Geographies of becoming: exploring safer spaces for coming out of the closet!

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Abstract: LGBTQI issues have become commonly investigated phenomena in research lately, probably due to the rise in the number of queer sexuality people who are “coming out” to open about their true sexual identities. A lot of research today explores LGBTQI population challenges. One critical challenge facing this minority population is their constant movement from one place to the other. Though research on LGBTQI migration is constantly growing, there is still increasing concern that this minority population choose to reveal their true sexual statuses in other geographical spaces while conceal in others. Only few studies endeavor to address the relationship between “coming out” decision and LGBTQI movement from around and/or between spaces. This paper explores how geographical context determines “the coming out of closet” for LGBTQI population. We seek to enquire why the minority populations choose to “come out” in some places and remain closeted in some. How do geographical spaces determine “coming out of closet” by LGBTQI population? How can dialogues be used to explore the relationship between “coming out of closet” and LGBTQI migration? community dialogues were used at Qoqolosing community. Diverse populations were represented in terms of church denominations, age, social class, and most importantly gender. Our results demonstrated that quite a noticeable number of LGBTQI population in Lesotho.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

For centuries, people with same-sex sexual attractions were not only ignored by the society, but were actually considered inexistent. It was only in recent years that many sexually diverse individuals started revealing their real sexuality statuses, challenging the binary perception of sexuality. Since then, negative attitudes emanating from, among other factors, predominant societal norms have been evident towards this minority population. The LGBTQI communities were then forced to hide their true sexualities and remain closeted in some context while opening up in others, depending on the level of acceptance of their sexualities in diverse spaces. The purpose of this paper was to explore how geographical context determines “the coming out of closet” for LGBTQI population. We seek to enquire why the minority populations choose to “come out” in some places and remain closeted in some. Finally, we interrogate how the lives of LGBTQI are impacted by a constant movement searching for safer spaces.
spend their lives moving around, searching for the right space to live their lives openly as queer sexuality persons. These results go beyond previous reports, showing that LGBTQI normally move from villages to towns where there is greater acceptance of LGBTQI people. Our study, thus expand the existing body of research on LGTBQI and migration by stipulating that, this minority populations migrate and relocate specifically to reveal their true sexual statuses. Taken together, the findings of this study revealed a strong correlation between revealing one’s true sexual status and the environment one is exposed to. Findings underscore the importance of geographical factors for “coming out of closet” for LGBTQI population. The paper suggests further investigation relating to the impact of constant relocation to LGBTQI socio-economic statuses.

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1. Introductory background

Sexual diversity is increasingly recognised as a serious, public concern in many parts of the world, (Ng & Rumens, 2017; Sabasay, 2016; Toft et al., 2019), of which Lesotho is also not exceptional (Talia et al., 2017). The debate around sexual diversity has received much attention in the past decades (Paternotte, 2018; Robles et al., 2015), following the “coming out” discourse around 1970s (Bobker, 2015; Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). Since then there has been a rapid rise in the number LGBTQI persons who are “coming out of closet” (Bobker, 2015; Brown, 2011; Corboz, 2009; Fortuin, 2015), triggering a huge debate around gender and sexual diversity issues (Lagie et al., 2018). It should be noted, however, that though awareness about the presence of LGBTQI is increasing, till presently, there is still high unacceptance for such minority population (Klett-Davies, 2022). The acronym LGBTQI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning and intersexual (Panich & Chaiumporn, 2018; Talia et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2018). Throughout this paper, we use the acronym interchangeably with “sexually diverse” or “queer” sexuality.

