



(TRANS)LATION?

Experiences of the deaf transgender community
in South Africa • 17 February 2018



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QUEER VERNACULARS
VISUAL NARRATIVES

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BEING TRANSGENDER AND DEAF IN SOUTH AFRICA

Being deaf does not only affect the person with hearing loss, but also every person or institution a Deaf person might come into contact with. This includes the general public, NGOs, emergency services, churches, tourism, workplace, sport, and engagements, in any capacity, with the state. On the 17th of February 2018, Iranti hosted a historic meeting with transgender members of the South African Deaf community. The meeting highlighted a number of issues and challenges that the community faces along with particular areas which can be improved upon by organisations trying to assist and acknowledge their Deaf constituents. This report provides an overview of that meeting, drawing from some of the learning experiences it provided while also offering a broad narrative of Deaf, transgender and Deaf transgender advocacy in South Africa, Africa and globally.

Deaf Culture, 'Deafhood', Deafness

Deaf culture is often also referred to, in a global context, as 'Deafhood' in that Deaf people make up a particular community, with a certain history, beliefs, norms, cultures, shared oppression and values. These are often directly related to Deaf people's struggles to uphold themselves in the larger hearing world¹, which has historically medically pathologised them.² Pathologisation continues to be understood as the dominant perspective on deafness globally, it is "premised on the idea that deaf people are not only different from hearing people, but that they are, at least in a physiological sense, inferior to hearing people".³ The outcome of this approach has seen medical practitioners attempt to help individuals who are deaf become as much like hearing individuals as possible.⁴ The parallels between this conversation and the current movement around transgender depathologisation are striking.

The 'sociocultural' view is the alternative perspective to the pathological approach. The sociocultural view argues that instead of seeing Deafness as a handicap it would be much more useful to understand it as a cultural condition. From this perspective, the appropriate comparison for Deafness would be "individuals who are members of other dominated and oppressed cultural and linguistic groups".⁵ In essence, this view understands Deaf people as a particular social-cultural community. In recent years, at a global level, this is the view that has gained the most credibility.

¹ Stander, Marga, and Guy McIlroy. 2017. 'Language and Culture in the Deaf Community: A Case Study in a South African Special School'. *A Journal of Language and Learning Per Linguam* 33 (1): p. 84

² Stander, Marga, and Guy McIlroy. 2017. 'Language and Culture in the Deaf Community: A Case Study in a South African Special School'. *A Journal of Language and Learning Per Linguam* 33 (1): p. 85

³ Reagan, Timothy, Claire Penn, and Dale Ogilvy. 2006. 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments in Post Apartheid South Africa'. *Language Policy* 5: p. 188

⁴ Reagan, Timothy, Claire Penn, and Dale Ogilvy. 2006. 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments in Post Apartheid South Africa'. *Language Policy* 5: p. 188-189

⁵ Reagan, Timothy, Claire Penn, and Dale Ogilvy. 2006. 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments in Post Apartheid South Africa'. *Language Policy* 5: p. 189

South Africa, in relation to this 'either/or' dynamic, presents a particular case. Indeed the countries specific socio-economic framework and political history suggests that the idea that Deaf people might have a choice between pathologisation or socio-cultural identity is not as clear-cut:

“Notwithstanding the ideological choices offered by the pathological and sociocultural views, most deaf people in South Africa are not really in a position for this dualistic choice to constitute their reality. Access to the social and economic infrastructure, which is necessary for the ideological choice to be meaningful, is simply not available to most of the deaf in contemporary South African society. This means that in a context such as that of South Africa the choice is in fact driven not by belief or ideology, but rather by poverty and economic constraints.⁶

Globally the Deaf community has focused on being able to contribute to the societies in which they live as equals. This does not mean that Deaf identity is static or monolithic. Rather, as with any other identity that is socially constructed, influenced by particular socio-political and economic forces and historically specific, Deaf identities vary from country to country.⁷ South Africa's Deaf community arises out of issues specific to South Africa these include Apartheid, a history of institutional racism and a lack of socio-economic access for Black Deaf people. Given this, it is arguable that the issues that transgender people might more generally face such as unemployment, lack of access to healthcare, violence, familial regulation, difficulties with housing are exasperated by being Deaf and indeed the possibility of dual pathologisation.



1 Kute Mabirimisa, Edwin Khatiti, Danny Manamela. Photo by Boitumelo Nkopane. ©Irant

⁶ Reagan, Timothy, Claire Penn, and Dale Ogilvy. 2006. 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments in Post Apartheid South Africa'. *Language Policy* 5: p. 190

⁷ Morgan, Ruth. 2014. 'A Narrative Analysis of Deafhood in South Africa' 32 (3): p. 256

Transgender, LGB, Gay and LGBTIQ+ Intersections

“Despite the equality clause in the Constitution of 1996 which prevents discrimination on the basis of disability as well as sexual orientation, Deaf lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered, and intersexed (lgbti) people are largely invisible in South Africa as they are usually deeply closeted”⁸

The emergence of Deaf people as visible members of the transgender community is relatively recent. In light of this very little research is available. Much of the work in this report then draws on work with transgender people; work with Deaf people and Deaf LGB/gay research, in an effort to fill some of this gap. It must be noted from the outset that this is far from ideal and that much more work needs to be done globally to address the absence of knowledge regarding the needs of LGBTIQ+ people who are deaf and/or have disabilities. It is widely agreed, as this report will attest to, that there is a distinct lack of visibility of Deaf transgender people globally. In turn, this has meant a limited availability of what is referred to as ‘survival literature’ - any form of published academic, creative or visual material that validates existence. This is particularly severe when it comes to the public visibility of Deaf transgender people of colour.

In light of issues regarding the absence of research, this report will be very clear when it is referring to LGBTIQ+ or LGB people and when it is referring to transgender people only. In no way are the experiences of (or the acronym) LGBTIQ+, as is common in broader social justice work, meant to stand in for the particular experiences of transgender people. Secondly, throughout this report both the capital ‘D’ and the small ‘d’ will be used in relation to the term ‘deaf’. When capitalised as ‘Deaf’ the term acknowledges that Deaf people are part of a unique cultural and linguistic community where being deaf is a trait and not a disability. Many Deaf people acknowledge the rights gained through disability legislation but do not consider themselves to be disabled. This is far from an uncontentious issue within the broader Deaf community globally, with some people arguing that the capital indicates a type of Western academic imperialism.⁹ Given these issues, this report follows the guidance of the group that met at Iranti. This is to use Deaf with a capital ‘D’ as well as deaf with a small ‘d’ - the first to indicate community and identity the second to indicate experience.

The parallels between the experiences of Deaf people and LGBTIQ+ people more generally are striking. The large majority of LGBTIQ+ people are raised in heteronormative and

⁸ Willemsse, Karen, Ruth Morgan, and John Meletse. 2009. ‘Deaf, Gay, HIV Positive, and Proud: Narrating an Alternative Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa’. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 42 (1): p. 85

⁹ Kusters, Annelies, Maartje De Meulder, and Dai O’ Brien. 2017. ‘Innovation in Deaf Studies: Critically Mapping the Field’. In *Innovations in Deaf Studies: The Role of Deaf Scholars*, 1–56. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

cisnormative environments while “more than ninety percent of Deaf people are born into hearing families”.¹⁰ This, in both cases, often leads to experiences of extreme loneliness, isolation, feelings of invisibility and oppression both in society and within families. Moreover, in the current day and age, for transgender people in particular, both groups have “often been considered psychologically disturbed...deaf children have frequently been misdiagnosed as developmentally disabled”.¹¹ As people considered to have disabilities Deaf people are often desexualised or have their sexual desires rendered as undesirable and by extension invisible. Often the public perception of deafness is ‘deaf and dumb’ this impacts on the notion that Deaf people might know who they are and what it is they desire. In turn, this severely impacts the ways in which Deaf transgender people are able to make themselves known and explain their feelings regarding their gender identity and expression. It must be stressed from the outset that experiencing various minoritising identities such as being both Deaf and transgender cannot be treated as an additive experience. Rather membership in multiple oppressed groups creates particular interactions and outcomes. For Deaf transgender people, as was illustrated in the Saturday meeting, the ability to be visible and the acknowledgement of their existence currently is key.

This report begins by outlining Deaf transgender advocacy as it currently stands globally, followed by a mapping of the situation as it currently stands for Deaf LGBTQIA+ and transgender South Africans. With this background in place the report unpacks the Saturday meeting between Iranti and members of South Africa’s Deaf transgender community. This is followed by an overview of Deaf advocacy in Africa and then Deaf transgender advocacy in South Africa specifically. The report then provides an overview of key issues, possibilities for future advocacy efforts and suggestions for immediate changes that might be made. Finally the report highlights some key concerns at the intersections of transgender and Deaf advocacy particularly regarding language and depathologisation.

¹⁰ Gianoulis, Tina. 2018. ‘Deaf Culture’. *Glbtc.Com*. February 20. http://www.glbtcarchive.com/ssh/deaf_culture_S.pdf.

¹¹ Gianoulis, Tina. 2018. ‘Deaf Culture’. *Glbtc.Com*. February 20. http://www.glbtcarchive.com/ssh/deaf_culture_S.pdf.

DEAF TRANS ADVOCACY IN REGIONS OUTSIDE OF AFRICA

In the US there is a distinct visibility, particularly online, of Deaf people who are transgender-identified. Much of the current advocacy and the visibility of Deaf transgender people though is white dominated and reflects white experience. In the 1970s LGBTIQ+ people in the US started the Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf (RAD), which is now one of the oldest organisations catering to Deaf LGBTIQ+ people in the world.¹² Today, several independent organisations exist in the US and Canada aimed at addressing the needs of the LGBTQIA+ Deaf community markedly the US the National Association of the Deaf actually has an LGBT specific wing. The diversity in Deaf LGBTIQ+ culture is evident from the existence of groups such as the International Deaf Leather Organisation.¹³

Deaf advocacy, as with hearing community, has largely been targeted at gay and lesbian people and has only recently started to include transgender individuals. It is notably much easier to be out or visible in the US and Europe, given the wider availability of resources and organisations.

