

**DOCUMENTARY: "IN OUR OWN WORDS"**

**GENDERED NARRATIVES OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND  
TRANSGENDER (LGBTI's) MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS**

***"I AM NOT A LESBIAN BECAUSE I WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED. YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH A HUMAN BEING, IRRESPECTIVE OF GENDER."***

**MELORA 'LOLA' SEBUENG (45 YEARS OF SESHEGO)**

She from a family of five children, a mother of 1, from Seshego Zone 4 and a proud lesbian, who knows who she is and believes in herself. In contrary, she stated that people are saying that 'homosexuality is un-African', which she definitely disagrees with. To her it has no culture, no colour. She believes that it is within a human being [that is within her], irrespective of [her] race and age, she is a **proud homosexual** woman.

On 'life outside' - especially when going to public places like shopping, **people will judge you by the way you look**. But deeper down as a human being, you [should] know that you are what you believe in, she highlighted the following scenario to ease understanding: "I cannot be changed by another person, I prefer to be myself and to let the next to know how I feel, if I feel uncomfortable about whatever you saying about me I will let you immediately, I am not going to hide it."

## **“HOW CAN WE DEAL WITH THE ISSUES OF COMING OUT IN RURAL AREAS?”**

### **LEBO MANAMA (38 YEARS OF MANKWENG)**

She revealed the following: “Everywhere I am visible, I am not hiding myself and I stand up for her community.” Coming out for her was very difficult, as she grows up in the rural place [area], knowing and understanding LGBTI matters was like she was in the dark, she knew who she was but she did not understand where she belongs, she asked herself this question: “is this kind of life normal?” Thus, most of her time she hid herself. She started coming out visible when she was at university. That is when she left home and the stigma from the area she grows up.

She went to a Christian school, Marobathota high school, Zion Christian Church (ZCC) at Moria, one way or another, she was forced to wear according to the norms of this school, she remembers that during the beginning of the years at high school, it was fine, they were allowed to wear trousers and tracksuits, and other things, while, towards the ending of the schooling years, the system changed, girls were compelled to wear girls uniform, the because of the Christian values of the school she was still shy and young, she did not even understand what was it to be an Activist and to fight what is right **[fight for one’s rights]** and she just had to follow the system, while finding herself been uncomfortable going to school but **she just had to adapt.**

Going to university made things easier, she gained independency, she got to understand few things LGBTI matters, to see the world, how things are done out there and it became easier for her, she first come out to her friend, the society around her before she came out at home, [moreover] coming out at home she had to be independent as well, she had to get a job, be financial wise, before she came out to her family she realised that **it is difficult to coming out when depend[ing] on your parents**, as lot of things can come out such as, I am your parent, you must listen to me, you must follow my rules under my roof, these challenges make it difficult for most LGBTI crew

members to come out, however, she had an advantage, as she had to be financial stable first, so that when she tells her family whatever she was going to say, she was prepared for it, luckily her family is not a close family, they accepted her as she was, even some of her partners she would take home, they knew them, the challenge on her coming out was directed to norms, based on this question; would people understand? but as she grew older, it became easier and manageable, it was not bad for her, unlike other people's experiences out there.

***“BEFORE YOU ARE A LESBIAN, YOU ARE A HUMAN BEING.”***

**MAGDALINE “MALUME” BOPAPE (36 YEARS OF MANKWENG)**

She realised that the [LGBTI] communities are most interested in the ‘*Monate* vibe things,’ they are not interested in the information part of knowing who they are or of accepting themselves [first] before they expect to be accepted by other people.

They aimed at educating LGBTI community to accept who they are, to know who they are, to know and be able to explain and tell people who they are before they expect those people to accept them.

True they say that; based on the African tradition ways, they say that we are part of the disable people, because ‘if you cannot love a man as women as expected - by the society – societal norms’ [to do so], it means you somehow have a disability in you, meaning you should get a government grant’

It is still difficult for many of them, more especially when it comes to blessing them when they get married, because most them says that if they bless them they will lose [revoke] their licences. It is still a problem. However, we attend churches; but when we asked the pastors to bless us, that is where it become a problem, but still they [church pastors] are willing to learn, asking them to give them information about LGBTI (teachings), to conclude that they know

and accept that they also humans, it is not a curse we just a finding ways of handling issues around LGBTI.

As a Lesbian woman, her understanding on it is that she had seen older people attending LGBTI occasions in Johannesburg unlike around here (Limpopo Province), her opinions suggests that they are tired of being stigmatised for all their [most parts of their lives] lives. They end up going to the old age homes, where they know that they can stay there and have a piece of mind apart from the community trying to stigmatised and discriminates them.

