her sexual orientation, they continued to ask her: “When are you getting married?” And of course, they were referring to a heterosexual marriage. Several women and men in the workshop group agreed that they had had similar experiences.

#### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

As HIV rates have stabilized or dropped amongst the heterosexual populations in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in most of the world, the focus on HIV prevention has shifted to “key populations” (sometimes referred to as most-at-risk populations): Men who have sex with men (MSM); transgender people; sex workers and people who inject drugs (amFAR, 2013, University of California, 2015). According to the World Health Organization, “Between 40% and 50% of all new HIV infections among adults worldwide may occur among people from key populations and their immediate partners” (WHO, 2014). One of the reasons for this development is that until recently most HIV prevention programs in Sub-Saharan Africa focused on heterosexuals.<sup>4</sup>

With the exception of those who engage in same-sex sexuality in South Africa, key populations, due to the illegality of their activities, real or perceived discrimination from healthcare workers and/or fear that healthcare workers will report them to the police has created a situation in which key populations, in particular MSM, are difficult to reach (University of California, 2015). This has prompted many conventional NGOs and newly formed NGOs in Africa to develop outreach and educational programs geared specifically towards key populations. This is a relatively new field of inquiry in terms of scientific inquiry. Subsequently, since 2012, there has been a dramatic increase in activism and research on LGBTI people in southern Africa (Ricardo et al., 2015).

The progress towards the acceptance of sexual and gender diversity has resulted in the conjoining of HIV prevention amongst key populations with the LGBTI right’s movements. For example, in 2012 the Swaziland the Alliance of Mayors’ Initiative on Coordinated Action against AIDS at the Local Level (AMICAALL) partnered with PSI International, a family planning company, to become the first health initiative in the country to welcome same-sex couples, encouraging them to utilize their HIV testing and counselling services (IRIN, 2012).

Such efforts have been slow to come and are sometimes met with resistance. It is often proclaimed, contrary to much evidence, that homosexuality is “un-African” – a Western import and indicative of the moral depravity and decadence of the Europeans who colonized Africa (Roscoe & Murray, 2001; McKaiser, 2012). Yet, despite negative political, cultural and legal dynamics, grass-roots African LGBTI

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organizations, sometimes with support from Western donors, have become more vocal and visible (Ricardo et al., 2015).

Local or international human rights organizations have also expanded their scope to include LGBTI rights in their human rights campaigns. Most organizations embrace the entire spectrum of LGBTI, for example Rock of Hope in Swaziland and LeGaBiBo (Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana) in Botswana. However, there are other organizations that support specific populations such as the South African based organizations Transgender and Intersex Africa and Gender DymaniX (which focuses solely on transgender issues). Reports often cite very low membership in these organizations but these numbers need to be read with care. I was informed that although many people may participate in an organization's activities, few can afford or are inclined to pay the dues in order to become official members.

While there is diversity amongst Sub-Saharan countries, some generalizations can be made: (1) HIV prevalence rates amongst heterosexuals are stable or decreasing in these countries; (2) HIV prevalence rates amongst key populations are increasing; (3) reducing discrimination against transgender and intersex people is often included as part of the mission of LGBTI organizations but specific information as to their plight is often not addressed; (4) in terms of LGBTI rights, some countries seem to be moving forward in terms of tolerance and upholding LGBTI rights as human rights, while in other countries legislation has been introduced to increase the penalties for same-sex sexual conduct; and (5) in most countries it is not illegal to be LGBTI rather it is the related sexual contact, such as same-sex sodomy, that is illegal.

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Laws specifically protecting LGBTI persons are desirable but South Africa is the only country in Africa where such legal protections are in place. However, Botswana and Swaziland have ratified international treaties that by definition, without specific mention of LGBTI identities, protect the rights of LGBTI people as human rights. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981, which has been ratified by all of the 54 member states of the African Union, requires tolerance and respect towards all individuals and states that each person is to be treated equally before the law. This treaty was ratified by Botswana in 1986, in South Africa in 1996 and in Swaziland in 1995 (Ricardo et al., 2015). The United Nations (UN) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was ratified by South Africa in 2015 and by Swaziland in 2004. It has not been ratified by Botswana (University of Minnesota, 2015). The first line of this treaty is "All people have the right of self-determination. In 2014, the United Nations Council adopted a resolution to protect "human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity" (HRC, 2014). South Africa was the only African country that voted in favor of the resolution. Botswana voted against it. Swaziland is not a member of the HRC. In general, the resolution was met

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with extreme resistance by Middle-Eastern and African nations. It was supposed to be revisited in 2015 but as of November 2015, I could not find any recent action regarding the resolution (UNC, 2014). Nevertheless, it is significant that the issue was put forth to the council.