An often-sighted example of particularly good work aimed at Queer Deaf people is the Deaf Queer Resource Centre (DQRC), based in the US, started in 1995. Described as a “virtual community centre online”, the DQRC is, in essence, a national information and resource centre that exists virtually providing counselling, information and educational workshops through the web.¹⁴ Planet Deafqueer (<http://planet.deafqueer.com/>) is also a considerable resource for Deaf LGBTQIA+ people in the US. In an effort to be more globally useful the website has been fitted with a translator app.

It must be stressed that this visibility has, perhaps surprisingly, not equated to the availability of resources for Deaf LGBTQIA+ people, let alone Deaf transgender people specifically. The recent report by Transgender Europe (TGEU), *Oppression Squared: D/deaf and disabled trans experiences in Europe*, seems to be one of the most comprehensive and informative studies and resources currently available globally. Alongside this, there are a handful of other projects and/or studies, which provide some insight into the needs and experience of Deaf transgender people. ‘Count Me in Too’ (CMIT) was a project launched in the UK to look at the experienced of disabled and Deaf LGB and T people. The survey data though not directly translatable to the South African context highlights some crucial issues:

¹² Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2017. ‘Rainbow: Constructing a Gay Deaf Black South African Identity in a SASL Poem’. *African Studies* 27 (3): p. 340

¹³ <http://internationaldeafleather.org/>

¹⁴ Barr, Billy. 2003. ‘Interview with Dragonsani Renteria, DQRC Founder’. *Deafqueer*. September 1. <http://www.deafqueer.org/411/about/interview.html>.

- Prejudice, suicidal thoughts, domestic violence, abuse, discomfort using public services and housing issues are more likely to affect LGB and T people who are disabled and/or Deaf, compared to other LGB and T people
- Gender/sexual identity is a particular source of discomfort in relation to being D/deaf when accessing health services
- Deaf or disabled LGB and T people are statistically twice as likely to struggle to access suitable accommodation
- Deaf LGB and T people feel isolated from LGB and T movement, activities, groups and events but also feel similar exclusion with regards to Deaf events - marginalised by their dual identities
- Access to information regarding help or assistance available to Deaf people from LGB and T organisations is considered difficult to access. Some organisations and services are experienced as actively antagonistic¹⁵

Key Issues¹⁶

- Difficulties in meeting and knowing other LGB and T people
- Lack of validation of identities
- Few images of Deaf LGB and T people in society but also in relation to services about or for Deaf LGB and T people
- Lack of acceptance by non-disabled LGB and T people and communities
- Lack of organisational policies and skilled staff
- Lack of access to adequate mental support and healthcare
- Lower income than hearing people, higher HIV status and mental health difficulties

¹⁵ Debenham, Claire. 2011. 'An Assessment of the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGB and T) People in the East Sussex Area Using or Needing to Use Adult Social Care's Services Claire Debenham Service Development Manager- Equality Adult Social Care January 2011'. East Sussex County Council. <http://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk/JsnaSiteAspx/media/jsna-media/documents/localbriefings/ESCC-LGBT-needs-assessment-march2012.pdf>.

¹⁶ Debenham, Claire. 2011. 'An Assessment of the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGB and T) People in the East Sussex Area Using or Needing to Use Adult Social Care's Services Claire Debenham Service Development Manager- Equality Adult Social Care January 2011'. East Sussex County Council. <http://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk/JsnaSiteAspx/media/jsna-media/documents/localbriefings/ESCC-LGBT-needs-assessment-march2012.pdf>. p. 15

SOUTH AFRICA

Before 1994 Deaf people in South Africa fell into the broad category of people deemed pathological and deviant by the Apartheid state, alongside LGBTQIA+ people more broadly. Though much has changed since 1994, for both groups, the stigma of this assignation for Deaf people has been difficult to shift and the situation for Deaf people, regardless of rights, has not improved significantly.¹⁷ Given the Constitutional protections of LGBTQIA+ and Deaf people in South Africa, in comparison to the rest of the continent, (and in some cases globally) both groups have access to a rigorous rights regime. This does not negate the high levels of violent crime experienced by LGBTQIA+ people, particularly those who are Black. Moreover South Africans specific socio-economic challenges coupled with a generalised ignorance regarding deafness and the Deaf Community allow for on-going marginalisation.

In 2011 Stats SA released the first comprehensive profile on persons with disabilities in South Africa based on the census data. The national disability prevalence rate is 7,5% in South Africa and of that 3,6% have hearing difficulties¹⁸. The national socio-economic profile is such that the majority of Deaf South Africans are far more economically disadvantaged in comparison to their hearing counterparts.¹⁹ Deaf people more generally struggle to gain equal access to health care, education, food, legal services, water and social security.²⁰ DeafSA estimates that at least 70 percent of Deaf people in South Africa are unemployed and live in informal settlements. Alongside this literacy levels are extremely low.²¹

South African Sign Language (SASL), Literacy and Interpretation

The validity of estimates is difficult to verify but the number of people believed to be using South African Sign Language (SASL) ranges from 500 000 to 1.5 million²². SASL, though a recognised language, is not one of South Africa's official languages. It is critical that SASL is understood as a *language* with its own syntax and grammar. It is not, as many hearing

¹⁷ Willemse, Karen, Ruth Morgan, and John Meletse. 2009. 'Deaf, Gay, HIV Positive, and Proud: Narrating an Alternative Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa'. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 42 (1): p. 84

¹⁸ Statistics South Africa. 2014. 'Census 2011: Profile of Persons with Disabilities in South Africa'. 03-01-59. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-01-59/Report-03-01-592011.pdf> p. vii

¹⁹ Heap, Marion, and Helen Morgans. 2006. 'Language Policy and SASL: Interpreters in the Public Service'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslies Swartz, Maguerite Schneider, Thereza Lorenzo, and Mark Priestly, 135–47. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 139

²⁰ Heap, Marion, and Helen Morgans. 2006. 'Language Policy and SASL: Interpreters in the Public Service'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslies Swartz, Maguerite Schneider, Thereza Lorenzo, and Mark Priestly, 135–47. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 139

²¹ Heap, Marion, and Helen Morgans. 2006. 'Language Policy and SASL: Interpreters in the Public Service'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslies Swartz, Maguerite Schneider, Thereza Lorenzo, and Mark Priestly, 135–47. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 139

²² Heap, Marion, and Helen Morgans. 2006. 'Language Policy and SASL: Interpreters in the Public Service'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslies Swartz, Maguerite Schneider, Thereza Lorenzo, and Mark Priestly, 135–47. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 139

people wrongly believe, a visual/special form of English. Instead SASL is translated into a spoken language such as English and visa versa so that Deaf and hearing people might communicate.²³ Signed language does not have a written form thus Deaf South Africans learn another language, often English, as their language of literacy.²⁴ This written language is a separate and secondary communication form to sign language.²⁵

SASL's lack of status as an official language in South Africa has meant, in part, that it is rarely used in schools as a the main medium of instruction. It is however taught at the Universities of the Free State and the Witwatersrand.²⁶ Up until 1994, Black Deaf children largely used SASL. Apartheid schooling meant manual signing was used in Black schools while white schools were strictly oral. One of the reasons for this was "oral education involves relatively expensive hearing aids and intensive, on-going speech and language therapy to be effective. Such resources, while available for white children, were not generally made available to others²⁷". Poorly resourced Apartheid education meant having to rely far more on sign language while it was disparaged among white children. Since democracy researchers have noted a marked shift by white Deaf children towards learning SASL.²⁸ For a significant number of Deaf South African SASL is their primary vernacular.

There is a notable lack of assistive services in South Africa. As mentioned in the meeting finding interpreters, let alone interpreters who are either LGBTQIA+ or LBTQIA+ friendly remains a major hurdle.²⁹ The lack means that many Deaf people are confined to their families or dependant on their families for support. This also contributes to low levels of employment and poor education outcomes. The lack or difficulties in access affect Deaf South Africans ability to finish school enter higher education, leading to their increasing invisibility in higher education settings. As a consequence, Deaf people either employed in

²³ Glaser, Meryl, and Theresa Lorenzo. 2006. 'Developing Literacy with Deaf Adults'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslie Swartz, Thereza Lorenzo, Maguerite Schneider, and Mark Priestly, 192–206. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 195

²⁴ Glaser, Meryl, and Theresa Lorenzo. 2006. 'Developing Literacy with Deaf Adults'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslie Swartz, Thereza Lorenzo, Maguerite Schneider, and Mark Priestly, 192–206. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 194

²⁵ Glaser, Meryl, and Theresa Lorenzo. 2006. 'Developing Literacy with Deaf Adults'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslie Swartz, Thereza Lorenzo, Maguerite Schneider, and Mark Priestly, 192–206. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 195

²⁶ Heap, Marion, and Helen Morgans. 2006. 'Language Policy and SASL: Interpreters in the Public Service'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslie Swartz, Maguerite Schneider, Thereza Lorenzo, and Mark Priestly, 135–47. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 144

²⁷ Reagan, Timothy, Claire Penn, and Dale Ogilvy. 2006. 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments in Post Apartheid South Africa'. *Language Policy* 5: p. 191

²⁸ Stander, Marga, and Guy McIlroy. 2017. 'Language and Culture in the Deaf Community: A Case Study in a South African Special School'. *A Journal of Language and Learning Per Linguam* 33 (1): p. 86

²⁹ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2017. 'Rainbow: Constructing a Gay Deaf Black South African Identity in a SASL Poem'. *African Studies* 27 (3): 342

menial positions or are unemployed, reliant on the state disability grant.³⁰ There is a strong relationship between disability and poverty.³¹ Statistics South Africa suggests that these issues combined with the historical effect of Apartheid's poor education policy for groups other than whites has meant on going deep levels of inequality with regards to school attendance, employment, income and educational access.³² The average reading age of a deaf person in South Africa is statistically lower than that of a deaf person globally. Finally, many Deaf people have very little knowledge about their rights to dignity and equality this is particularly true for LGBTQIA+ Deaf people who also often lack a language for themselves.



