

"2 in 1" The experience of an intersex man continues...

And, this is how my life has been structured generally: where everyone who gets chance and opportunity will discuss me as if I'm not there or like I do not have feelings that get hurt from the unkind things they say to me and about me due to this condition of intersex or '2in1' like they say. ■

WORDS OF A PILLAR OF SUPPORT



By: Mpho Tekanyo

There is a saying in our culture "motho ke motho ka batho" it means that we coexist and are interdependent, example my being and meaning in the world can only be fulfilled by the being of the other. This implies recognition of the otherness of the other. I'm glad I was raised by a Christian family, and at a very early age I was taught unconditional love and tolerance and mostly never to judge because the only person who could judge us is the Almighty and no one was superior than Him and had any right to judge. I have trans and intersex friends and such I too am a member of Rainbow Identity Association as what is known as 'alliance membership'. I fully support the trans and intersex movement and all advocacy meant to curb trans-phobia and all resulting discrimination and stigma based on this sub-community's yearn to express their gender identity.

And the other challenge is that trans-women and men face is unemployment, reasons being their gender identity and expression, and if they do find jobs they are either mistreated, harassed, discriminated including invasion of their privacy, verbal abuse and physical or sexual assaults all due to a lack of understanding and acceptance of the difference trans and intersex people are born with. Many have lost their jobs due to insisting on freely expressing their gender identity that is perhaps not reflected by their identity document such as Omang and passport in the work place.

My greatest plea is that various key players in our communities begin to engage with trans and intersex people so as to have a 1st hand experience from interacting with this sub-community and getting to the core of their needs and concerns. It pains me more especially as a mother to imagine my child hypothetically one day opening-up to me about their being perhaps transgender and them having to go through life everyday being turned into everyone's prey just for something they did not choose to being. More needs to be done in order to protect future generations from living a life that is undignified by one's being themselves.

As the leader of the Alliance group in Rainbow Identity Association I have spent most of my time with transgender and intersex people and I have learned that in the LGBTI community they face more challenges than LGB. Reasons being gender based discrimination is a serious human right problem that plagues our society today, for example it is exceedingly difficult for trans and intersex people to access many service we the LGB community have access to like for example medical care or health facilities because at the clinics it is sex segregated, most trans people avoid getting needed medical care because of discrimination and harassment they face in the health care system (those irritating questions like: "wa re o eng, monna kana mosadi?" and instead of being assisted the nurse calls other nurses and you become the topic of the day). In family and friends functions, trans-women are denied entrance to all women spaces because they are not perceived to be "real" women in things like baby shower and bridal showers.

Trans-men are denied to help at family functions like funerals and weddings where cows are slaughtered for festivities they are told that it's a men's work not "want to be men", and they are forced to wear skirts when going to Kgotlas or they are denied entrance or worse punished for wearing trousers. ■



Events: Social Workers Workshop

The 2013 leg of this project saw yet another milestone forged between RIA and Botswana Social Workers Association when a collaborative workshop was hosted for social workers from the South-Central Region which had in it representation from Kweneng District, Gaborone and the South-East District. Much of what resulted from the workshop was a passion on the part of social workers who wished to be utilized more in getting the conversation into the home-stead where social workers have more access to than RIA; more programming is to come from this association between RIA and the Social Workers Association.

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THE IDENTITY ISSUE

THE iDENTITY ISSUE

26 September 2013 #2™
Newsletter

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inside!

★ FEATURE STORIES

“THROUGH THE EYE OF A
TRANS-WOMAN”

INSIDE STORIES

- ARRESTED AT A CLINIC
- WHAT IS NON-COMFORMITY
- REPUDIATE SOCIAL NORMS
- A CONVERSATION: FROM LOVE TO HATE

EVENTS:

BOTSWANA SOCIAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION WORKSHOP
MINISTRY OF HEALTH MEETING WORKSHOPS
BOMME-ISAGO WORKSHOP