Despite effort to raise awareness about sexually diverse populations, by matrix organization in Lesotho (Muzenda & Kessman, 2017), LGBTQI in the country still particularly face discrimination and harassment based on their sexual statuses (Hartline, 2014; Muzenda & Kessman, 2017; Talia et al., 2017). Several authors have attempted to define the phrase “coming out of closet” generally as opening up and revelation of one’s queer status to others (Docena, 2013; Fishberger et al., n.d; Boso, 2013; Anti-Defamatory League (ADL), 2015; (Tamashiro, 2015); Wilson et al., 2018), for individuals who report experiencing predominant sexual or romantic attraction toward members of the same sex (Mayer & McHugh, 2016); while those who have not publicly declared their true sexual orientation are referred to as “closeted” (Bobker, 2015; Boso, 2013; Kimberly, 2015). This term ‘coming out’ does not only involve a revelation or acknowledgment that one is a member of a sexual minority (Tamashiro, 2015), but also accepting (Kimberly, 2015), participating and being actively involved with LGBTQI communities (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Gibson & Macleod, 2014). The comparison with “closet” is set forth by the fact that hiding one’s true sexual status, is like hiding in in the dark space; the site of secrecy, resistance, shame and repression (Gibson & Macleod, 2014; Maniago, 2018; Tricou, 2018), with no freedom to express your identity (Boso, 2013; Wilson et al., 2018).

Throughout this paper, the term “closeted” will be used to refer to LGBTQI population who, besides living gay lives, being in homosexual relationships, do not discuss their sexual identity or engage in overt same-sex intimacy or other markers of gay identity (Boso, 2013). While observing safe space remains a primary concern for most LGBTQI (Brown, 2011; Martos et al., 2017), for “coming out of closet”, homophobia towards this minority population remains evident in almost all
societies (Miller, 2016; Sithole, 2015). They are often considered as deserving of the treatment (Francis & Brown, 2017). Their (LGBTQI) identity formation is thus shaped by lots of challenges, emanating from unending movements, from one space to another (Annes & Redlin, 2012); hence, a hypothesis that environmental and experiential factors play an important role in LGBTQI revelation of sexual statuses (Mayer & McHugh, 2016). Not only geographic aspects are considered a decisive factor for “coming out” (Annes & Redlin, 2012), but also social, cultural, economic, physical and many other factors (Badgett et al., 2019; Klett-Davies, 2022; Mayer & McHugh, 2016).

In Lesotho, talking about sex alone is still a taboo, influenced by societal norms and values. The situation is even aggravated when it involves same-sex sexualities. It is due to such socio-cultural influences that concealment of sexually diverse statuses is evident in this country (Logie et al., 2018). Recent evidence suggests that, with the pressure to fit within social categories of gender and sexuality (Francis & Brown, 2017), LGBTQI population in Lesotho keep searching for places that are safe and welcoming of their sexuality (Muzenda & Kessman, 2017). A number of researchers have also reported that many LGBTQI who have already opened up about their real sexual orientations, go back to closet in other environments (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Mayer & McHugh, 2016; Subhrajit, 2014), as a reaction to possible social stress (Mayer & McHugh, 2016) or being literally forced (by those in power) to go back to closet (Mallory et al., 2017). Consequently, this minority population only reveal their true sexual identities in an environment with more accepting social climate, for social connections and support (Wilson et al., 2018), and conceal it, despite their continuing willingness to engage in same-sex sexual relations (Tamashiro, 2015), where homosexuality is morally contested, shameful or stigmatising (Paternotte, 2018). Factors found to be influencing concealment of one’s queer status have been explored in several studies as discrimination, rejection, shunning (avoidance), isolation, labeling, other forms of abuse (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Brown, 2011; Flores-Palacios & Torres-Salas, 2017; Logie et al., 2018; Tamashiro, 2015; Wilson et al., 2018) and many more.

In Lesotho, though the country is classified among countries where same-sex sexual activities are legal (Talia et al., 2017), the law does not explicitly condemn homophobic acts towards LGBTQI population (Hartline, 2014). Recently, members of LGBTQI community in Lesotho confessed on television show on the 5 September 2019 that in response to their socially constituted depression, they normally resort to overdrinking and drug abuse. Research on the subject has currently been explored, though mostly restricted to limited migration patterns of such minority population (Annes & Redlin, 2012). A neglected area in the field of sexuality is the influence of environment on sexual expression. What is also not yet clear is the cause of endless back-and-forth movement, form one place to the next, so until recently, there has been no reliable investigation examining the impact of one’s geographical space on LGBTQI concealment of sexual statuses and the decision to “come out”. In order to determine this relationship, the paper aims to investigate implications for LGBTQI migration, through adoption identity stage model. The key research question of this study is whether or not the geographical space remains key determinant for being “closeted” and or “out of closet”. There is a considerable literature to suggest that many LGBTQI in Lesotho are forced to leave their homes, due to family conflicts and/or violence (Logie et al., 2018; McNair et al., 2017), after “coming out”. Some preliminary work that was carried out in the early 1990s shows that being LGBTQI has long been associated with abnormality and psychological disorder (Bage, 2016; Ng & Rumens, 2017; Ndimande, 2017). However, more recent evidence suggests that the next decade is likely to witness a considerable rise in queer sexuality (Martos et al., 2017), since the number of LGBTQI population “coming out” usually increases over time (Mayer & McHugh, 2016), yet due to the aforementioned misconceptions, this minority population remain targets of many forms of hate crime (Ng & Rumens, 2017).