### *Botswana*

It is not illegal, *per se*, to be a LGBTI person in Botswana. However, the penal code criminalizes against the order of nature” which is punishable by up to seven years in prison. Same-sex sexuality amongst men and women is criminalized (ILGA, 2013). Section 164 reads: “Unnatural offences – Any person...who has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature or permits any other person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature” (LoC, 2014). Consequently, there is no legal recognition of same-sex couples in terms of marriage, adoption, etc. (Godisang et al., 2004). Yet, despite the law and anti-LGBTI comments by politicians (see below), the law is rarely enforced and there is considerable activism supporting LGBTI rights (Ricardo et al., 2015).

In 2010, the Botswana Employment Amendment Act: 10 was passed. This Act amended the Employment Act by outlawing discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation and health status, including HIV/AIDS status (ICJ/Sogi, 2013). In 2013, BONELA, the Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS, hosted a meeting with activists and 25 local chiefs to discuss the discrimination against LGBTI people in the country. In contrast to general claims of homosexuality being un-African, Stewart (2013) reported that “the chiefs said that homosexuality has always been part of local society, as is clear from the existence of a word for it—“matanyola”—in the local Setswana language, which is spoken by about 4.5 million people in Botswana and South Africa” (Stewart, 2013). Just the acknowledgement that LGBTI identities are indigenous to Botswana was a significant move forward in terms of the acceptance of sexual minorities.

In 2014, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights announced that it had adopted a “Resolution on the Protection against Violence and other Human Rights Violations against Persons on the Basis of their Real or Imputed Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity” (ISHR, 2014). Botswana supported the adoption of the declaration but there was no word that this would lead to a repeal of the countries laws which criminalize same-sex relationships (Potts, 2014). Also, in 2014, LeGaBiBo, the largest LGBTI organization in Botswana, won an important victory in the courts by being allowed to register as an organization. This ruling legally recognized their right to exist but despite the fact that LeGaBiBo has a visible office in Gaborone, in 2015, the workshop I attended there was held in a “safe house.” This certainly indicates that LGBTI people still need to be protected from perceived violence. Yet, you would have not known this from the atmosphere at the workshop which was upbeat and lively. Most of the participants in the workshop were openly gay or lesbian and two transgender people also participated.

While the laws against same-sex sodomy are largely ignored in Botswana harassment and hates crimes still exist. One of the transmen at the workshop related his experience of correction rapes several years ago and gave birth to a child as a result of the rape. Others transmen and lesbians at the workshop reported being harassed, threatened and often living in fear.

It is not against the law to be transgender in Botswana but this does not mean that transgender people are free from ridicule and harassment. However, while out to lunch at an upscale restaurant café in Gaborone with the organizers of the workshop, one of whom was a transman, a beautiful transwoman stopped by our table to announce an upcoming event in which she was featured and was also selling rainbow bracelets. While our presence at the restaurant and the arrival of the transwoman seemed to spark a bit of interest, and this could have been because we were a mixed race and multinational groups, there was nothing to suggest disapproval or prejudice.

### *South Africa*

Legally, South Africa ranks as one of the most progressive countries in the world regarding LGBTI rights. After the end of apartheid in 1994, there was a deep respect for human rights and the new constitution offered broad protections against human rights abuses. The South African constitution is the only constitution in the world to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation. It is also the only country in Africa to allow for same-sex marriage, which became legal in 2006. Discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation is legal prohibited and joint adoption is allowed (BBC, 2002).

However, the lived experiences of many LGBTI people in South Africa does not always reflect the liberal laws and legal protections. In 2012, the Congress of Traditional African Leaders of South Africa submitted a proposal to remove the protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation from the South African constitution. Although, The African National Congress (ANC) rejected the proposal, it provides insight into lack of support of LGBTI rights (Mbutho, 2013).

Five people, including three lesbians were murdered in 2013–2014 in what is believed to be hate crimes related to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation (AI, 2014/15). In an interview, a woman who lives openly as a lesbian stated, “Every day I live in fear that I will be raped...Lots of my friends have been raped for being lesbian. It’s not an unusual thing” (Bendix, 2014).

In response to such violence, in 2013, a Combating Hate Crimes, Hate Speech and Unfair Discrimination policy was proposed. Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, the Hon JH Jeffery, MP announced in 2014 that significant progress had been made but noted that it had been held up because there is much debate about trying to protect free speech while outlawing hate speech (doj & cd, 2014). As of November 2015, I could not find an update on the status of the policy.



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Advocates for LGBTI rights claim that the need for such a policy is overdue. Currently there is no systematic collection of data related to violence or hate crimes against LGBTI people (Bendix, 2014). And while many laud the prospect of the new policy, others suggest that there is already enough legislation in place to protect LGBTI people and that the violence will not end until there is a change of mentality with South Africans and with the attitude of the police (Anderson, 2013).