MORE INSIDE | TRANS AND INTERSEX HEALTH ISSUES IN BOTSWANA |

Project Summary
from the Project Coordinator



Max Mabaka

The conceptualisation process for this 2year old project began in 2011 with a desire to see the gender discourse begin to broaden in its understanding and packaging of gender variance that is experienced by transgender, transsexual and intersex individuals in this country. Ideally, the project was geared towards invigorating the pace at which the issues, concerns and needs of trans and intersex persons such that it too became a topical issue of discussion when the rights of all people are discussed; so as to intensify social discourse around these needs of trans people. More pertinent of these rights being that of access to needed health care in the country. This project therefore took to open the dialogue between trans and intersex persons, their advocates and activists and health practitioners on how better to render health services to trans and intersex persons in a more welcoming and inviting manner, such was titled "The right of access to adequate health for all". The project was initialised for a year's duration but was then proposed for another extra year out of need to intensify talks with relevant health service providers and policy formula-tors on the various concepts surrounding trans and intersex lives before the groundwork for policy review can be sought.

This project facilitated talks with various District AIDS Councils (DMSACs) primarily in 2012 where various governmental departments, non-governmental and parastatals have seating and hold an advisory role on matters relating to HIV/AIDS in their respective districts. These meeting-workshops were highly successful in widening the radius to which our projects objective reached. One of the successes resulting from this was the talks that were open and are still on-going with the Ministry of Health to begin to incorporate trans and intersex specific medical and health needs in the mainstream health spectrum.

Part of this was to host in-practice trainings for health practitioners on the ground on the intricacies of dealing with trans and intersex clients, an initiative that is yet to be initialised.

The Universal Access project had various targets one of them being to produce advocacy tools that later advocates and activists through follow-up projects can use to continue to tell the stories of trans and intersex people in this country; their challenges and their needs. These tools came in the production of a DVD capturing real trans and intersex persons' stories as told by themselves as well as with this newsletter. This newsletter has been designed differently to most other newsletters as an additive to the DVD that will soon be accessible in telling these more of these stories and breaking the silence on the discrimination, intimidation, harassment and human rights violations experienced by trans and intersex persons in this country. In this newsletter we continue to capture the heroic survival stories of trans and intersex people in various spaces.

As we continue to make strides at influencing policy review and reform within the mainstream health spectrum, we continue to capture these inconvenient truths of the real experiences of trans and intersex persons in Botswana so as to use them later in years as advocacy for this sub-community continues to grow as well.

Our gratitude however, will forever go towards ARASA who funded this project from 2012 to its extension into 2013 and seeing the potential in this project.

We thank as well Rainbow Identity Association for housing this project and giving it a home from where it was executed. With this tool we hope that future projects will benefit from this initiative, thank you. ■



THE OBSTACLE (an opportunity) IN OUR WAY

By Maungo Mafhoko

It is said long time ago, a master had a boulder (rock) placed on a roadway. The master hid himself to see if anyone would remove the chunk of rock on the roadway. Some of the master wealthiest merchants and friends came by and simply walked around the rock. Many blamed the master for not keeping the road clear, but none did anything about getting the rock out of

It is said a peasant (poor man) came along carrying a load of vegetables. Upon approaching the rock, the peasant laid down his burden and tried to move the rock off the roadside. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded. After the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the stone had been.

The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the master indicating that the gold was from the person who removed the rock from the roadway. The peasant learned what most of us never understand:

“Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition”

I know there are times when identifying as trans or intersex seems like an obstacle, but perhaps it is an opportunity? Think about it. ■

ON THE COVER



Joseline Hernandez from “Love And Hip-Hop Atlanta” has been creating quite a stir on the internet since the reality show’s premiere. But what do we know about the 34-year-old aspiring rapper from Miami? Here are some titbits we’ve gathered from several spots around the web. She’s had more than one name. According to one site Hernandez was, “was trapping” that frap, performing under the stage name **Shenellica Bettencourt**.

Joseline Hernandez is also a transgender supermodel and actress in the USA.

NB: This cover story was to show the diversity of trans-people around the world.

This project was made possible by:



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email: rainbowid@aol.com

What is non-conformity continues...