2. Theoretical framework
While we acknowledge Mayer and McHugh (2016)’ conception that Sexual orientation and gender identity resist explanation by simple theories, we also found it prudent to review a model that would fittingly guide LGBTQI revelation of sexual statuses, definitely following on Allen (2018)’
Observation that theories are a product of who we are and/or where we come from. To start with, we find it compelling to say, while the world is characterized by migrations, due to search for better living conditions (Castelli, 2018; Trivedi & Vyas, 2018) for LGBTQI population, migration is involuntary, motivated by desire to achieve the same rights as heterosexuals (Panich & Chaiumporn, 2018), and/or simply a reaction to social stress (Mayer & McHugh, 2016; Tamashiro, 2015). Their back-and-forth movements, in most cases from the country to the city (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Martos et al., 2017), we reckon is driven by assumed and actual signs of advanced modernity that shape dominant sexual freedom (Sabsay, 2016); hence stimulate their desire to live openly as LGBTQI population.

The arguments presented in this paper draws on identity development model, defining six identity processes or stages that LGBTQI populations go through, before the “coming out” process. Such stages include: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis (Ferdoush, 2016; Hoffarth & Hodson, 2017; Lotter, 2010). While the stages are sequential, it is important to note that not all LGBTQI follow the same path, and not all LGBTQI individuals go through all the stages; people's experience unique and dissimilar identity development processes (American Psychological Association, 2008; Docena, 2013; Ferdoush, 2016; Maniago, 2018). That is why Docena (2013)'s explanation might seem to be even plausible by pointing out that even the number of stages that this population go through differ, indicating that even the first stage of self-identification is preceded by another phase of predominate interests for opposite sex. Though it was beyond the scope of this paper to detail all the stages, the first stage of the model (an awareness of homosexual feelings) is generally reported to be the hardest one (coming out to oneself), with the highest levels of stress being experienced, by LGBTQI population (Docena, 2013; Ferdoush, 2016; Maniago, 2018), especially when one's environment is particularly intolerant towards sexual minorities (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2017). It is at this stage where many LGBTQI also try hard to block homosexual feelings (Ferdoush, 2016).

The main contention of the identity-stage model is that, coming to terms with one's queer status has never been an easy path (Docena, 2013; Nkosi & Masson, 2017), thus Lotter (2010) considering “coming out” process as an endless journey to self-identification. Though the model suggests the aforementioned stages, the roles played by social and historical factors (Docena, 2013; Nkosi & Masson, 2017) towards “coming out” process are also not to be ignored, in this study, hence Hoffarth and Hodson (2017) suggesting that sexual identities may shift throughout the lifespan. The idea put forth by this statement is that sexual identity shifts over time, rather than being stable over a long period of time (Nkosi & Masson, 2017; Sprigg, 2019). Other factors to be considered of importance for identity development include context, race, ethnicity, gender, culture and class (Ferdoush, 2016). The idea of sexual fluidity does not suggest, however, that being LGBTQI is a passing through phase, hoped by many LGBTQI parents that their children are just going through a phase rather than actually being queer (Toft et al., 2019). What is clarified in this paper is that the last stage of the model “revealing one's homosexual identity” is highly dependent on the level of acceptance individual's environment. Unfortunately, many places in Lesotho are particularly intolerant of LGBTQI population, and highly condemn homosexual acts. This explains why these minority populations keep moving around, searching for a place where they can reveal their true sexual identities.