Research conducted in 2013 found that 61 percent of South Africans did not think homosexuality should be accepted by society. However, this figure should be put in the context. Compared with the other Sub-Saharan countries surveyed South Africa's acceptance of homosexuality was by far the highest – in Kenya the figure was eight percent, Uganda four percent, Ghana three percent, Senegal three percent and Nigeria one percent (PRC, 2013).

On the positive side, South Africa elected its first openly gay member of parliament and another openly gay man was appointed as a cabinet member in May 2014 (HRC, 2014). In addition, there are thriving LGBTI organizations in South Africa, annual gay pride parades and even a “pink” map to Cape Town, listing and showing all the LGBTI friendly establishments in the city.

### *Swaziland*

In Swaziland anal sex between males is illegal as a common law offence with the penalty of less than ten years in prison. Same-sex sexual activity amongst women is not criminalized. Same-sex couples cannot jointly adopt children and there are no legal protection against discrimination (ILGA, 2013). Although there are people in Swaziland living openly as LGBTI, the topic is basically taboo. LGBTI people face stigma, discrimination and violence (KENWORTHY, 2013).

In 2012, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Magwagwa Gamedze, dismissed a request by a United Nations human rights group working in Swaziland to recognize LGBTI people, stating, “It was difficult for government to formulate a policy on homosexuals or enact a law to recognize them because they actually formed a minority if ever they existed. Their numbers do not permit us to start processing a policy” (IRIN, 2012).

The LILO workshop I attended in Swaziland was much more subdued than those I attended in the other countries. This could be attributed to the fact that it was held in the countryside instead of a major city. But the atmosphere was probably more somber due to the fact that in attendance were the sister and girlfriend of a recently slain lesbian. A month before I arrived in Swaziland, a young lesbian, Kayla Glover had been murdered in what is believed to be a hate crime. The day I arrived, Malume, the founder of Rock of Hope, the largest LGBTI organization in Swaziland, and I went to visit her grieving family. They informed us that the man who brutally murdered Kayla was out on bail the same day he appeared in court, and they had little hope of justice.



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There are organizations such as Rock of Hope and House of our Pride (HOOP) that operate openly. Sibusiso Masango, Secretary General of HOOP stated in a 2013 interview, “We see that there are some changes and we do push.” Beginning in 2012, LGBTI groups have organized an event to commemorate International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia. In 2015, the event was themed ‘Fighting Against Hate Crime’. A moment of silence was observed for Kayla Glover, Themba Zwane and Floyd Mhlongo of Swaziland and all those who had been murdered for their gender identity or sexual orientation (Shongwe, 2015).

I interviewed LGBTI people who had attended previous LILO workshops at the Rock of Hope headquarters in Manzini. They were much more upbeat. When discussing his experience at the workshop, a 21 year old gay interviewee said, “It made me take time to look at my inner self and find out if I am happy and in time I did discover that I was happy and free to do whatever my heart tells me to do.” And when I was interviewing a transwoman, she said she had to cut the interview short because she was playing a game with a men’s basketball team. This confused me as I knew this person as a transwoman. I asked Malume about this, and he informed me that transwomen had their own basketball team in Manzini.

## METHODOLOGY

I think it [the workshop] has helped me understand who I am – issues to do with who I am, issues to do with my personality and also being able to put me in the society part of the equation. Because, for the most part, people tend to look at them vs the society instead of them as part of the society. (26 year old gay male attending a workshop in Johannesburg)

The main hypothesis of the original research is that attending a LILO workshop has a positive impact on understanding LGBTI identities and helps to enable LGBTI people to lead healthier and safer lives.

In-house PV curricula developer, Patsy Church, who has over 15 years of experience facilitating workshops and formulating mental health and HIV prevention programs, has developed a three day LILO workshop curriculum based on positive psychology with the goal of empowering LGBTI people (Church, 2013). The workshop was been rolled out in seven Sub-Saharan African nations (South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana Tanzania, and Zimbabwe). PV is planning on expanding this offering into additional Sub-Saharan African countries and potentially beyond the African continent.

The method of their operation is to work longitudinally with local LGBTI organizations, with LILO workshops often being the catalyst forming the long-term partnership. Initial workshops are conducted by LILO facilitators. Persons with leadership skills are identified during the workshops. After several workshops are conducted in the selected countries, LILO schedules a five day ToT (Training

of Trainers) workshop. During the course of the five days, would-be trainers go through the curriculum provided with holistic capacity strengthening support, and then teach it back to the group. They are evaluated and designated into the categories of Master Facilitators (qualified to conduct workshops in all SADC countries), Lead Trainer (qualified to conduct workshops in their own countries), Support Trainer (qualified to aid a Master Trainer or Lead Trainer in conducting a workshop). This method has been creating and continues to create a network of qualified educators/activists throughout Southern Africa.