2 Kute Mabirimisa, Edwin Khatiti, Danny Manamela. Photo by Boitumelo Nkopane. ©Irant

In Chapter 1 (6) 5 the Constitution of South Africa created Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) which is empowered to promote and assist in developing the official languages of South Africa, including sign language.³³ PanSALB has funded several projects to

³⁰ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2017. 'Rainbow: Constructing a Gay Deaf Black South African Identity in a SASL Poem'. *African Studies* 27 (3): 341

³¹ Statistics South Africa. 2014. 'Census 2011: Profile of Persons with Disabilities in South Africa'. 03-01-59. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-01-59/Report-03-01-592011.pdf> p. 153

³² Statistics South Africa. 2014. 'Census 2011: Profile of Persons with Disabilities in South Africa'. 03-01-59. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-01-59/Report-03-01-592011.pdf> p. 153

³³ Reagan, Timothy, Claire Penn, and Dale Ogilvy. 2006. 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments in Post Apartheid South Africa'. *Language Policy* 5: p. 198

train SASL interpreters.³⁴ They have also been involved with DeafSA to try ensure the recognition of SASL as an official language.³⁵ Currently, only Uganda and Swaziland recognise sign language as an official language.³⁶ During the early 90's the Human Sciences Research Council along with the South African National Council for the Deaf (now DeafSA) undertook a project run collectively by a group of hearing and deaf researchers to develop a SASL dictionary. Politically its intention was to provide a status and identity to Deaf people in South Africa while also providing a space for them to meet and develop a policy for their own language³⁷. In 2001 a National Language Board for SASL was also created aimed at furthering this promotion of SASL³⁸. South Africa has the earliest record of deaf education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since the first school established in 1863, another 44 have followed. Of these only 10 are academically focused, the rest focus on practical skills.³⁹

Key Issues⁴⁰

- Lack of information on HIV and STDS
- Lack of accessible educators/ awareness workshops
- Lack of information on rights
- Lack of accessible care providers/carers for information, emotional support and counselling
- Lack of information and counselling through sign language as a medium
- Lack of trained interpreter services
- Lack of resource networking
- Need to unify signs for medical concepts, illnesses and experiences that require access to healthcare
- Lack of education on the impact of SASL when treating and caring for Deaf people
- Refusal of a majority of SASL interpreters to sign sex-related signs
- Lack of confidentiality, and code of ethics and good practice for interpreters
- High illiteracy levels which makes reading the written word difficult

³⁴ Heap, Marion, and Helen Morgans. 2006. 'Language Policy and SASL: Interpreters in the Public Service'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslies Swartz, Maguerite Schneider, Thereza Lorenzo, and Mark Priestly, 135–47. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 136

³⁵ Stander, Marga, and Guy McIlroy. 2017. 'Language and Culture in the Deaf Community: A Case Study in a South African Special School'. *A Journal of Language and Learning Per Linguam* 33 (1): p. 87

³⁶ Akach, Philemon Abiud Okinyi. 2010. 'Application of South African Sign Language (SASL) in a Bilingual-Bicultural Approach in Education on the Deaf'. Doctor of Philosophy Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State.

³⁷ Reagan, Timothy, Claire Penn, and Dale Ogilvy. 2006. 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments in Post Apartheid South Africa'. *Language Policy* 5: p. 193

³⁸ Reagan, Timothy, Claire Penn, and Dale Ogilvy. 2006. 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments in Post Apartheid South Africa'. *Language Policy* 5: p. 193

³⁹ Akach, Philemon Abiud Okinyi. 2010. 'Application of South African Sign Language (SASL) in a Bilingual-Bicultural Approach in Education on the Deaf'. Doctor of Philosophy Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State.

⁴⁰ Philpott, Sue. 2007. 'Study on HIV and Disability: Draft Report'. Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library p. 114

Organisations, Groups and Social Spaces

DeafSA was established in 1929 and has nine provincial chapters in South Africa. Other notable organisations include Deafblind South Africa, SHHH and the Sign Language Education and Development (SLED). Like many other South African movements, Ruth Morgan argues that politically the Deaf community, in South Africa, has often put forward a united and homogenised identity while suppressing other overlapping identities that might draw away from the case for mainstreaming.⁴¹ There is some mention of their once having been a 'Deaf Association for Gays of Southern Africa' but no proof to this organisation's actual existence⁴². At one point Cape Town based LGBT NGO the Triangle Project ran a Deaf LGBT support group. A hearing counsellor working with an interpreter facilitated the group. The group collapsed after interpreting services became difficult to secure.⁴³ There was an LGBT committee of the Bedfordview Deaf Club although the group was predominantly white and Deaf Black LGBTQIA+ people in Johannesburg found attendance difficult due to distance and transport costs.⁴⁴ Social spaces have existed in the past. As John Meletse, one of the first openly gay Deaf men in South Africa and orchestrator of the original meeting with Iranti has noted, "It is very important for Deaf gay people to have a social space where they can interact freely with each other. However there is very few of these spaces available and the few attempts to start organisations have failed"⁴⁵

Meeting Reflection

On the 17th of February 2018, representatives from Iranti met with Gay and Trans members of the Deaf community in South Africa. The aim of the meeting was to map out the experiences and needs of transgender South Africans who are deaf. This was done in the hopes of finding possibilities for future joint and inclusive advocacy efforts. From the outset it became clear, emulating the progression of the hearing LGBT movement, that though there has been some work done addressing the needs of Deaf LGB/Gay people very little has been done for transgender people specifically. Work undertaken by the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives (GALA) based at the University of the Witwatersrand under the

⁴¹ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2017. 'Rainbow: Constructing a Gay Deaf Black South African Identity in a SASL Poem'. *African Studies* 27 (3): p. 340

⁴² See: <http://www.fayllar.org/disability-all-sorts-a-directory-of-organisations-and-resource.html?page=6>

⁴³ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2012. 'Deaf Gay Life Stories'. presented at the World Federation for the Deaf (WFD) Congress, Durban, July.

https://www.gala.co.za/resources/docs/Deaf_gay_life_stories_Meletse_Morgan_WFD_2011.pdf.

⁴⁴ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2012. 'Deaf Gay Life Stories'. presented at the World Federation for the Deaf (WFD) Congress, Durban, July.

https://www.gala.co.za/resources/docs/Deaf_gay_life_stories_Meletse_Morgan_WFD_2011.pdf.

⁴⁵ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2012. 'Deaf Gay Life Stories'. presented at the World Federation for the Deaf (WFD) Congress, Durban, July.

https://www.gala.co.za/resources/docs/Deaf_gay_life_stories_Meletse_Morgan_WFD_2011.pdf.

guidance of Dr Ruth Morgan and John Meletse in 2002, a deaf gay man, was noted as one of the key interventions for LGB community.

In recent years, as an advocate for Deaf LGBT people, John explained that he had been approached by an increasing number of Deaf transgender youth looking for information about themselves and access to resources. He noted that this alone suggested a lack of accessible and explanatory information for this particular community. He suggested that though people might live/ express themselves in particular ways there was a deep lack of language when it came to ways in which Deaf transgender people might identify themselves as transgender. He also noted a lack of knowledge and understanding within the Deaf community more broadly.

One of the major challenges for the Deaf LGBTQIA+ community in South Africa is the lack of organisational support. Existing entities either focus on Deaf people or LGBTQIA+ people but rarely the two in combination. Again mimicking the hearing community, within this transgender people are particularly invisible. This is true even though Deaf transgender people themselves take part in mainstream LGBTQIA+ events such as Soweto Pride and various Gay Pageants include Miss Gay Pride.

Aside from the lack of organisational overlap, sign language itself was also highlighted as a barrier. South African Sign Language (SASL) has particular lingo for various terms, often groups who identify with these terms use these. These signs are not as widely available within mainstream sign. This means the avenues through which a Deaf person might find language to describe themselves are limited. The group themselves noted that they had their own in-group terminology and signals for their identity, signs they were reluctant to share because they are of importance to their sense of self. Alongside this language used within a given group may differ. For instance, during the session, John used a particular sign to indicate finding 'middle ground'. Two other Deaf trans people, who had accompanied him, immediately asked him to stop and explain what he had just signed. Once the others understood they then showed him how they indicated 'middle ground', both examples of which were clearly different from his signing of it.



3 Kute Mabirimisa, Edwin Khatiti, Danny Manamela, John Meletse. Photo by Boitumelo Nkopane. ©Irant

The question of where and how Deaf people might access information and training to understand their own feelings and expressions and even pronoun use was one that was stressed throughout. Deaf people are not only left out when educational materials are created but they are also excluded in the processes of their inclusion. It was pointed out, given the way in which language develops, that organisations often rely on interpreters to translate materials for the Deaf community rather than Deaf people themselves. In these instances, the interpreters are often not members of the LGBTQIA+ community and/or not deaf themselves. Their use of language and knowledge of the dialect to sign what it might mean to indicate LGBTQIA+ is therefore limited. Interventions created with Deaf people in mind need to start with Deaf people because, though a step forward, communication through interpreters is not ideal. Moreover as noted there is great difficulty in finding interpreters who are either LGBTQIA+ friendly or LGBTQIA+ identified themselves, finding those who are either transgender or understand what it might mean to be trans is even more difficult.

The pool of available interpreters in South Africa is limited. Interpreters themselves are reluctant to identify as openly gay in South Africa let alone transgender. Companies and NGOs often neglect to include interpreters in their budget. This means that Deaf transgender people will often be invited to events but end up “counting the bugs on the

It was stressed that there is a need to focus on the natural standardisation of the language when referring to LGBTQIA+ issues and rights but within this, there will always be lingo. There is a cultural pride in relation to lingo, which the Deaf LGBTQIA+ community is reluctant to share with the straight community. As one participant stated this is because “they communicate differently. It is ours and it is our cultural pride”. The group acknowledged though that to increase visibility it would be necessary to document those signs signifying LGBTQIA+ identity, especially for interpretation services. It was emphasised that as with most languages standardisation has taken place within the purview of the Deaf heterosexual community. This has allowed for the widespread use of disrespectful signs to indicate specific identities. As an example, John pointed out that often the sign for homosexuality used by the heterosexual deaf community was one that indicated anal sex. He found this to be insulting and denigrating.