3. “Coming out of closet”
A closet is “a secret that is hidden due to its social stigma” (Scott, 2018). There is evidence to show that lately many LGBTQI populations in Lesotho are “coming out” to open about their true sexual orientation (Logie et al., 2018), probably due to greater social acceptance of sexual minority (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2017). However, “coming out” to open about one’s queer status is still considered a risk-taking act that involves a very brave decision to make (Fishberger et al., n.d; Ng & Rumens, 2017). Prior to critically reviewing the process of “coming out”, it is worth noting the significance of the practice as postulated in research. Firstly, there is mounting evidence that living
openly with one’s true sexual identity inherit many health benefits (Botha & Frost, 2018; Ferdoush, 2016; Maniago, 2018; Pachankis et al., 2015), while leading a double life is suicidal in itself (Tricou, 2018), hence Nkosi and Masson (2017) calling it a “toxic closet”. As Pachankis et al. (2015) indicate, LGBTQI health outcomes depends largely on how long they have been living in closet. We understand as indicated by Brown (2011) and Maniago (2018) therefore that, being out of closet involves moving past oppression and despair and living an openly LGBTQI life. Contrarily though, many LGBTQI use the closet for protection and safety (Brown, 2011; Pachankis et al., 2015).

“Coming out” does not only involve sharing your sexual orientation and/or your gender identity with people in your life (Fishberger et al., n.d). Research guides the understanding that “coming out” is a continual, life-long process that involves different stages, ranging from self-identifying as LGBTQI to disclosing your sexuality to other people (Anti-Defamatory League (ADL), 2015; Fishberger et al., n.d; Kimberly, 2015; Maniago, 2018; Tamashiro, 2015). What is being importantly emphasized about the process of coming out is the continual nature of it (Toft et al., 2019). Another plausibly inclusive explanation defines “Coming out” as a process that requires figuring out who and how to tell, while also processing how that might affect your relationships with people you trusted (Fishberger et al, n.d; Tamashiro, 2015). Though LGBTQI are sometimes also blamed responsible for their invisibility (Bobker, 2015), Tamashiro (2015) argues that, before taking a decision to “come out”, one would have struggled against it, with anxiety and or fear (Kimberly, 2015), and even sexual aggression (Barnes & Malamuth, 2014) as the main companions at every stage.

4. Data generation
One major concern for sexuality studies is finding a good communication strategy to engage LGBTQI population (Robles et al., 2015). This paper draws on ethnographic qualitative study, entrusted for its many recorded advantages, among which provide abundant data about real-life people and situations (Daniel, 2016), due to prolonged engagement between the researchers and participants (Anney, 2014; Rahman, 2017). We also opted for this method of data generation for its ability to enable elicitation of quality active data (Motsa & Morojele, 2016; Rahman, 2017). For the purpose of this paper, qualitative research design was used along with community dialogues as a research methodology. Research on LGBTQI in Lesotho evidenced that opening space for dialogue promotes inclusion and acceptance within family units and local communities (Muzenda & Kessman, 2017). We also concur with Knight-McKenna et al. (2018), which through interactions with communities, people might regularly and carefully question their own beliefs. We hypothesised therefore that this approach would allow both heterosexuals and homosexuals communities a space to listen and be listened to, and thus come to terms with one another, on issues related to sexuality. Gibson and Macleod (2014) also advocate that the method might transform societal attitudes about homosexuality in the midst of “glorified” heterosexual.

Participants were recruited from villages around Qoqolosing community. To rule out the possibility that community members might feel reluctant attending a gathering where sexual behaviours are discussed, the participants were recruited through community chief; so in the first step, the chief was contacted and highlighted about the intention to engage his community in a dialogue about sexual diversity. In Lesotho, working hand in hand with community chiefs has arguably been the most successful way of building an intermediate or long-term relationship with community members (Muzenda & Kessman, 2017). The chief was thus briefed about the topic under discussion prior to meetings, to allow him space to also influence positive attendance of community members. Prior to commencing the study, ethical clearance was sought from the department of Education in the University of the Free State. At first, participants were a little bit hesitant to discuss sexual matters in the presence of other community members. However, being assured of anonymity of their information, let to more open communication. There were approximately 50 community members who attended the
gathering, and diverse demographic categories of say gender, age, class, church denomina-
tions, educational level, were represented. Sexuality statuses for those 50 participants as
reported, were as thus; 20 men, comprising of nine gay and eleven heterosexuals, 19 women
(six lesbians and thirteen heterosexuals) and eleven participants preferred not to say. Given the
status of non-acceptance for sexually diverse in the said community, it could be hypothesized
that those who did not mention their sexuality were members of LGBTQI communities who
were not ready to disclose their real sexual identities. Themes were created out of recurring
opinions from all participants.