The findings presented here are based on data collected via questionnaires and interviews with people who attended LILO workshops in South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland. There were a total of forty-five workshop attendees who completed the pre workshop questionnaire, the post workshop questionnaire or both. Participants were from South Africa, Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. Interestingly, the only Malawian attendee was a male heterosexual who had recently become a king. He informed us that his new status would provide him with more influence and power and that he planned to use this to affect change and empower LGBTI people in his country.

There was 100% compliance in completing the questionnaires. Attendees were read a consent statement informing them that we were not required to complete the questionnaire or answer any of the questions. To insure confidentiality questionnaires were folded in half and collected into a bag or box by the workshop facilitators. The questionnaires were administered either by me or one of the LILO facilitators. I conducted all of the interviews. The data present here is a total of all participants unless otherwise noted and will only be presented if a significant difference exists between attendees from different countries.

As per my Internal Review Board permission to conduct this research, all participants were at least 18 years of age. This did not seem to be an issue as everyone at the workshop acknowledged that they were 18 years old or older. The age issue was, however, based on a self-reporting honor system.

Four research tools were employed to collect qualitative and quantitative data: (1) a pre-workshop questionnaire administered directly at the beginning of the workshop; (2) a post-workshop questionnaire administered at the end of the workshop; (3) post workshop interviews; (4) and interviews with individual who had attended a workshop in the past.

#### LIMITATIONS OF DATA

Because LILO depends on local LGBTI organizations to organize and spread the word about LILO workshops, the research cohort was self-identifying and had at least knowledge of or experience with LGBTI activism.

For the most part, I participated in all the workshop as an attendee. I did this to experience what the other attendees were experiencing and also to build trust that would be carried over to the interview process.

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The workshop I attended in Johannesburg was a “Trainer of Trainers” workshop, meaning that those attending the workshop in order to be certified as a trainer. Thus, nine of the 16 participants had previously attend at least one LILO workshop. Also, the number of people completing the pre workshop questionnaire is different from that of those who completed the post workshop questionnaire. This is due to the fact that people who were not present at the very beginning of the workshop, missed the pre workshop questionnaire but usually completed the post workshop questionnaire. Some workshop participants completed the pre workshop questionnaire but were not in attendance when the post workshop questionnaire was administered. So it should be noted that there is not always an exact match between those who completed the pre workshop questionnaire and those who completed the post workshop questionnaire. While this is not ideal, data collection amongst this population under the present circumstances is challenging at best.

All questionnaires and interviews were administered/conducted in English. English is one of the 11 official languages of South Africa. English is one of the two official languages of both Botswana and Swaziland. I can state with confidence that everyone I interviewed was fluent in English. However, since there was no oral component to completing the questionnaires, it is unknown if there were language difficulties.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The most valuable things I learned at the workshop is that I don't always have to stick my problems under the mat. I am not alone in this. I always have to face up to my problems and not run away from them. It gives me ways of actually helping other who are going through the same thing. (32 year old gender nonconforming person who identified as heterosexual from Botswana)

There are stereotypes and misconceptions, held both by locals and foreigners, about what it means to be a LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) person in Southern Africa. This unfortunate because the issues facing LGBTI people are varied, complex and often misunderstood. There are variations from country to country and within countries, between rural and urban populations and within families, ranging from full acceptance to being totally ostracized (Walters, 2015).

The atmosphere at all the workshops was exuberant – there was an abundance of laughter and more than a few tears. The support they provided each other was constant, sincerely and truly touching. Due to the intimate nature of the workshop exercises bonded the group together quickly. It was an amazingly uplifting and soul-searching series of exercises. After experiencing the workshop, reviewing the preliminary results and conducting a few interviews, I thought that the bonding of the participants and trainers would be facilitated by having the attendees set up a Facebook page, a WhatsApp or Google+ site. I added a question at the end of the questionnaire and interview script asking if they would be willing to stay in touch

with their fellow workshop attendees via one of these forms of social media. Every single participant seemed eager to do so. Even without this more organized way to keep in touch, information and cellphone numbers were exchanged with promises to stay in touch.

The final version and the pre-workshop questionnaire consisted of 32 questions, 29 of which were multiple choice and true/false. The questions about their age, what the letters LGBTIQ stand for and listing names of all the African LGBTI organization that they knew of were fill-in-the-blank. All questions except basic information questions such as age and gender identity included an “I don’t know” option.