It was noted that a workshop on sexual orientation and gender identity aimed at Deaf people would be a first for that community. The group stressed:

- The need to *mainstream* their experiences as Deaf transgender people
- The need for broader education for the wider Deaf community
- The need for education and access to materials for transgender Deaf people specifically
- The need for workshops or education regarding rights, access, sexual health and sexual identity were highlighted as key
- The need to bring transgender people who are Deaf onto an equal footing with their hearing counterparts
- The need to include Deaf transgender people from the outset in any program and not just rely on interpreters

Key needs:

- Educating the hearing community on Deaf community and Deaf culture
- Helping those who look or behave ‘differently’ and are teased as a consequence but do not have the language to explain themselves
- Shift how the LGBTQIA+ community operate in order to increase accessibility for the Deaf community. This is particularly with regards to events such as Soweto Pride or the Africa Trans Health, Advocacy and Research Conference
- Interpreters who are part of LGBTQIA+ community or familiar with LGBTQIA+ culture
- Standardisation and dissemination of South African Sign Language (SASL) around queer issues
- Resources for the Deaf community on LGBTQIA+ issues particularly sexual health
- Access to public health for transgender people
- Not being victimised as people who are transgender and Deaf when entering clinics

Suggested Interventions short/medium

- Filmed workshops on transgender-specific issues, general LGBTQIA+ issues for the Deaf community and mental and sexual health
- Document stories and workshops as resources
- Educational opportunities so Deaf and hearing LGBTQIA+ can function together
- Sensitisation training with healthcare workers on Deaf LGBTQIA+ issues
- A silent short film/ web series exploring struggles: acted out by members of the deaf community
- Stories by Deaf LGBTQIA+ people from Deaf LGBTQIA+ people for Deaf LGBTQIA+
- Collaborative efforts with organisations already dealing with specific issues. For example, working with organisations that already work with LGBTQIA+ families or DeafSA

Suggested interventions long term

- Research report
- Documented intervention at government and policy levels
- National outreach to find people who are transgender and Deaf

On several occasions, both the absence and desire for knowledge by Deaf transgender people in the meeting was glaring. While hearing presenters used acronyms such as 'LGR' (Legal Gender Recognition) without explanation, expecting those present to already have this lingo. Those from the Deaf community on more than one occasion stopped presented in order to ask for more information or an unpacking of terminology. This suggests that even the most basic language used by organisations can come across as exclusionary to a community that has had very little access to any form of language. As a community, Deaf people feel very marginalised. The notion of 'mainstreaming' came up more than once in relation to various spaces. The lack of space for LGBTQIA+ Deaf people to meet was also flagged in several instances. Moreover, the lack of effort by LGBTQIA+ organisations, to even do the minimum, is experienced as deeply demotivating and isolating for the Deaf transgender people.

Standard workshop methods also presented particular problems for the group. For instance, at one point it was suggested we break into smaller groups to brainstorm short, long and medium term interventions. This was immediately flagged as difficult because there was only one interpreter. This suggests that either resources need to be increased or the very methods organisations rely on to workshop particular issues need to be moulded with this particular audience in mind.

Moreover, it was also suggested that the subtitles of a web series or the current Iranti content might be put in a variety of African languages. Pointing, again, to the general lack of knowledge regarding the Deaf communities needs it was highlighted that Deaf people largely understand and use English, rather than other African languages because this is their language of literacy or second language to SASL. When the discussion of documentation came up, the extent of how resource-poor the community is became clear. It was requested that even the current workshop should have been recorded for dissemination. It was explained that what hearing people forget is that filming sessions directly assists in capturing the intrinsic nuances of sign language for specific topics. Filming is considered a particular form of 'note taking' by the Deaf community more broadly. Whereas in other settings for hearing communities a five minute post workshop synopsis would suffice, for the transgender Deaf community, given their current needs, the entire sessions needed to be recorded.

Side issues

There were questions and concerns regarding the place of transgender people in the church and furthermore whether any of the churches aimed at the LGBTQIA+ community had interpreters. It is often the case that mainstream churches are more likely to have interpreters while LGBTQIA+ churches are more accepting of LGBTQIA people but do not have facilities for Deaf people. Towards the end of the session, there was some confusion over whether resources were going to be targeted at Deaf transgender people specifically or the wider Deaf community and the wider LGBTQIA+ community in order to create greater awareness. It was concluded that there was a need for a strategy split between what hearing people need to understand and what Deaf people need to know. Many of the issues the LGBTQIA+ Deaf community face are the same as the hearing LGBTQIA+ community but experienced as compounded by their deafness. Issues raised in the workshop were often not purely about deafness or being deaf and LGBTQIA+ but rather about how being LGBTQIA+ is sidelined in the deaf community and being deaf is sidelined in the LGBTQIA+ community.

DEAF ADVOCACY IN AFRICA

The key human rights document for deaf and disabled people globally is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities ([A/RES/61/106](#)) (CRPD), which South Africa ratified on 30 November 2007. The purpose of this treaty is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity (Article 1). States are bound to take appropriate measures to promote accessibility of information and communication services. This includes forms of live assistance and intermediaries, readers and professional sign language

interpreters (Article 9).⁴⁶ This is particularly relevant in terms of how Deaf people might access their right to health and in fact a myriad other rights. The CRPD is considered a step forward in recognising the rights of Deaf people who are dependant on sign language, “the relevant provisions do not contain hard obligations for government that can be enforced immediately⁴⁷”.

Deaf children across the continent tend to be treated as a burden or bad omen by families. As with South Africa, education is severely lacking, as is access to interpreters. Due to the stigma associated with deafness and perceived notions of ‘dumbness’, Deaf people are often denied the opportunity to live independently.⁴⁸ Deaf people can also be seen as helpless and burdens, this exposes them to abuse and sexual violence but also makes their survival intimately dependent on their families. The lack of interpreters also means a lack of personal in judicial, clinic and state settings to assist Deaf people. Several studies highlight the dangers to Deaf people who cannot access adequate healthcare without assistance⁴⁹. Outside of South Africa the access to tertiary education for Deaf people becomes even more challenging. Given this lack, it is unsurprising that very little published material documenting the experiences of Deaf people in Africa by Deaf people themselves exists. By extension “the record for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed (lgbti) and Deafhood is even less impressive”.⁵⁰ In light of this it is particularly notable that in 2015 Gender Links Mauritius as part of their commitment to the Mauritian 16 Days of Activism brought together various sectors of the LGBT community including deaf and blind members.⁵¹

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) considers the Africa region to be one of the weakest of its seven regions globally. Many countries across the continent have at minimum at least one organisation that deals with the needs of their internal Deaf community. Some of the key issues the community beyond South Africa’s borders face include unemployment, lack of access to social grants, gender-based violence and the abandonment of deaf

⁴⁶ Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. ‘Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa’. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): p. 55

⁴⁷ Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. ‘Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa’. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): p. 56

⁴⁸ Fullerton, Katie. 2013. ‘Deafness in Sub-Saharan Africa’. *The Borgen Project*. August 6.

<https://borgenproject.org/deafness-in-sub-saharan-africa/>.

⁴⁹ See: Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. ‘Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa’. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): 54–66.

⁵⁰ Willemse, Karen, Ruth Morgan, and John Meletse. 2009. ‘Deaf, Gay, HIV Positive, and Proud: Narrating an Alternative Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa’. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 42 (1): p. 85

⁵¹ Virawsahmy, Loga. 2015. ‘Southern Africa: Calling for Inclusive Societies on Human Rights Day’. *Gender Links*. December 10. <http://genderlinks.org.za/news/southern-africa-calling-for-inclusive-societies-on-human-rights-day-2015-12-10/>.

children.⁵² The WFD has done work aimed at strengthening the capacity of communities in Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Cote de l'ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. They suggest that the key issue for Deaf people across the African continent is the lack of respect for their human rights.⁵³ The WFD recognises minorities within its field of work and “strongly emphasises the need for equitable access by women and minorities in deaf communities including...deaf Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender communities”⁵⁴. The LGBTQIA+ Deaf community globally is considered a Special Interest Group to the WFD and they are acutely aware of the on-going marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ people within the Deaf community globally. In relation to how this might work for their African regional groupings this commitment to marginalised communities with the broader Deaf community is unclear.

When external aid has taken place with regards to Deaf people across the continent, the situation is often that the communities themselves are not listened to and/or Deaf people are not directly involved. This is why in the meeting; the group stressed on several occasions their belief that they, as Deaf people, needed to be intimately involved in any work going forward. Among studies that do exist the key factor to ensuring long-lasting change for organisations, communities and individuals has been including Deaf people at every stage of planning, facilitation and progress.⁵⁵ In part, this is because different Deaf communities have different cultures due, in part, to their having to straddle various cultural identities while also identifying as Deaf. The Deaf community has its own culture and members will know it best.

The Deaf Peer Education Manual created in 2007 by the Development Marketplace of the World Bank is considered one of the few examples of a training manual, which addresses issues of sexuality, sexual health and HIV aimed at young Deaf people in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is meant to be interactive and managed through a peer education process. The manual is a great example how to have interactive/participatory activities or workshops aimed at including Deaf people. The manual also highlights that because sign language vocabulary is limited it is worth encouraging Deaf people to create their language. The manual also includes a section highlighting terms through images that refer to specific healthcare issues in order to assist practitioners in communicating with Deaf patients.

⁵² Sinkamba, Percos. 2011. 'Zambia: Caring for the Deaf'. *Gender Links*. July 1.

<http://genderlinks.org.za/programme-web-menu/zambia-caring-for-the-deaf-2011-06-26/>.

⁵³ World Federation of the Deaf. 2016. 'Our Projects'. *WFD*. December 2. <https://wfdeaf.org/our-work/our-projects/>.

⁵⁴ World Federation of the Deaf. 2015. 'XVII WFD Congress Resolutions'. *WFD*. August 14.

<https://wfdeaf.org/about-us/world-congress/xvii-resolution/>.

⁵⁵ Wilson, Amy, and Nickson Kakiri. 2011. 'Best Practices in Collaborating with Deaf Communities'. In *Deaf Around the World*, edited by Gaurav Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli, 271–85. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Andersson, Yerek. 2011. 'Deaf Mobilization Around the World'. In *Deaf Around the World*, edited by Gaurav Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli, 271–85. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DEAF TRANS ADVOCACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

“The Deaf people always ignore me but I act a woman...I have suffer our Deaf community have blamed me about my body”⁵⁶

In 2002 John Meletse and Ruth Morgan initiated the *Deaf LGBT Oral History Project* at the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archive (GALA) Johannesburg, South Africa. This project was the first and only of its kind on the continent. It ended due to a loss of viable funding.⁵⁷ Though focused on LGBT people in a way that centred gay identity there were members of this research project who did identify as transgender through the project or came to identify as such later. This was, in part, due to the fact that the project provided some of those present with a language of self that had not previously encountered. This section draws from some of the projects archive highlighting the gendered experiences of Deaf LGBT people and the brief transgender narrative of one particular participant.