Both researchers as well as the participants were Sesotho native speakers, hence dialogues
were carried out in Sesotho, while also not refuting code switching. A number of researchers
(Fritz & Vandermause, 2018; Knight-McKenna et al., 2018) have reported the importance of
using participants’ own language that, it enhances communication and facilitates trust
between the researcher and participants. Besides enjoying the privilege of flexible, active
collaboration with participants, brought forth by extensive vocabulary and mastery of lan-
guage, we also inherited two main benefits to this; first, translating and transcribing data
from audio recorder, which was done by both researchers, became easy. This also helped in
capturing non-verbal clues. The only pitfall in using participants’ native language for data
collection, we reckoned, people get overexcited and thus dialogues being prolonged; all dialo-
gues took beyond 30 min that they were scheduled for.

Repeated dialogue meetings were held to remove the potential biasness in translation, and
to ensure generalisability of results. Being arguably the most flexible method (Maguire &
Delahunt, 2017), thematic analysis was adopted in this study. Audio-recorder was used, as
a better method rendering the voices of participants (Tessier, 2012). To avoid biasness in the
interpretation of results, our main focus was put on data that only addressed the research
questions.

5. Results
Since our intention was not to throw a set of questions demanding responses from the researched,
only prompts were used to initiate and set the theme for the dialogues and allow a flow of ideas
from participants themselves. Prompts were as thus;

What is the status of LGBTQI population in your area? Would you rate it as acceptance or non-
acceptance?

How easy/difficult do you think is it for LGBTQI to reveal their real sexualities?

What is the general perception of LGBTQI in your community?

For those who have revealed their true sexuality what is the general reaction?

Most of the arguments presented were collective opinions, especially those coming from LGBTQI
community participants, who have “come out”. There are also few individual opinions from those,
we speculate, are closeted LGBTQI communities and others from heterosexual groups. Three main
themes that emerged from results are presented below as; disclosing one’s homosexual
status has never been an easy path, LGBTQI community faces rejection after disclosing their sexual
orientation, and finally this minority population keep moving in search of better accepting
environment.

6. Disclosing one’s homosexual status has never been an easy path
As indicated in the literature above, this study revealed that, LGBTQI population often develop
anxiety, wrestling with guilt and/or depression before “coming out” to open about their sexual
statuses, for the obvious reason of fearing possible stigma and discrimination. A vast majority
of them thus confessed hiding their true sexual identities till they were recognized by other people:

I was hiding it, but my brother told me that he was aware that I am a lesbian, and he added asking whether I am aware of the harm I am causing in the family. In saying that he was referring to my mother's heart disease as an outcome of my homosexual status, so I had to shoulder the blame of being responsible for 'their' mother's illness.

If you live in such negative environment, how would you 'come out'? I never told them I was gay, they only realized that and they never said anything, but I can tell everyone's attitude at home changed towards me.

Contrary to research (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Katz-Wise et al., 2016; Ryan, 2009), indicating that LGBTQI reveal their true sexual identities to families and friends, before coming to open to the general public, our findings revealed that a vast majority of LGBTQI in Lesotho do not verbally confess their queer statuses to family members; rather through living styles such as dress codes, behavioral contact and general socio-cultural practices. This does not suggest however that LGBTQI are recognized by the way someone dresses, walks, or talks; we still consider it imperative for someone to reveal their sexual statuses before being considered as such.

The above findings revealed as Figueroa et al. (2016) reported that parents are the ones who normally become aware of their children's queer statuses, before they could even (LGBTQI children) “come out”. Thus, it can be concluded from the findings of this paper that a vast majority of LGBTQI in Lesotho remain closeted, fearing possible stigma and discrimination. The next theme indicates that, after battling with fear to reveal their true sexual identities, LGBTQI population encounter highly negative response from people they open up to.