The post-workshop questionnaire consisted of all but two of same questions as the pre-workshop questionnaire (questions about how they found out about the workshop and their motivation for attending were omitted), plus eight additional questions relating to their workshop experience. This allowed me to determine what knowledge was gained or what opinions were changed during the workshop experience. Each participant assigned their pre-workshop questionnaire a secret number/name and added that same number to the post-workshop questionnaire.

The questions fall into five categories: (1) basic background information such as age, gender and sexual identity; (2) basic knowledge of LGBTI terms such as selecting the correct definition of transsexual, intersex, and asexual; (3) exploratory questions about their beliefs related to gender and sexual identity such as “is gender fixed or fluid?” and true/false and yes/no questions such as “Homosexuality is curable”; (4) questions about their opinions of gender and sexual identity issues such as “How important do you think it is for LGBTI people to be “out?”; and (5) questions about the lived experience of being a conforming or nonconforming person such as “Have you experienced discrimination because of your sexual orientation.”

#### *Background Information of the Research Population Who Completed the Pre and/ or Post-Workshop Questionnaires*

In general, the workshop attendees were young. The average age was 27 with the youngest participant being 18 years of age and oldest being 42 years of age. All attendees, except for a few who attended the workshop in a small town in Swaziland, demonstrated a high command of the English language. All participants were black or of mixed racial descent. They were not asked about income or economic background. However, there were indicators that they were not affluent. For example, some participants dressed stylishly but their attire looked neither new nor expensive. Cigarettes were a commodity that were shared. Everyone had a cellphone but calls were few, with the less expensive option of texting being the preferred mode of communication. As far as I know none of the participants in Botswana or Swaziland had an automobile and transportation to and from the

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*Table 1. Background information\**

Average Age	27
Female Gender Identity	47%
Male Gender Identity	51%
Nonconforming Gender Identity	2%
Sexual Identity Lesbian	24%
Sexual Identity Gay	40%
Sexual Identity Bisexual	16%
Sexual Identity Heterosexual	7%
Nonconforming Sexual Identity	4%
WSW (women who have sex with women)	4%
MSM (men who have sex with men)	7%
No answer	4%

*\*The sexual identity percentages do not add to 100% because some respondents chose more than one sexual identity*

workshops was paid for by the LGBTI organization through a grant they received for rolling out LILO workshops.<sup>5</sup>

Although transmen and transwomen completed the questionnaire, they all selected the gender identity they identified with rather than choosing the transgender option. This is significant because it makes a statement about their commitment and comfortableness with their adopted gender identity. They do not see themselves as transwomen but as women and not as transmen but men.

At the beginning of each workshop, everyone was asked if they preferred to be referred to as a he or she or by some other pronoun. One transwoman in Botswana beamed when it was her turn and proclaimed, “I am a she.” “I am a she!” she repeated with a broad grin. She seemed so relieved and happy to make this proclamation.

All but one of the people who identified as bisexual had a female gender identity. This supports recent scientific research that suggests that women have a higher degree of bisexuality than men. Of course, bisexuality is also strongly impacted by social and cultural dynamics. Women are under more pressure than men to marry and have children. Many countries that criminalize same-sex sexuality among men do not criminalize same-sex sexuality among women. In addition, it is increasingly popular to see women kissing and fondling other women as sexy rather than taboo. This is similar to attitudes in the West, where lesbianism finds greater acceptance than male homosexuality (Jennings, 2007). Although as Jennings notes, only androgynous or attractive lesbians enjoy popular acceptance in the West.

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For example, in popular culture, such as the TV series *The Game of Thrones*, the women need to be beautiful for this to be titillating. There is however cross-cultural variation, for example in Jamaica lesbians and gays face rather equal (and fierce) discrimination (LaFont, 2009). In India, lesbians face greater discrimination than their male counterparts, primarily because women's lack of autonomy inhibits their freedom of sexual expression (Sharma, 2006).

I love being gay! That is why I got my job as a fashion designer. (male LILO workshop participant from Swaziland)

One of the exercises called "The Fish Bowl" involved all those who identified as the same sexual orientation moving their chairs into a small circle in the center of the room, while those in the outer circle listened to them talk amongst themselves about what it was like to be gay or lesbian, nonconforming or heterosexual. The quote above is from workshop in Johannesburg. During the exercise, for the most part, the gay men joked, laughed and discussed the benefits of being gay. In contrast, the lesbian circle was much more subdued. They spoke about worries of violence, being pressured by their families to marry, and that if they dated men or had children, they were discriminated against in the lesbian community and declared to be "hasbiens" (a play on the terms "has been" and "lesbian" to indicate that a woman who in the past was a lesbian but has betrayed the lesbian community by being sexually active with men). When workshop attendees were asked to "trash" negative terms related to their gender and sexual identities, hasbien was high on the list. Many of the women who identified as lesbian or nonconforming had children. They often explained that they had their children while they were young and before they had the conviction or courage to self-identify as lesbians or nonconforming individuals.