The project showed that gender plays a critical role in how Deaf LGB and T people are treated. Deaf children often go to special schools. In these schools staff and learners don't necessarily understand different gendered identities.⁵⁸ Not fitting into specified gender roles can lead to bullying and criticism: “if boys act like girls or girls act like boys they are in trouble”⁵⁹. Schools present as precarious zones for those who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Some Deaf children stay in hostels connected to Deaf schools, these are experienced as paradoxical sites of early sexual and gendered exploration and homophobia and transphobia. Indeed, “deaf schools which are usually the most important spaces for the transmission of Deaf culture, where peer groups replace families in terms of support...are not safe spaces due to lack of awareness about gender and gay issues and rights”⁶⁰.

For one of the Oral History Projects participants'— who would later come to identify as transgender— school was a place where she was teased for walking and acting like a woman. She was also often asked if she was a man or a woman because she wore the girl's uniform shirt. She remembers the time as one where she felt a certain sadness regarding

⁵⁶ Tsoetsi, Oupa. 2005. 'Deaf Oral History Project 2005'. Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library.

⁵⁷ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2011. 'HIV/AIDS and Deaf Communities in South Africa'. In *Deaf Around the World*, edited by Gaurav Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli, 308–15. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 308

⁵⁸ Meletse, John. 2007. 'Are Your Sexual Rights Being Respected?' Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library. Accessed March 2 p. 5

⁵⁹ Meletse, John. 2007. 'Are Your Sexual Rights Being Respected?' Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library. Accessed March 2 p. 6

⁶⁰ Meletse, John, and Ruth Morgan. 2007. "'I Believe in Myself and Am a Strong Deaf Gay (Person)": An Oral History Project with Deaf Gay and Lesbians in South Africa'. presented at the World Federation of the Deaf, 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library, June 20.

her body. When she asked her teacher about these issues and experiences, the teacher expressed shock. Regardless her family treated and accepted her as a woman, while confusingly at school the teachers often separated her into the girl's groups.⁶¹

This struggle for recognition and understanding within the Deaf community maintains itself into adult life.⁶² Indeed, LGBT rights are not seen as Deaf rights by the majority of Deaf people.⁶³ Though the GALA project itself did not directly address transgender issues there are multiple strands of their findings that are useful to this report. This section draws from some of the advocacy work and research findings of that project.

Healthcare

As was clear following the initial meeting with the group healthcare is a critical concern on several fronts. The first is generalised healthcare pertaining to sexual health and mental well being in particular and the second access to gender-affirming healthcare. In both cases, there is a very little available information directed at transgender people who are deaf. Moreover, in general healthcare practitioners are either transphobic or treated Deaf people as though they do not know what they need. The transphobia⁶⁴ experienced is that much more pernicious than that experienced by those in the hearing community because there is the extra hurdle of having to 'prove' oneself in spite of Deafness. Due to the simultaneity of issues - being transgender and Deaf at the same time - it may be the case that the various healthcare practitioners, a Deaf transgender person interacts with, will not understand one or more facets of their identity. For instance, it would seem likely that any Doctor willing to prescribe hormones may have very limited knowledge of SASL and a healthcare practitioner addressing issues dealing with Deafness may have very little knowledge about transgender identity and needs.

⁶¹ 'Deaf Oral History Project 2005'. Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library.

⁶² Meletse, John, and Ruth Morgan. 2007. "I Believe in Myself and Am a Strong Deaf Gay (Person)": An Oral History Project with Deaf Gay and Lesbians in South Africa'. presented at the World Federation of the Deaf, 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library, June 20.

⁶³ Morgan, Ruth. 2007. 'World Federation of the Deaf Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered (LGBT) EXPERT REPORT (2003-2007) SOUTH AFRICA'. 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library.

⁶⁴ See: Collison, Carl. 2017. 'Trans People Seek Bias-Free Healthcare'. *The M&G Online*. Accessed August 3. <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-07-28-00-trans-people-seek-bias-free-healthcare/>; Wilson, Don. 2013. 'Transgender Issues in South Africa, with Particular Reference to the Groote Schuur Hospital Transgender Unit' 104 (6): 449–51.

Sexual and Mental Health

“I saw many Deaf people who were HIV positive, but they were not disclosing their status. Some knew their status but could not talk about it due to the stigma attached to being HIV positive. I could see they had swollen glands and were losing their hair and getting very thin. Then they got sick and died without saying anything. Other Deaf people believed that they had been bewitched by *sangomas* [traditional healers], and that’s why they became sick and died. They didn’t believe they had AIDS- related illnesses. Due to lack of communication many Deaf people don’t know about HIV/AIDS. They don’t understand why the two words are used together”⁶⁵

Given the lack of resources in combination with the lack of available interpreters generally, and LGBTIQ+ friendly interpreters, in particular, there is notable lack of access to information across several key issues areas critical to Deaf transgender lives. In the Deaf community more broadly there is a distinct lack of information with regards to sexual and mental health. Although there are many organisations in South Africa, which focus on these issues, there are very few educational materials targeted at Deaf youth and adults. Pamphlets are often indecipherable and use jargon beyond the literacy level of a large portion of Deaf South Africans. Access to clinics is hindered by insufficient provision for communication. The underlying belief and stigma around people perceived as disabled being desexualised exacerbates this situation.

As part of the *Deaf LGBT Oral History Project*, an educational comic for Deaf youth was developed with illustrations and South African Sign Language. In speaking to one of the creators of the comic, Cherea Halley, she noted that the comic was a very positive step in broader Deaf sexual health education. The problem was that it still required people to distribute it and to be able to engage with it. This meant that eventually, the roll out of the comic required the actual investment of its creators, John Meletse being one of them. During this roll out it was discovered that deaf teaching assistants from Deaf schools held a set of inaccurate beliefs regarding HIV. For example, one Deaf teaching assistant believed that eating beetroot, in fact, caused HIV/AIDS. This was a direct result of what she had understood from the Minister of Health at the time.⁶⁶ One of the major hurdles for the project was the lack of available SASL terminology. The comic creators had to come up with this, for Halley this was one of their major tasks and areas of greatest success - the expansion of SASL. Another misconception was the idea that HIV positive meant ‘well’ or

⁶⁵ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2011. ‘HIV/AIDS and Deaf Communities in South Africa’. In *Deaf Around the World*, edited by Gaurav Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli, 308–15. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 308

⁶⁶ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2011. ‘HIV/AIDS and Deaf Communities in South Africa’. In *Deaf Around the World*, edited by Gaurav Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli, 308–15. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 309

'good' due to the function of the PLUS sign as a positive more generally in SASL.⁶⁷ This issue of miscommunication when translating to SASL is not an anomaly; several studies mention the confusion Deaf people experience when accessing healthcare services directly related to language issues.⁶⁸ In some cases research has suggested that Deaf people may actually contract HIV due to insufficiently explained information. The inability to understand material and communicate with healthcare providers is a major hurdle for Deaf patients.⁶⁹

Due to lack of interpretation services Deaf people are often not provided with pre or post test counselling leaving them traumatised. Deaf youth interviewed in the *GALA Deaf HIV/AIDS Project* noted that it was commonly perceived that they could not fall in love and could not have sex⁷⁰. Studies show that Deaf patients often experience misdiagnosis, delayed diagnosis, a lack of standard care as experienced by hearing people and a general lack of proper treatment.⁷¹ Deaf patients who do not understand treatment, their diagnosis, not being able to convey necessary information or ask questions and patients who do not understand adherence, is common⁷². In light of this Deaf people are often reluctant to seek healthcare largely because they deem it ineffective and a waste of time. Some Deaf people send family members or friends in their place to access medication or to communicate follow up visits. In doing so missing out on medical check-ups.⁷³ Written communication can also prove difficult in that many Deaf South Africans, as noted, are poorly educated or not able to write English or understand their healthcare practitioners handwriting.⁷⁴ Moreover, many Deaf people have experienced healthcare professionals who expect them to provide

⁶⁷ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2011. 'HIV/AIDS and Deaf Communities in South Africa'. In *Deaf Around the World*, edited by Gaurav Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli, 308–15. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 309-310

⁶⁸ See: Senne, Tshgefotso. 2016. 'Deaf Women's Lived Experiences of Their Constitutional Rights in South Africa' 30 (1), Morgan, Ruth, John Meletse, and Sibusiso Kheswa. 2009. 'Creating Memory: Documenting and Disseminating Life Stories of LGBTI People Living with HIV'. In *From Social Silence to Social Science: Same-Sex Sexuality, HIV & AIDS and Gender in South Africa*, edited by Vasu Reddy, Theo Sandfort, and Laetitia Rispel, 117–23. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 118-119

⁶⁹ Senne, Tshgefotso. 2016. 'Deaf Women's Lived Experiences of Their Constitutional Rights in South Africa' 30 (1): p. 72

⁷⁰ Philpott, Sue. 2007. 'Study on HIV and Disability: Draft Report'. Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library p. 4

⁷¹ Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. 'Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa'. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): 54–66.

⁷² Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. 'Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa'. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): p. 62

⁷³ Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. 'Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa'. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): p. 62 Steinberg, Sullivan, and Loew 1998).