7. LGBTQI community faces rejection after disclosing their sexual orientation

One other key finding that emerged from this study revealed that LGBTQI communities face rejection after disclosing their sexual statuses; a vast majority of LGBTQI participants reported remorsefully that they lost quite a number of friends after revealing their true sexual identities to them:

There is this friend of mine whom we have been friends since Primary and luckily even when we got to secondary level, we were sent to the same school, and that's when our friendship became stronger. You can't believe when I tell you that all what we had came to a gentle stop the day I told her I have attraction towards people of the same gender.

Similar expression was uttered by another LGBTQI participant:

It's so hurting, once you disclose your true sexual identity, it's like you are driving everyone away. Some people start feeling like you are kind of danger to them. What is even more surprising is that before disclosing your sexual status, the same people have never felt unsafe around you.

Not only LGBTQI population claim to be sanctioned after disclosing their sexual statuses, even members of heterosexual group themselves confessed their negative attitudes towards that emerged after this sexually diverse individuals revealed their true sexual identities to them:

I got an inbox (personal) message from Facebook, the guy started greeting me—‘hi’ and I also responded pleasantly, till we became kind of pal friends. One day he told me he is gay, and that's when I suspected shirt coming, and I responded; ‘so what?’ He asked me if I was also gay; that's when our friendship ended, and I told him to back off!
I don't even want to understand that thing at all; in fact I don't even want to have any close contact with such people. In fact, I once insulted the other one, trying to make a move on me and told him straight that I am not

The above findings justified previous research (Maniago, 2018) indicating that, LGBTQI populations lose many of their loved ones, due to revelation of sexual statuses. Further research conducted in Lesotho (Poteat et al., 2016; Talia et al., 2017) revealed that such populations are even prone to physical and verbal attacks, and are sometimes insulted, ridiculed and humiliated by members of heterosexual group. In an attempt to justify their homophobic attitudes, a vast majority of heterosexual participants disclosed their believe that engaging in homosexual acts and being sexually attracted to people of the same gender is just a way of challenging normal heteronormative culture. The question arouses then as to whether these sexually diverse populations should remain forever closeted to conceal their presence in society, and some of the responses were that:

In the past it was still okay that they were forced to live the way the society wanted them to.

I think it was still better when they were hiding it, nowadays they are all over, and you get hugely disgusted, for example, someone that you have known for a very long time to be straight, and surprisingly after sometimes you meet that very person as a completely changed being in terms of gender

We understand from the above views that many people in Lesotho are aware of the presence of diverse sexualities in society, yet they also want to deny it, and rather encourage such population to remain closeted for the rest of their lives. The single most striking finding of this study is that due to feeling of isolation, these sexually diverse populations even develop a sense of self-hatred and many of them wish they were not born, hence the utterances:

But why should we suffer, is there God who sees us? I often question God for my being, I wish I could see him face-to-face, and be close enough to ask why he chose to create me this way

The feeling is so intense, in fact, I rather say nothing hurts more than being made an outcast for something that you have no control over; it is very painful because we did not chose to be the way we are, and it's not even like we are happy that we are different from other people

The above findings are in line with previous reports (Francis, 2017; Maniago, 2018), showing that “coming out” inherit a range of punitive social controls, including, among others, abandonment, rape, physical violence and many other challenges. It is worth mentioning that none of the LGBTQI participants in this study reported receiving support after “coming out” either directly or indirectly, as indicated above. In search of support, this population minority in Lesotho keeps moving around looking for a better place to reveal their true sexual identities, as critically discussed in the next theme.

8. LGBTQI minority population keep moving in search of better accepting environment

One other significant finding of this study is that LGBTQI populations keep moving around places in search of better accepting places, for them to “come out”. Quite a number of LGBTQI participants tearfully confessed that they were forced by living circumstances to leave their original homes, and as they indicated that has been a very drastic decision they ever took:

I was tired of living a lie. In fact, I realized even before I could reveal my sexual status to anyone that many people were already aware that I am gay and I could barely endure the attitudes. Let me confess that I still very much love my home, I did not intentionally decide to leave, even now if I had a choice I would just come back

People believe that it is simply by choice that we run away from home, yet no one would enjoy being separated from their loved ones; but sometimes you just feel you want to live openly
and express your sexual attraction without being judged. That's why we normally move to
towns where people don't mind other people's businesses