We have cases of rape, as a Lesbians [as we are regarded as woman by the majority], for example; I can go to a Tavern at night and get male friends there, who will later turn to be my enemies on closing time, taking her as a snack (*Sishebo*), apparently we are not safe, however, if we go to Taverns knowing that we will not be alone, we will have groups of friends to help us, it is fine, but still; let have alcohol limits, while disregarding substance abuse, it a [BIG NO] as it is not healthy at all to us as human beings. To the young people; they should at least try to explore themselves to informative events to know and understand the really merit of being human beings before our sexuality.

As we have started Capricorn Ignited, we gonna go somewhere along the way within the years planning to put a different in our young ones so that at the end they will belong somewhere and try to make something out of their lives.

***“OLDER LGBTI PEOPLE ARE LIVING AS FRIEND, THEY DO NOT TELL PEOPLE THAT THEY ARE ROMANTICALLY INVOLVED, BECAUSE OF THE SOCIETY.”***

**CAROL GOMPA-RAPHESU (44 YEARS OF AGE FROM POLOKWANE)**

The older people, older than us they never came out. You will think they are living in a house as friends, and they never told other people that they are the couple, they never even got married, because of the way they were treated by the society, that is the reasons they think they are no older people who are Gays and Lesbians **[they do not tell people that they are romantically involved, because of the society]**.

Subsequently, she sees lot of people getting married nowadays, freely, she sees change happening, lot of older people will start showing interests, as younger generations often attend these events. The older people they did not go to the events, it is not known where they are or where they attend, however, she attends these events when she can.

Equally, as an older lesbian, she encourages that lot of older [gays and lesbians] who have already been there to come out as the younger ones look up to them, they [younger ones] also need advises on how to handle certain circumstances [challenges], this should be beneficial for them to see how we are living, certain people still thinks lesbians and gays are dirty and ugly people, they do not take them as normal human being, who are beautiful and love other people. If they [society] saw a lot of that in the society, things will change faster.

***“LIFE IS ACTUALLY GOOD NOW, BUT IT WAS NOT ALWAYS LIKE THAT.”***

***“OLDER GAY PEOPLE ARE MORE PRIVATE AND MORE RESERVED BECAUSE THEY COME FROM AN ERA THAT IT WAS ILLEGAL TO BE GAY SO INSTEAD OF GOING OUT, THEY INVITE FRIENDS, HAVE A BRAAI AT HOME AND HAVE A NICE TIME.”***

**JACOBUS SMIT (50 YEARS OF AGE FROM PHALABORWA)**

It was not easy in the earlier years to be gay, now it is much more open and free, but in the years when we were young, in the early twenties it was not easy as it was still illegal, I come out around 1992/1993 to my parents. There was an incident with me and a Youngman, we went to play Golf, I hit the ball into the bush, we went to looking for it, we did not find Golf ball but we find others (burst in laughter). At the end of the day, people found out about it, it was a huge story, when he got home eventually after a weekend in jail, his parents sat him down at the dining room table, and asked him about this incident, that is where he gathered guts to tell them the truth that [YES], he was gay, although he was scared, his father and mother [parents] were amazing people, his [parents] were amazing during this process, they embraced his sexuality and sexuality orientation and everything. He found out after his passing in 2014, that his father told his mother during this process that they should barely accept their son as he is or they will lose him. From then on, his parents invited his gay friends into the house, everybody was free, they were free to be who they are in their house.

**“THE MEDIA PORTRAYS THAT MEN [GAY] ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE MONEY.”**

**VUYANI ZONKE (35 YEARS OF PHALABORWA)**

I came out to my two university best friends [Naomi and Peggy] in 2009, to his surprised when he told them that he was gay, everybody told him that they already knew, they just wanted him to confirm it. This was the same response he received when he told his family members.

He go to church, he does what is needs to be done there and go home, however, his problem is; people will always look and judge him at the end of the day for being a born again Christian, going to church every Sunday, while also been gay, and however, he says that God will judge him, he cannot hide to the people in terms of who he is, whereas God knows, only one person who he need to please is God, because is the one who have heaven, people on earth cannot do anything for him, he cannot hide to people staying on earth and expose himself to God, **[and you are lying to yourself basically, Jacobus added]** he still want to live his life and be the person he is and he will face judgement, then on earth he have to do what he is currently doing, if the church bans him because he is openly gay that will not be a problem, and as long as he did not drag his gayness into church, he is fine with everything, in church he is just a member, not a gay person going to a particular church, but he is not participating in anything there, since he does not people to say he is the last person to tell them anything.

**(Jacobus added,** that is one of the big things, which lead to him leaving his family church, he was a church member expected to give tithe, they wanted his money but when it comes to church events, he did not get involved as its was seen as this gay person is helping in the church [heaven forbids], in his opinion, if you are who you are and you are true to yourself, the only person you need to be true to; is yourself and God. [If you accepted yourself – very important], what I always say to young gay people is that; ‘how can you accept people to accept you for who you are, if you cannot accept yourself.’