*Baseline Knowledge of Research Population Who Completed the Pre and/or Post-Workshop Questionnaires*

It [the workshop] made me feel new because there were a lot of things I didn't know and that helped me to see a view of life in a different way. (24 year old heterosexual woman from Botswana)

It is clear to see that the workshop provided a learning experience. The participants who completed the post workshop questionnaire were better informed than those who completed the pre workshop questionnaire. Information about intersex, asexuality and transsexuality were included in the content of the workshop. However, it should be noted that even before attending the workshop, there was a high degree of knowledge.

Asking about the discovery of a "gay" gene was a wild card question.

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Table 2. Basic knowledge\*

<i>Pre-workshop questionnaire</i>	<i>Correct</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>DK, INC, NA***</i>
What do the letters LGBTIQ stand for?***	73%	0%	27%
Identifying the definition of intersex	53%	37%	10%
Identifying the definition of asexual	60%	3%	37%
Identifying the definition of transsexual	77%	3%	20%
Scientists have found the “gay” gene	43%	13%	44%
Sex and gender are the same thing	67%	17%	17%
Gender identity and sexual orientation are the same thing	73%	13%	13%
<i>Post-workshop questionnaire</i>			
What do the letters LGBTIQ stand for?***	91%	0%	9%
Identifying the definition of intersex	100%	0%	0%
Identifying the definition of asexual	91%	0%	9%
Identifying the definition of transsexual	96%	0%	4%
Scientists have found the “gay” gene (no)	74%	4%	22%
Sex and gender are the same thing (no)	96%	0%	4%
Gender identity and sexual orientation are the same thing (no)	92%	4%	4%

Notes on this and subsequent tables:

\* To simplify the interpretation of the data in table form, the some of the questions have been simplified. Please see Appendix A and B for a complete list of all the questions covered in this chapter.

\*\* This question was fill in the blank. Participants were asked to fill in: “L stand for \_\_\_\_\_, “G stands for \_\_\_\_\_, “and so on. Also, Q can stand for queer or questioning so both answers were considered correct.

\*\*\* DK stands for “I don’t know”, INC stands for an incomplete answer, and NA stands for no answer. I will use these abbreviations through the presentation of the data. I have also married the DK, INC and NA responses to simplify the presentation of the data. It is safe to assume, for the most part, if a question was not answered it was because the respondent did not know the answer.

*Questions Exploring Beliefs about LGBTI Issues*

...I used judge people who were in the closet but now I get why someone would stay in the closet. (30 year old lesbian woman from Swaziland)

No one left this question unanswered which indicates that everyone had an opinion on this issue. However, change in responses from pre-workshop questionnaire to



*Table 3. How important do you think it is for LGBTI people to be “out”?*

<i>Pre-workshop questionnaire</i>	
Very important	87%
Somewhat important	10%
Not important	3%
<i>Post-workshop questionnaire</i>	
Very important	74%
Somewhat important	36%
Not important	0%

the post-workshop questionnaire suggests that the participants were not dogmatic in their opinions. I believe that the changes in the percentage from pre workshop questionnaire of those choosing that being “out” was very important to a smaller percentage of such responses in the post-workshop questionnaire is due to the content of the workshop. A significant amount of time was spent on the issue of “coming out.” The “to who,” the timing, the benefits, the downside, how to do it and the importance of it being an individual choice were points that were emphasized during the workshop. As the quote above suggests, the realization that those who were “out” were not entitled to discriminate against those who were not, seems to have influenced this change in responses.

Many LGBTI people throughout the world compartmentalize their lives, coming out to like-minded individuals in support organizations and/or friends, while staying in the closet at work or with family. Setuke (2011) notes that lesbians in Botswana are more likely to “come out” to friends rather than their families. Discussions that took place in the workshops confirmed this, with many LGBTI people disclosing that they were “out” to friends not but family. Many of the workshop attendees feared “coming out” to their families because they perceived their family members to be trans/homophobic.

When asked “Who should decide who is male and who is female?” 98 percent of the respondents selected the option “the person themselves.” Other options were society, parents, the law, or doctors. One person did not answer the question and another person added “parents” to the “themselves” options. This indicates a high level of self-determination.