⁷⁴ Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. 'Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa'. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): p. 62

their own interpreters and who treat them with irritation when they do not. Having to bring one's own interpreter raises questions about confidentiality.⁷⁵ In summation:

“Deaf adults are exposed to knowledge about human sexuality from a number of sources but are much more limited than hearing persons, who can overhear conversations on the bus or watch television without having to read someone's lips”⁷⁶

Trans-Specific Healthcare

There is a distinct absence of data on the magnitude of health inequalities and experiences that characterise the experiences of health for transgender people globally⁷⁷. For the majority of countries in the world there is no data whatsoever available regarding transgender health. Moreover what research does exist rarely, if ever, includes trans people with disabilities or Deaf trans people.⁷⁸ This gap in research is important to consider in terms of the generalizability of current health research across regions and geographical settings.⁷⁹ It is notable that the general health of transgender people is the least researched aspect of the transgender global burden of disease.⁸⁰ Whereas mental health is most studied. Yet, a key social determinant of health for transgender populations worldwide is access to gender affirmation. Accessing affirming healthcare presents several burdens to the average transgender South Africa. For Deaf people, some of these issues are exacerbated by the very guidelines for access, which may not have taken them adequately into consideration. For instance, the WPATH guidelines suggest a period of psychotherapy prior to accessing affirming healthcare. This can be difficult for trans people who are deaf because it requires entering into a particular kind of communicative relationship usually with a psychologist or psychiatrist. This often means, in order to facilitate discussion, having an interpreter present. As has been noted finding interpreters who understand and are knowledgeable about LGBTQIA+ issues is an on-going problem in South Africa. These barriers are similar in relation to accessing general mental healthcare for transgender

⁷⁵ Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. 'Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa'. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): p. 63

⁷⁶ Zakarewsky, George. 1979. 'Patterns of Support Among Gay and Lesbian Deaf Persons'. *Sexuality and Disability* 23 (Fall): p. 186

⁷⁷ Reisner, Sari L, JoAnne Keatley, Mauro Cabral, Tampose Mothopeng, Emilia Dunham, Clarie E Holland, Ryan Max, and Stefan D Baral. 2016. 'Global Health Burden and Needs of Transgender Populations: A Review'. *Lancet* 388: p. 412

⁷⁸ Reisner, Sari L, JoAnne Keatley, Mauro Cabral, Tampose Mothopeng, Emilia Dunham, Clarie E Holland, Ryan Max, and Stefan D Baral. 2016. 'Global Health Burden and Needs of Transgender Populations: A Review'. *Lancet* 388: p. 422

⁷⁹ Reisner, Sari L, JoAnne Keatley, Mauro Cabral, Tampose Mothopeng, Emilia Dunham, Clarie E Holland, Ryan Max, and Stefan D Baral. 2016. 'Global Health Burden and Needs of Transgender Populations: A Review'. *Lancet* 388: p. 422

⁸⁰ Reisner, Sari L, JoAnne Keatley, Mauro Cabral, Tampose Mothopeng, Emilia Dunham, Clarie E Holland, Ryan Max, and Stefan D Baral. 2016. 'Global Health Burden and Needs of Transgender Populations: A Review'. *Lancet* 388: p. 428

people from the Deaf community. The experience of having to engage in a therapeutic relationship with someone who does not sign can be extremely damaging.⁸¹

Access to Justice and the State

Barriers to communication are not only a hindrance in health service settings but also in police stations, courts and in general interactions with the state. This creates a direct barrier to the realising substantive citizenship.⁸² Research done with Deaf Black women in South Africa shows that those who are reliant on state healthcare are prevented from exercising their rights and participating as substantive citizens in an inclusive South African society as a result of their lack of linguistic rights. The reliance on SASL interpreters to access the state leaves marginalised Deaf people vulnerable, Tshegofatso Senna, argues that this is a direct result of the fact that SASL is not recognised as an official language. Recognition would entitle the Deaf population to interpreting services, particularly when trying to access public services.⁸³ Indeed it is broadly agreed that interpretative and translation services are an integral and indispensable component to the provision of access to services on the basis of equality.⁸⁴

For Deaf transgender people, in particular, there is the added stigma of transphobia and the pathologisation of both deafness and trans identity along with the generalised ignorance regarding transgender identities.⁸⁵ These factors in combination may make it harder for people who are both Deaf and LGBTQIA+ to make themselves known. Although studies suggest that it is often more difficult for young black Deaf LGBTQIA+ to come out in their hearing families than it is to do so within the Deaf community.⁸⁶ The negative reaction to issues regarding sexual orientation and gender identity can mean being forced onto the streets or being disowned. This scenario is less of a reality for white Deaf LGBTQI+ people in South Africa given that “they are generally more resourced and independent in comparison to their black counterparts”.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Whalen, Mel L. 2013. ‘Deaf Female-to-Male (FTM) Identity Explored’. Ypsilanti, Michigan: Submitted to the Department of Psychology Eastern Michigan University.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1428427636?pq-origsite=gscholar>

⁸² Senne, Tshegofatso. 2016. ‘Deaf Women’s Lived Experiences of Their Constitutional Rights in South Africa’ 30 (1): p. 72

⁸³ Senne, Tshegofatso. 2016. ‘Deaf Women’s Lived Experiences of Their Constitutional Rights in South Africa’ 30 (1): p. 73

⁸⁴ Heap, Marion, and Helen Morgans. 2006. ‘Language Policy and SASL: Interpreters in the Public Service’. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslies Swartz, Maguerite Schneider, Thereza Lorenzo, and Mark Priestly, 135–47. Cape Town: HSRC Press. p. 136

⁸⁵ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2017. ‘Rainbow: Constructing a Gay Deaf Black South African Identity in a SASL Poem’. *African Studies* 27 (3): 341

⁸⁶ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2017. ‘Rainbow: Constructing a Gay Deaf Black South African Identity in a SASL Poem’. *African Studies* 27 (3): 341

⁸⁷ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2017. ‘Rainbow: Constructing a Gay Deaf Black South African Identity in a SASL Poem’. *African Studies* 27 (3): 341

“The fact that Deaf LGBTIQ+ people are for the most part invisible in South Africa is not surprising given apartheid’s legacy of social segregation, imbalanced resources, and double stigmatisation. Deaf and LGBTIQ+ people are both discriminated against by a society that does not understand what it means to be Deaf or what it means to be LGBTIQ+ These inequalities are still felt in the black Deaf world to a much greater extent than in the white Deaf world where white Deaf people have more resources and can be more open about their sexual orientation. It is also harder for Deaf black people to be LGBTIQ+ than for black hearing people as most hearing LGBTIQ+ people of all races are able to exercise their right to be open about their sexual orientation and identity.⁸⁸

When Deaf people cannot communicate with healthcare providers they are denied ‘informational’ access to healthcare. As a direct consequence, their health and by extension human rights are violated. Again it has long been an argument that the introduction of SASL interpreters on the basis of sign language being recognised as an official language would go some way to rectifying this situation.⁸⁹ When Deaf people cannot communicate within myriad settings their many rights are compromised as is their health and wellbeing.

For many the ability to tell their parents about who they are hinges on economic freedom through employment. Given the high rate of unemployment of Deaf people and their economic dependency on families and the state, the barriers to this are notable. The Deaf community for all the participants in the *Deaf Oral History Project* had a negative attitude towards their sexuality and their expressions of gender. Moreover the combination of being both Deaf and gay (and transgender) left many feeling that finding employment was ultimately impossible. Those who did find employment for instance within Deaf organisations like DEAFSA western cape found a level of hostility from other colleagues or an outright expectation that they should ‘act normal’.

Moreover, because Deaf people may often live with their families or in support based environments these can be a hindrance to their expression of their gender identity. These issues are more likely to occur in familial and institutional settings, “because institutions often fail to take into account the specific needs of individuals and are not focused on

⁸⁸ Morgan, Ruth, and John Meletse. 2017. ‘Rainbow: Constructing a Gay Deaf Black South African Identity in a SASL Poem’. *African Studies* 27 (3): p. 340

⁸⁹ Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. ‘Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa’. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): p. 55

enabling people to express themselves. It is also more likely that institutional transphobia will exist within large public organisations”.⁹⁰

As noted when discussing being handcuffed by the police, engagement with the state is particularly difficult for Deaf transgender people. In South Africa access to ID books is prohibitively expensive⁹¹. Furthermore staff at the Department of Home Affairs generally do not know about Act 49 — which gives transgender people the right to adjust their documents – or simply refuse to adhere to it⁹². This is done due to a combination of wilful ignorance and because the Act lacks accompanying protocols. Moreover to engage with the State would require an interpreter and these services are not provided at DHA offices. The fact that staff often ask invasive questions and do not understand the Act can only exacerbate the situation for a Deaf person. Deaf transgender people then, like many South Africans, may simply live without adequate documentation. Although people would ordinarily apply for disability grants if they have no or limited income, this can be challenging for Deaf transgender people if they do not have legal gender recognition.

Summary of Key Issues in South Africa

- Lack of available information on HIV and STDS
- Generalised Healthcare access issues
- Lack of accessible educators/ awareness workshops
- Lack of information on rights
- Lack of accessible care providers/carers for information, emotional support and counselling
- Lack of information and counselling through Sign language as a medium
- Lack of trained interpreter services and LGBTQIA+ friendly interpreters
- Lack of resource networking
- A need to unify signs for medical concepts and diseases
- Lack of education on the impact of SASL when treating and caring for Deaf people⁹³
- Refusal of a majority of SASL interpreters to sign sex and gender-related signs
- Lack of confidentiality and code of ethics and good practice for interpreters
- High illiteracy levels among Deaf people which makes reading the written word difficult⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Gale, Nathan. 2017. ‘Oppression Squared: D/Deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences in Europe’. *Transgender Europe (TGEU)* p. 28

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⁹³ Philpott, Sue. 2007. ‘Study on HIV and Disability: Draft Report’. *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). ‘Deaf Project’ 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library* p. 114

⁹⁴ Philpott, Sue. 2007. ‘Study on HIV and Disability: Draft Report’. *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). ‘Deaf Project’ 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library* p. 114

- Health care practitioners often mainly concerned with Deaf peoples medical and functional support overlooking their personal, emotional or other health needs. This can lead to exclusion from general screening programmes, resulting in shortened life expectancy and avoidable health problems.
- Generalised lack of access to healthcare including affirming healthcare
- Cost and difficulty of accessing mental healthcare support because of the added cost of an interpreter
- Lack of available language for LGBTI identities and the use of derogatory signs to indicate specific identities such as signalling homosexuality with the sign for anal sex.⁹⁵
- Transgender identity can often be experienced in ways quite specific to the individual this may get lost in interpretation or be negated by the interpreter
- Being Deaf is often treated as a mental disability and by extension Deaf transgender people are often denied the same rights to make decisions about their lives and healthcare. This is particularly true for affirming healthcare, which remains largely inaccessible. The lack of access, information and even language for oneself can compound or create mental health issues which further exacerbate this situation⁹⁶
- Misconceptions around Deaf peoples sexuality and desires⁹⁷
- Economic exclusion on the basis of unemployment due to Deafness, cost of public transport, inaccessible information and the reliance that Deaf people have on others for particular needs can also be a form of gatekeeping in that those that assist may be unwilling to assist with LGBT related issues⁹⁸
- Prohibitive costs
- Hostile staff making the process even more difficult
- The need to have two letters from doctors or mental healthcare practitioners which can be enormously difficult for Deaf people
- Communication difficulties with officials
- In general Deaf transgender people come into contact with organisations that have a record of their legal gender more often than non-disabled trans people”.⁹⁹ This is particularly true when for instance they might be assessing government grants, social welfare, social support this puts them at increased risk of discrimination.