**(Vuyani also shared** that is exactly what he wanted to actual say that the reason why people are scared to come out is that they hear what people say about gay people when they are chilling with them).

**Jacobus also highlighted** that we do have money, we work hard for it just like everyone else, it is not to say we have more money than the other next [straight] person, in my case; I do not have anybody else to spend my money on, except himself, partner, mother and dog [referred to as their son, which got to eat], they do not have extra expenses like school fees, and other extra things. It seems like we have lot of money. He confirms that older gay people knows how it is to struggle, translating to effective ways of saving money.

**Vuyani added** on that note for people thinking that they have lot of money, we become easy target of strange lies coming to them stating that we are using our partners [send on them], creating low self-esteem, as people are saying that if you are in a relationship with certain people, we might be in that relationship for monetary benefits. Making you to think that are these people saying that I am not that attractive? I cannot be really loved? Or the only thing people love about you is money. We become targeted, if somebody genuine come along, you start having doubt because of your previous experiences that they were people targeting you because of what you have or what you can do for them, this referred as one of other biggest issues we face.

**Jacobus stated** that at the end of the day, if you meet somebody and fall in love, you start to really give your everything [all], and it turns out that this person was only after money, you start questioning yourself; 'I am good enough?

**Vuyani also contended** that to show that it was existing, why did the law come into action, they knew about it all along, they had to supress it and now they come back to say it is a new thing, it is not a new, existed from donkey's years. Jacobus shared that misconception of people thinking it is new because it now more open, legal and visible. Those years it was just happening in the dark, happening where it was not visible [the audience ended sharing the initial Golf Course anecdotes of discovering other balls with huge laughter].

**Jacobus also mentioned** that it does not matter what, that is the most difficult decisions to ever make in your life is to come out to people and be free, because of the scaredness of been kicked away or rejected or whatever, if you know you will be free and you can, I will urge every young gay person to be who you are, be free from hiding because you are who you are.

**Vuyani advised** that please read the bible and learn what it teaches us, it teaches us that we should pray for each other, we should not be judging each other, say bad things about each other, chasing each other away from churches, we also have the right to praise our Gods, **Jacobus also said**, enjoy your life, do what you feel like doing, but be safe, they are dangerous people outside, they are diseases outside, condomise, be who you are, life begins with you, if you accept yourself for who you are, then everybody else will accept you.

***“EVEN IF IT COST ME LIFE, I WILL NEVER DENY MYSELF AGAIN.”***

#### **DANIEL “DANNY (48 YEARS OF AGE FROM MUSINA)**

Homophobia is as really as the air that we breath, some of our family members go through hell, been a homosexual is not a phase that you go through, I would rather say that trying to be straight, while you know that you are gay is a phase that you go through, soon or later it will come out, your true self will surface. Some people may never reach the level that most of us has reached where we are openly gay.

Many gay man and women has got husbands and wives, children and families, but they know that they are gay, so it a very hard thing for people to really admit and get used to themselves and accept themselves, we will just help and be there, we will support our family members, our brothers and sisters that have gone through that pain, we will cry with them, we will even fight with them, we will do anything to make them feel the worse that they are as fellow human beings that has got the same rights as any other human

beings in this world. To the homophobes out there; do not be scared of us, been gay is not a sickness, it is not a virus, either you gay or straight, there is no two ways about it and if you accept us for who we are, it will make it so much easier and we all can be friend and happier together.

To my brothers and sisters out there; stay as strong as we are, we are gay, we are strong. If you are struggling with comprehending who you are and why you are different, just remember this; you are not different, you might have a different skin colour from a different background, but the fact that we are human, we are all the same. If you are gay, does not mean you are not human, you are human, once you have accepted that you are halfway there, nearly 99% there, you must just realise that you are the same as you always been, you will be surprised how much you receive from the most unlike [unthoughtful] places. There are lot of older gay man, they hided by getting married and having a family, but gays have always been there, whether it is male or female, it has always been there and it always will be there, it is not taboo, it not a phase, it is just there, it is part of who you are, it is in your genes and the fact that you do not see older gays as often as younger gay people, it because they still scared to be shunned by the community, he observed that they are many older gays as much as younger gay people factual.

Culturally, he is an Afrikaans Broer, brought up with the notion that guys will greet you at auctions, mingle with you at parties and they will be friendly with you up to the point where they realise that you are gay and different, the next few meetings it will be like you have got sickness or something that you will infect them with. Until they realised that you are still the same person they meet before they know you were gay, you are not there to jump their bones. The biggest misconception from the Afrikaans speaking farming community guys have is that they [lesbians and gays] going to infect me and break down my masculinity. Until they realised that we are just human and the same person they meet [before their realisations].

-----THE END-----