In the past, I had to keep my identity to myself but after the workshop, I learned ways of coming out, how to survive discrimination and stigma...– I was indoors and keeping my feeling to myself, feeling discriminated by society but after the workshop, I go to know my rights as a LGBTI person. I have the same rights as a straight person so I should not be discriminated against. (23 year old gay man from Swaziland)

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Table 4. Findings on the desire/non-desired to gender or sexual identity

<i>Pre-Workshop Questionnaire</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>	<i>NC*</i>
If it were possible, would you change your gender identity?	30%	65%	4%	NCNA
If it were possible, would you change your sexual orientation?	22%	74%	4%	NCNA
Have you experienced discrimination because of your non-conforming gender identity?	70%	22%	9%	0%
Have you experienced discrimination because of your sexual orientation?	83%	13%	0%	4%
Has self-stigma been an issue in your life?	48%	52%	0%	NCNA
Do you think LGBTI rights are a human rights issue?	83%	9%	8%	NCNA
<i>Post-Workshop Questionnaire</i>				
If it were possible, would you change your gender identity?	14%	86%	0%	NCNA
If it were possible, would you change your sexual orientation?	14%	86%	0%	NCNA
Have you experienced discrimination because of your non-conforming gender identity?	72%	14%	0%	14%
Have you experienced discrimination because of your sexual orientation?	86%	14%	0%	0%
Has self-stigma been an issue in your life?	28%	57%	14%	NCNA
Do you think LGBTI rights are a human rights issue?	100%	0%	0%	NCNA

\* *NC = I do not have a non-conforming gender and sexual identity. This option was only available in the questions that addressed nonconformity. In this table NCNA indicates not nonconforming was not an answer option*

The results from the pre- and post-questionnaires shown in Table 4 support my assertion that at least some of the LGBTI people in Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland have a high degree of self-determination and self-esteem. Findings from the pre-workshop questionnaire show that although 70 percent of the attendees reported experiencing discrimination due to their nonconforming gender identity, only 30 percent answered that they would change their gender identity. It should be noted that only one person who completed the pre-workshop questionnaire identified as nonconforming in the basic information part of the questionnaire. However, many of the attendees challenged traditional gender norms in terms of dress and behavior. Despite this, no one chose the answer: “I do not have a nonconforming gender identity” in the multiple choice part of the questionnaire.

Eighty percent of the LILO workshop attendees identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Yet, despite the fact that 83 percent of the workshop attendees completing the pre-workshop questionnaire chose “Yes” to the question; “Have you ever been discriminated due to your sexual orientation?” Only 22 percent responded that they would change their sexual orientation if it were possible.

Not surprisingly, the responses to the post-workshop questionnaire showed an even stronger level of self-esteem. While 72 percent of selected “Yes” to gender identity discrimination, only 14 percent selected “Yes” to changing their gender if they could.

I see myself different through the workshop – a good person, a person who can get anything he wants. Back in the days, I saw myself as this weird kid but not anymore. (21 year gay man from Swaziland)

Forty-eight percent of the attendees who completed the pre-workshop questionnaire answered that self-stigma had been an issue in their lives. It is significant that no one left this question unanswered and no one chose the “I don’t know” option. While this figure is high, it is much less than those who experienced discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Again, this suggests a fairly high level of self-esteem with 52 percent responding that they had not had an issue with self-stigma.

The responses from the post-workshop questionnaire are more ambiguous, with less attendees (28 percent) reporting self-stigma and slightly more (57 percent) reporting no self-stigma and 14 percent choosing “I don’t know” or leaving the question unanswered. I thought it would be the opposite with post-workshop attendees reporting more self-stigma after reflecting on their experiences during the workshop. It may be that the question was too broad or that they had not thought much about self-stigma prior to the workshop, or that they thought of self-stigma differently after it was thoroughly explained in the workshop.

Perhaps the most positive outlook that can be gleamed from these findings is the answer to the question “Do you think LGBTI rights are a human rights issue?” Eighty-three percent of the participants completing the pre workshop questionnaire agreed with this statement. Nine percent disagreed with the statement, while eight percent chose the “I don’t know” option. All of those who complete the post-workshop questionnaire affirmed that they believe LGBTI rights as a human rights issue.

## CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction, many articles and reports written about LGBTI experiences in this part of the world accentuate the negative (Selemogwe & White, 2013). There is no doubt that sexual and gender minorities in Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland experience discrimination, prejudice and stigma but the findings presented here add another dimension to our understanding of the lived

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reality of LGBTI people in these countries. The responses to questions regarding self-determination, self-esteem and their experiences of discrimination and self-stigma suggests a more hopeful future. This research was limited to people attending LILO workshops, therefore, broad generalizations cannot be made but increased advocacy should lead to the “cascade effect,” which refers to behavioral change in a few ultimately affecting many. So the hope is that these primarily young and pro-active member of these countries will take their empowered message back to their families and communities and that tolerance and acceptance of LGBTI people will grow.