⁹⁵ Collison, Carl. 2017. 'Queerness, Desire and Disability'. *Mail & Guardian*. February 22. <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-02-21-queerness-desire-and-disability>.

⁹⁶ Gale, Nathan. 2017. 'Oppression Squared: D/Deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences in Europe'. *Transgender Europe (TGEU)* p. 19

⁹⁷ See for example: Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 3, Article 6: Women and girls with disabilities, 2016 at pages 10 and 11: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/GC.aspx> (20.11.2017);

⁹⁸ Gale, Nathan. 2017. 'Oppression Squared: D/Deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences in Europe'. *Transgender Europe (TGEU)* p. 19

⁹⁹ Gale, Nathan. 2017. 'Oppression Squared: D/Deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences in Europe'. *Transgender Europe (TGEU)* p. 31

- Attitudes, gatekeepers, poor access and a lack of autonomy are the main issues that impact on D/deaf and disabled trans people’s access to healthcare
- A lack of choice and control over who provides them with assistance with everyday living can prevent Deaf transgender people from freely expressing their gender identities and accessing the trans-specific healthcare

Possibilities for Future Joint Advocacy Efforts



4 Eva Mofokeng. Photo by Boitumelo Nkopane. ©Irantti

One of the major hurdles for any organisation when dealing with Deaf constituents is the inaccessibility of information, which makes accessing even the most basic benefits of an organisation frustrating if not impossible. It also sends a message to Deaf people that they either do not exist for the organisation or that their needs have been given no consideration.¹⁰⁰ Besides Deaf organisations LGBTQIA+ organisations should be the number point of access for Deaf LGBTQIA+ people, but currently they are not. There are several barriers that transgender people who are Deaf experience. Some of these were mentioned or experienced in the meeting and will be highlighted. One of the major critiques of organisations that have worked with Deaf communities in the past is the way in which Deaf communities are not treated as partners. Often they are approached as objects of pity.¹⁰¹ Several organisations

and activists suggest that what is necessary to ensure the welcome inclusion of Deaf people is to fundamentally shift organisational culture by viewing access for all as fundamental to

¹⁰⁰ Gale, Nathan. 2017. ‘Oppression Squared: D/Deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences in Europe’. *Transgender Europe (TGEU)* p. 38

¹⁰¹ Wilson, Amy, and Nickson Kakiri. 2011. ‘Best Practices in Collaborating with Deaf Communities’. In *Deaf Around the World*, edited by Gaurav Mathur and Donna Jo Napoli, 271–85. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 271

the culture of an organisation rather than an afterthought. Having Deaf board members, volunteers or employees sends a powerful message about who the organisation might belong to. Key issues for Deaf people more generally:

- A lack of visibly Deaf people use in images and media
- Lack of general accessibility information regarding premises and spaces not provided
At the meeting this was visible in the difficulty Deaf participants had finding the Iranti office, getting upstairs, accessing the building and finding the toilets.

Options

- Provide ways in which Deaf people can take part in the organisation even if voluntarily
- Have a particular staff member responsible for communicating and facilitating Deaf constituents access and needs
- Begin the process of subtitling or adding SASL to all available media. This would be particularly fruitful in terms of reaching a wider Deaf audience.
- Some organisations such as the American based *DC Centre* host sign language workshops for their staff and members of the broader LGBTQIA+ community. This is done in order to ensure greater communication and facilitation when engaging with members of the Deaf community. Classes are donation only.¹⁰²
- As was stressed at the meeting it is widely agreed that the key to inclusive Deaf trans advocacy is working with Deaf people and with the organisations they feel best represent some of their needs. Approaching *DeafSA* might be one way to begin a dialogue regarding transgender needs. It seems that this has been the standard approach for national deaf organisations globally.
- Working with providers to produce trans specific healthcare information and more general information regarding sexual and mental health and gender identity
- Including healthcare practitioners in work with Deaf people in trans awareness or gender identity workshops
- Since SASL is taught at a tertiary level in some universities (particularly Wits), ensuring that LGB and T issues, and in particular relevant signs, appear on the curriculum in some form would be useful. This might be done through approaching the Wits Language School
- Collaborate with Deaf people and Deaf organisations to provide information on legal gender recognition in alternative formats such as video content

- By including Deaf people in future media you can assist in denaturalising dominant discourses, ideologies and ideas.¹⁰³ It also begins the process of affirming to Deaf transgender people that they are valuable, exist and are worthy.

This implies not just sign language interpretation or Deaf specific content but including Deaf transgender people in Iranti's media productions as an existing element of the broader transgender community. This assists with mainstreaming, an issue that was mentioned on several occasions as a clear goal and desire for Deaf transgender people in South Africa. Mainstreaming remains an integral aim not as a form of assimilation but rather "as an acknowledgment that disability cultures form an integral part of the diversity, multiculturalism and multilingualism that constitute South African society".¹⁰⁴

- Offer a training exchange with a Deaf or Disability rights organisation as a skills share
- One of the planned activities for the original GALA based project, one which was also mentioned in the meetings between Iranti and the Deaf transgender community, was the possibility of a web series. This would make learning on various topics but particularly gender identity and expression more accessible.¹⁰⁵
- Include Deaf people in strategic consultations and advocacy work
- Trained interpreter services are essential for Deaf South Africans' constitutional right of access to healthcare because they provide informational access. This is something to consider when advocating for, assisting with or explaining access to affirming healthcare

Organisational Changes

- Have a variety of mediums that people can use to contact the organisation, including phone, e-mail, online form, in writing
- Create an access policy for events highlighting things to remember and keep in mind in order to centre accessibility
- Use graphics and symbols on information leaflets, reports, announcements etc. to aid access and understanding.

¹⁰³ Stadler, Meryl. 2006. 'Media and Disability'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslie Swartz, Thereza Lorenzo, Maguerite Schneider, and Mark Priestly, 373–86. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 375

¹⁰⁴ Stadler, Meryl. 2006. 'Media and Disability'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslie Swartz, Thereza Lorenzo, Maguerite Schneider, and Mark Priestly, 373–86. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 379

¹⁰⁵ Morgan, Ruth. 2013. 'Concept Note to Continue a Partnership between GALA and Anova Health on Deaf HIV/Aids Awareness Project for the Period May to December 2013'. 'Deaf Project' 2438072 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library.

- Put up signage to assist Deaf people around the office space. Signage should be clearly worded, with few words. Sans-serif, large-type font should be used, with a high contrast with the background sign material¹⁰⁶

Clearer graphic signs addressing the following would assist: Emergency exits, toilets and changing facilities, kitchens and places to get drinking water, stairs and lifts/elevators and accessible facilities, entrances or routes, where they differ from primary or main ones.

- Enable staff to undertake a basic sign language course so that there are people within the organisation who are able to communicate with SASL speakers
- Provide graphic facilitation training to staff members with a facilitation role within the organisation so that they can deliver workshops that are accessible to Deaf people (this might be achieved through a skills exchange)
- When creating events make sure to advertise that there will be a sign language interpreter, captions or subtitles (general access information). This lets Deaf people know they are welcome. At events themselves reassure people that they are welcome as are their ways of communication. If the event lacks a form of accessibility it is also recommended to make that known so that Deaf constituents can make informed decisions.

A suggested way to mitigate costs in terms of provision is to provide a means of RSVP, which needs to take place within a required time frame asking people to state if they need an interpreter. Alternately provide printouts or visual materials. Though it may be necessary to know for instance how many, if any Deaf people are attending, it is important to make the deadlines for this info known and to not require more medical info than absolutely necessary. Treat any info as private and confidential¹⁰⁷

- Make time for breaks so people don't experience exhaustion
- When providing transport consider accessibility needs but also produce access standards that can be given to external organisations and individuals providing workshops so that inclusion is extended to those who provide services to the organisation or space
- Connect with a local Deaf transgender people or Deaf organisations offering a skills exchange as a free or low-cost way of having a sign language interpreter at events.
- It may be more prudent when trying to include Deaf people to hold events during the day
- Provide remote access or recording of events

¹⁰⁶ Murray, Ellen. 2018. 'Writing Good Accessibility Information: A Guide To Making Your Work, Campaigning and Communities Accessible to Disabled People'. Accessed February 25. <https://ellenmurray.co.uk/accessible/>.

¹⁰⁷ Murray, Ellen. 2018. 'Writing Good Accessibility Information: A Guide To Making Your Work, Campaigning and Communities Accessible to Disabled People'. Accessed February 25. <https://ellenmurray.co.uk/accessible/>.

- Provide clear and concise travel information prior: point-by-point access information to Irandi. Provide building info and images. One of the best ways to make venues, events and activism more accessible is to list publicly available access information. Listing accessibility info tells people they have been considered. It is also a way for Deaf people to figure out if they can attend and if it will be worth their while. This can be done simply by making it available online. This not only shows commitment but signals thought regarding the needs of Deaf trans people. If a venue is inaccessible or if you are unable to provide an interpreter this should be flagged. Accessibility information should be easy to find and easy to read. Perhaps a permanent page?
- Captioning is not used extensively in South Africa even though it is an inexpensive media innovation that serves Deaf audience members. Captions enable literate deaf people to understand television shows.¹⁰⁸

Some staff could be trained as captionists to transcribe real time what is being said in the projected onto a screen. Captioning is cheaper and more widely accessible though not interchangeable with Sign. To reiterate SASL is a language of its own different from English or Zulu or Xhosa¹⁰⁹

- Have a list of interpreters. If you do not have a list already ask Deaf people who they like to work with and they may be able to provide you with some contacts. Ask other organisations, interpreters, students or organisers. Developing a relationship with Wits may help in this regard¹¹⁰

More General

- Support the Deaf movements efforts to ensure the wider availability of interpreters particularly professional SASL interpreters as an integral part of the public service in South Africa
- Acknowledge Deaf transgender people's existence by simply mentioning them
- Advocate for the presence of Deaf transgender people at key meetings such as the *Africa Trans Health, Advocacy and Research Conference*
- Highlight Deaf transgender people's increased risk as a particularly vulnerable sector of the Trans community

¹⁰⁸ Stadler, Meryl. 2006. 'Media and Disability'. In *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda*, edited by Brian Watermeyer, Leslie Swartz, Thereza Lorenzo, Maguerite Schneider, and Mark Priestly, 373–86. Cape Town: HSRC Press p. 382-383

¹⁰⁹ British Columbia Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf. 2018. 'Volunteer Captionists'. *BCRAD*. Accessed February 22. <http://www.bcrad.com/volunteer-captionists/>.