While this population minority suffer discrimination and rejection from community members in
general, families are found to be a great deal for LGBTQI population who leave homes and remain
homeless (Mallory et al., 2017). Our findings substantiate previous findings from Lesotho, indicat-
ing that LGBTQI discrimination starts within the family, hence many of them living by themselves
away from their homes (Logie et al., 2018). LGBTQI participants reported being forced to leave
their homes, since they could not resist the pressure from parents, of being told to marry people of
opposite sex:

The pain of always being pestered to get married and have children! I sometimes wish
children were bought so I could just go to the shop and purchase them, and give them to my
parents

Besides just discrimination within the family, quite a number of LGBTQI participants also reported
being literally thrown out of their homes, because of their sexual statuses:

My parents told me face-to-face that I am a disgrace to the family, and that they never gave
birth to a gay child, and you could see the pain in my mother's eyes as she told me to go and
live my sinful life away from their home

I was told to go where I would do as I please and never come back home. The most
unfortunate part is that even in towns where we believe living openly as LGBTQI person is
common, it is not every place in town that you can live peacefully without humiliation,
mockery and condemnation

In general, we found a significant positive correlation between LGBTQI population movement away
from home, and family rejection. This result echoes previous reports (Castelli, 2018; Reyes et al.,
2015) showing that the influence of the family support has the upmost importance for a specific
individual to make the final choice to migrate or to stay. Remarkably, our results also showed as
explained below that even parents themselves expressed their fear of raising a child they never
knew she or he is a homosexual; a vast majority of them thus confessed it is better not to have
a child at all than to have LGBTQI child.

The issue of marriage and kids was generally reported by LGBTQI population as the main
worrying factor for family members. This result echoes Logie et al. (2018), indicating that for
a male child parents have a fear that the family name will fade away, while those with female child
feel they will spell the loss of the bohali (the bride price) their fathers were expecting to receive
upon their marriage.

From the above findings it is clear that “coming out of closet” remains a very tough decision to
take for LGBTQI population in Lesotho. Notably though, even those places which are generally
believed to be better accepting still pose huge challenges for LGBTQI population. What we can also
induce from the findings of this study is that LGBTQI populations in Lesotho choose to “come out”
in other places but not in others, depending on the acceptability of such population in different
places. Future studies

9. Discussions

The world today is subjected with rural–urban migration of people of different diversity identities;
ethnic, age, religion, groups (the list is endless). For the LGBTQI minority, the rural–urban move-
ment is mostly associated with a search for a more accepting environment of their sexuality
(Wimark, 2014). It cannot be overemphasized here that the unending movement and constant
relocation impact negatively on their (LGBTQI) entire life, including their health statuses, economic,
and social wellbeing (Badgett et al., 2019; Klett-Davies, 2022). Only a small number of LGBTQI participants reported intentionally leaving their homes for reasons other than homophobia.

In terms of the first research question our findings seem to build in particular on the previous research, indicating that LGBTQI people in Lesotho have difficulty finding public spaces that are safe and welcoming (Muzenda & Kessman, 2017). Evidence from previous reports shows that, the population minorities face discrimination at work places, in places of learning, in families, in communities and just everywhere they are (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Lees, 2017; Pellot, 2017). In response to intense homophobia, many LGBTQI remain “closeted” for the rest of their lives, while those who are “out” decide to go back in the closet, to shield themselves from homophobic attitudes (Boso, 2013; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2017; Mayer & McHugh, 2016). There is evidence to suggest that many LGBTQI people in Lesotho have experienced human rights abuses related to their sexuality; they have been verbally or physically harassed (Netshandama et al., 2017; Talia et al., 2017). In line with the existing literature, our study also revealed that as soon as they come to open about their sexual identities, LGBTQI experience harassment, starting with family, then to the public. The results of this study also confirmed the previous reports showing that many LGBTQI youth are literally pushed out of their homes because of their sexual orientation. They are mostly denied space for being vibrant and active in family matters, since their identity is considered an embarrassment. Being a concealable identity, many LGBTQI decide to conceal their true sexualities, especially in an environment where homosexuality is particularly condemned.