One hundred percent of the participants indicated that they would recommend LILO workshops to others. Most recommendations for what could be done to improve the workshops including increasing the number of workshops being help and expanding the targeted audience such as developing a workshop for health care workers, adding one workshop which included parents and family members and creating a follow-up workshop so that participants could reconnect, have an opportunity to touch base to reinforce the empowerment their experienced at the workshops and share their post workshop experiences. The quote below succinctly summarizes why LGBTI people in these Southern African nations will benefit from activism and the programs aimed at empowering them.

I would recommend the LILO workshop to others because there are a lot of people going through life with no one to help them through and these workshops are critical in Africa where sometimes there is no therapy so you go through the emotions on your own. Through LILO, you can reach quite a few people in that situation. (27 year old lesbian attending a LILO workshop in Johannesburg)

One commonality to the discussion of LGBTI issues in Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland is that of contradiction. LGBTI pride is visible in organizations and events yet stigma, discrimination and hate crimes continue. The anti-LGBTI rhetoric by politicians is being met with some success of societal recognition. As LGBTI rights is increasingly framed as a human rights issue, the plights of nonconforming people in these countries will become more difficult to ignore. With pressure from above from the United Nations and other international organizations and pressure below from local LGBTI activists, governments will eventually have to take notice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is dedicated to Malume, the gentle giant and founding father of Rock of Hope, Swaziland.

I would first and foremost acknowledge my gratitude to people who attended the LILO workshops and gave so generously of their time. Their warmth and honesty

was truly inspiring. I also would like to thank all the staff at LILO, in particular Carsten Norgaard, Patsy Church, Flavian Rhodes, Lee Mondry and Thembisa Jantjies, all of the LILO facilitators, without which this chapter would not have been possible.

I only had the privilege of conducting this research because the City University of New York granted me a sabbatical, allowing me an extended stay in Southern Africa. Susan Farrell, the chair of the Behavioral Sciences and Human Services at Kingsborough Community College deserves special thanks for her continued support of my research.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> It is not unusual to conflate minority identity with community membership. For example, we speak of the black community, the Jewish community, etc.
- <sup>2</sup> Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity conform to their biological sex. Correctional rape is a hate crime. The victims are usually biological women who are or are perceived to be tomboys, lesbians or transmen. It is falsely believed that by forcing these conforming persons into taking the female role during sex, in other words, being penetrated, their “deviant” sexuality will be cured, hence the term correction rape.
- <sup>3</sup> Correctional rape is a hate crime. The victims are usually biological women who are or are perceived to be tomboys, lesbians or transmen. It is falsely believed that by forcing these conforming persons into taking the female role during sex, in other words, being penetrated, their “deviant” sexuality will be cured, hence the term correction rape.
- <sup>4</sup> Although lesbians and intersex individuals are not considered key populations, these groups often belong to organizations that are formed under the LGBTI umbrella and as such are included in this research.
- <sup>5</sup> The workshop participants were all lodged in the hotel where the workshop was hosted so local transport was not an issue.

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APPENDIX A

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender identity? Please tick one of the boxes.

- Female
- Transgender
- Male
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

What is your sexual identity? Please tick all identities that apply.

- Bisexual
- Gay
- Heterosexual
- Queer
- Lesbian
- MSM (men who have sex with men)
- WSW (women who have sex with women)
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

What do the letters LGBTIQ stand for? (Please answer as many as you can)

- L stands for \_\_\_\_\_
- G stands for \_\_\_\_\_
- B stands for \_\_\_\_\_
- T stands for \_\_\_\_\_
- I stands for \_\_\_\_\_
- Q stands for \_\_\_\_\_

How important do you think it is for LGBTI people to be “out”?

- a. very important
- b. somewhat important
- c. not important

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What is the term to describe a person who is born with chromosomes, external genitalia or an internal reproductive system that are not considered standard as male or female?

- a. intersex
- b. homosexual
- c. metrosexual
- d. I don't know

What is the term to describe people who lack sexual attraction or interest in sex?

- a. asexual
- b. pansexual
- c. queer
- d. I don't know

Who should decide who is male and who is female? Please tick all that apply.

- society
- the person themselves
- their parents
- the law
- doctors
- other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- I don't know

What is the term to describe people who have or are in the process of transitioning from one sex to the other?

- a. hermaphrodite
- b. bisexual
- c. transsexual
- d. I don't know

If it were possible, would you change your gender identity?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know

If it were possible, would you change your sexual orientation?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know

LGBTI RIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES IN THREE SOUTHERN AFRICAN NATIONS

Have you experienced discrimination because of your non-conforming gender identity?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I do not have a non-conforming gender identity
- d. I don't know

Have you experienced discrimination because of your sexual orientation?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I do not have a non-conforming sexual orientation
- c. I don't know

Has self-stigma been an issue in your life?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know

Do you think LGBTI rights are a human rights issue?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know