¹¹⁰ British Columbia Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf. 2018. 'How to Book ASL-English Interpreters: An Introduction for (Broke) Community Organizers.' *BCRAD*. Accessed February 22. <http://www.bcrad.com/how-to-book-asl-english-interpreters-an-introduction-for-broke-community-organizers/>.

In Meeting and Workshops

- Good visual access is essential because the majority of Deaf people rely on visual information, due to this seating and lighting are critical
 - Reserve accessibility seating up front
 - Put interpreter close to the speaker or presenter. Too far away and Deaf people might have to look back and forth missing visual cues
 - This certainly happened in the meeting, in part due to the set up of the screen and visibility issues regarding standing and presenting
- Consistent bright light is needed for lip reading¹¹¹
- Vlogs with someone signing information is a one preferred and effective method of disseminating information to Deaf people¹¹²
- It is good to ask prior to starting a workshop or meeting if everyone can see the interpreter
- A suggested arrangement of a room is to have a U-shape with facilitators on the open end
- Any activity that requires Deaf people to move their attention back and forth from printed text to looking at signing or a flipchart/overhead projector can cause them to lose their place repeatedly. This is easily overcome by ensuring that all texts that are given have printed line numbers in the left-hand margin.
- Make sure that the Deaf people receive written documents in simple language.

¹¹¹ Lu, Alex. 2014. 'Making Queer Events Accessible for the Deaf Community: A How-To Guide'. Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf. <http://www.bcrad.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Making-Queer-Events-Accessible-for-the-Deaf-Community.pdf>.

¹¹² Lu, Alex. 2014. 'Making Queer Events Accessible for the Deaf Community: A How-To Guide'. Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf. <http://www.bcrad.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Making-Queer-Events-Accessible-for-the-Deaf-Community.pdf>.

CONCERNS

Though very little research is available on the needs of Deaf transgender people, there are some lessons that can be taken from broader research on the Deaf community and Deaf LGBTQIA+ people. In particular, there is the option to learn from the mistakes made and the issues faced. A crucial area of concern reiterated at several points during the meeting was language and the use of SASL. Language forms the basis of the right to information, the right to be treated with dignity, to participate in decisions, to give informed consent and to be treated with confidentiality and respect. A Deaf patient's inability to give informed consent, their right to health, right to information, to participate in decisions, to confidentiality and to be treated with respect and dignity is a direct consequence of language barriers.¹¹³ Not just in terms of communication but specifically available interpretation services and the actual substance of SASL.

It needs to be kept in mind that within Deaf communities signs shift in relation to the influence of political movements¹¹⁴. The sign, in American Sign Language, for transgender is a recent invention, created "in concert with a growing political community of Deaf and transgender folk".¹¹⁵ The sign for transgender was the result of Deaf transgender people coming together and recognising "the paucity of sign language to capture trans life".¹¹⁶ As the Deaf transgender community became more empowered through meetings and workshops they were able to innovate their own signs. In American Sign Language this currently looks like a flower closing in the centre of the chest and "while voiced as 'transgender', its visual meaning is "to accept all parts of myself".¹¹⁷ American Sign Language has often set the parameters of what signs have meaning. In the same way, as for the hearing, this movement of language has its own complications in that it can miss the nuances of gender already being expressed in the Global South. With regards to this being asked to teach the language of identity comes with a particular kind of responsibility. At the same time, as was pointed out in the meeting, some signs are an 'intimacy'. Deaf people may be reluctant to share the signs they use among themselves for intimate activities and

¹¹³ Haricharan, Hanne Jensen, Marion Heap, Fans Coomans, and Leslie London. n.d. 'Can We Talk about the Right to Healthcare without Language? A Critique of Key International Human Rights Law, Drawing on the Experiences of a Deaf Woman in Cape Town, South Africa'. *Disability & Society* 28 (1): 54–66.

¹¹⁴ Chen, Mel. 2012. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

¹¹⁵ Chen, Mel. 2012. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham and London: Duke University Press p. 82

¹¹⁶ Chen, Mel. 2012. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham and London: Duke University Press p. 82

¹¹⁷ Chen, Mel. 2012. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham and London: Duke University Press p. 82

concepts.¹¹⁸ These are all issues that will have to be negotiated in terms of sign language creation and use to express notions of gender identity and expression.

Triangle Project has facilitated workshops in the past on HIV, sexual health and STDS with the assistance of an interpreter for those who did attend and were Deaf this was a very positive step. Due to the fact that there was an interpreter the number of Deaf people in the workshop steadily increased. When the interpreter left the group fell apart and Deaf people stopped attending. The stories show evidence of having worked with LGB and T organisations like Triangle project in the past but ultimately finding the experience frustrating due to lack of acknowledgement, facilitation and seemingly being overlooked in favour of hearing people and projects¹¹⁹

Since Iranti is involved quite intimately with Depath it may be useful, as TGEU has done, to ensure that the issues being addressed and the language used do not perpetuate ableism. As the TGEU report points out there is a risk of ableism “in suggestions or implications that being diagnosed with a mental illness, or even just being associated with people who have a mental illness, is a bad thing”.¹²⁰ A secondary risk is linking mental illness with the stigmatising idea that it is not normal. In essence, suggesting that if transgender people were free of the mental disorder diagnosis they would be normal. It is also worth bearing in mind that trans advocacy around “trans-specific healthcare has the potential to improve access for D/deaf and disabled trans people. Medical treatment that is based on self-determination, advocates for bodily autonomy and removes gatekeeping restrictions would reduce many of the barriers faced by D/deaf and disabled trans people”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Kleinfield, Mari, and Noni Warner. 1997. ‘Lexical Variation in the Deaf Community Relating to Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Signs’. In *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality*, edited by Anna Livia and Kira Hall, 58–84. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 59

¹¹⁹ Richerd Pelton

¹²⁰ Gale, Nathan. 2017. ‘Oppression Squared: D/Deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences in Europe’. *Transgender Europe (TGEU)* p. 38

¹²¹ Gale, Nathan. 2017. ‘Oppression Squared: D/Deaf and Disabled Trans Experiences in Europe’. *Transgender Europe (TGEU)* p. 22

CONCLUSION

The Deaf community in South Africa is less well informed than the hearing community regarding issues relating to gender identity, expression and transgender rights. The LGBTQIA+ community, more broadly, rarely provides interpreters at social, educational or political events. This leaves Deaf transgender people often feeling trapped between the two. Although anecdotal evidence from the US suggests that due to the small size of the Deaf community and shared experiences of oppression Deaf people endure, Deaf people may be more likely than the hearing community to accept transgender members¹²² were they to understand what it means to be transgender.

There is a distinct lack of research, advocacy material, training tools and basic information regarding the needs of Deaf trans people globally. South Africa is no exception in this regard. It is widely agreed though that knowledge of sexual health, HIV/Aids, gender identity and issues regarding human sexuality continue to be sorely lacking. Part of the reason for this is that where material has been created it has often only been created with a hearing audience in mind. When information has been 'created' to address Deaf people specifically the approach most often undertaken has been to tweak existing material, which often, as with sexual health material addressing gay or heterosexual audiences, does not address the specific realities of Deaf transgender lives. Moreover because their materials in the form of health manuals or training tool are targeted at the border continent they are often cisgender focused and heteronormative in nature. They largely do not mention LGB populations let alone transgender people. Research with transgender populations rarely includes Deaf people while the inverse is also true for Deaf populations. In particular regarding Deaf transgender people research is one advocacy strategy that would not only affirm the lives of those who identify as such but also highlight their existence. There are distinct consequences to the failure of the hearing LGBTQIA+ community to communicate effectively with their Deaf counterparts. For instance, the lack of adequate sexual health information is one of the suggested reasons for the higher than average HIV infection rate among the Deaf.¹²³

John Meletse once told an audience over ten years ago "as long as the straight Deaf community continues to be homophobic and label black Deaf people, it will be impossible to establish a visible organisation for deaf LGBT people to come out."¹²⁴ It may indeed be the case that this is what is needed, either as a stand-alone body or a wing of DeafSA, much like

¹²² Zakarewsky lanhotlz and rendon

¹²³ Gianoulis, Tina. 2018. 'Deaf Culture'. *Glbtc.Com*. February 20.

http://www.glbtcarchive.com/ssh/deaf_culture_S.pdf.

¹²⁴ Meletse, John, and Ruth Morgan. 2007. "'I Believe in Myself and Am a Strong Deaf Gay (Person)": An Oral History Project with Deaf Gay and Lesbians in South Africa'. presented at the World Federation of the Deaf, 'Deaf Project' 2438075 Box 2 Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, William Cullen Library, June 20.

what has taken place in the US. In the meantime acknowledgment, active inclusion and visibility present themselves as the easiest and most straightforward steps to ensuring a shift in the visibility and access Deaf transgender people experience from LGBTQIA+ organisations. Moreover whatever projects are undertaken the centring of Deaf people not only as participants but also as fundamental contributors is crucial. It is clear that in South Africa there remains a massive gap between what Deaf transgender people have rights to and the ways in which they might access those rights. Most critical is the facilitation of communication and overcoming the barriers of information, which affects their health, their survival and indeed their very sense of self. The most basic complication for Deaf people globally is simply access. Being Deaf and transgender means that access – to information, to healthcare, to support – is not only critical but it is often life saving.

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