Contrary to previous reports showing that towns and cities become better places to be, for LGBTQI (Wimark, 2014), this study revealed that homophobia is more intense in urban areas. They (LGBTQI) are, however, drawn by LGBTQI networks available in urban places. Such friendship networks, which are hard to access in rural areas, have been reported as very important for attainment of a positive LGBTQI identity (Docena, 2013). As indicated above, LGBTQI participants in the study reported that they normally move to the city, where people do not mind other people’s businesses, thus feel at liberty to live openly as LGBTQI identities. Unfortunately, uprooting from one community to the other leads to a sequence of other dramatic experiences that include, among others; sexual harassment, physical attacks, (Botha & Frost, 2018; Fraser et al., 2019; McNair et al., 2017). Their susceptibility to abuse and harassment is mainly drawn from lack of support, especially from family members. It is evident that these minority populations are denied many life opportunities, due to constant mobility. For example, they are denied opportunity to the highest attainable standard of Education, which then impact on their socio-economic statuses. It is therefore unsurprising that reports show high rate of complete and attempted suicides for LGBTQI population (Reyes et al., 2015), since they find life unworthy of embracing.

Our findings point out specifically that, though the phenomenon of sexual diversity is slowly gaining strength in Lesotho, change in attitudes has not been visible, the challenge of which drive LGBTQI populations away from their original homes. One other important finding of this study is that other members of LGBTQI communities hide their sexual statuses for reasons that are religious, rather than just social. Despite families being entrusted to form positive gay identity (Docena, 2013), our findings revealed that many LGBTQI who decide to migrate do so because of ill-treatment from parents and family members. The same evidence was reported by LGBTQI youth representative, on Lesotho television, on the 11 September 2019 that of all the challenges they encounter, being expelled from their homes is the most unbearable one. They indicated on the same program that, family attitudes promote depression and then suicidal ideation among the LGBTQI population. Taken together, our findings suggest a need for further research investigating the socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts that influence “coming out of closet” for LGBTQI populations.

10. Conclusions and recommendations
The evidence from this study suggests that a vast majority of LGBTQI population in Lesotho remains closeted, fearing possible stigma and discrimination. This bears the implication that
such minority populations continue engaging in risky sexual behaviours of concurrently having homosexual partners in private, while also engaging in open relationships with heterosexual partners to win communities’ approval. Unfortunately, such behaviours as reported by Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2017) increase their risk of contracting or spreading HIV among the LGBTI individuals and also to some heterosexual individuals. The study revealed also that a vast majority of LGBTQI populations are forced to unintentionally relocate, looking for better accepting environment of their sexual orientations, where they can “come out” to open about their real sexual identities. Evidence points out, however, that such movement around places does not necessarily suggest they (LGBTQI) find destination places so accepting of their sexual statuses. As mentioned earlier, leaving their friends, families, and homes; being disconnected from loved ones only leads to a series of other dramatic experiences.

Defining the six stages of identity-stage model, this study sought to address the gap in literature that deals with LGBTQI migration. Through dialogues, we were able to unearth complex issues of discrimination and homophobia, leading to constant relocations of LGBTQI populations; thus, we found community dialogues as affirming strategy to influence positive environment. Both the literature review and empirical data revealed that that community dialogues can be a groundbreaking method used to promote the visibility of LGBTQI populations, and thus reduce stigma and discrimination towards such populations. Robles et al. (2015) advocate that even small conversations can be a good act of promoting the visibility of the minority. With 50 community members who participated in dialogue meetings; both heterosexuals and homosexuals, evidence points out specifically that their perceptions shifted after such dialogues, from viewing LGBTQI community as dangerous, but other members of the society. This we conclude withstanding the fact that change in attitude is something, which is impossible to guarantee, but can only assume it has taken place. The findings in this study provide a new understanding of the relationship between “coming out” process and environmental influence. Though our study offers rich insights into how geographical space impact on LGBTQI movement and “coming out”, we feel there is a need to extend the boundaries of research from LGBTQI discrimination in different environment, to future studies that concentrate on how living in constant movement, searching for the right space to “come out” impact LGBTQI socio-economic statuses. Another important direction for future research that builds upon implications for remaining and/or leaving closet is also proposed.

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