The other problem they face is finding a partner. People fantasise about them and want adventure, but they still believe they are the confused lot therefore commitment is a nightmare for them. They are not commitment-phobic but rather it's difficult for them to find people who love them for who they are and not what they labelled themselves as. There are seen as stepping stones for the future. You toss them around and leave them, besides, they are the confused ones!

Dress code is another issue; Non-Conformers are just that, they do not conform. Most of them feel comfortable in certain clothes than others. As much most man would not feel comfortable in a dress, they have their choices. Unfortunately the restrictions in gatherings and workplaces put them under pressure. They do not attend funerals or Kgotla meetings because they do not want to be humiliated by being thrown out. They are ordered to dress according to how you are perceived by the outside world. In such spaces they dress to fulfil people desires, pathetic if you ask me! People who are very comfortable in their own clothes are dictating terms to them to dress the way they like, not you. Non-Conformers are just like porn's in a chess game, they don't matter.

Above all these I stand firm and say we all deserve to rip the fruits of humanity. For whichever is there, is for humans regardless of race, colour, age, Gender identity. People suddenly forgot being humane; Respect, acceptance and Love is pushed aside so that people fulfil their selfish desires. Everyone has a right to live a happy life, a respectable and honoured life. Love them for who they are for they are not taking anything away from you, if they are not stepping on your toes, why are you hell bent in destroying them. They are humans who search what you search in life. For you want respect and to be recognised, walk the talk and understand it is or might be your Sister, Mother, Brother and Lover. A Non-Conformer is a person just like all of us, with career goals and life plans! Why is it different with a Non-Conforming person? All they want is to be addressed in a certain way, why is it hard to accept it! Non-Conforming have the right to be addressed by name and pronoun corresponding to their Gender Identity regardless of Court ordered name or Gender change. Let's not forget addressing a Non-Conformer with an incorrect pronoun is a form of discrimination.

Non-Conformers face a huge challenge of Restrooms; it's unimaginable to picture how it is for a Non-Conformer to get into restrooms with only two labels of Men & Women. In either section you enter into, people look at you like you are an alien from Mars. They laugh or run out of the bathroom presuming they are being attacked by someone who should not be there. They would rather prefer to wait until they get home or get to a place where no one knows them. In our country there are no neutral restrooms to cater for these people.

Non-Conformers have the right to a restroom that corresponds to their Gender Identity like any other regardless of their Sex assignment at birth. This lot feel unsafe in either males or Females bathrooms. They are told that their identity is invalid; it's for the confused individuals who don't really know what they want. They are prone to Depression, because they feel they do not belong in any box. They feel their identity and self-concept is invalidated.

The Non-Conforming endure the same struggle even within the Transgender community, they are addressed as not man or woman enough. They are seen as finding a corner to run to, to avoid confrontations or not being content enough with themselves. Like any Box there is in the universe, we have the low esteemed and the people who feel they have no self-worth. It's bad enough that they do not see their worth, now imagine the burden of being called an invalid identity. Most Non-Conformers turn to alcohol and drugs for solace.

The other problem they face is finding a partner. People fantasise about them and want adventure, but they still believe they are the confused lot therefore commitment is a nightmare for them. They are not commitment-phobic but rather it's difficult for them to find people who love them for who they are and not what they labelled themselves as. There are seen as stepping stones for the future. You toss them around and leave them, besides, they are the confused ones!

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Love them for who they are for they are not taking anything away from you, if they are not stepping on your toes, why are you hell bent in destroying them. They are humans who search what you search in life. For you want respect and to be recognised, walk the talk and understand it is or might be your Sister, Mother, Brother and Lover. A Non-Conformer is a person just like all of us, with career goals and life plans! ■

“2in1” The experience of an Intersex Man

Story By: Zwenzimu Mgewu

I am Zwenzimu Mgewu; a young man of 27 years from Jackalas II. My mother works as a nurse who originally is from Jackalas II as well, whereas my father is from Tonota. I was born with a condition where I found myself with male and female genitals; which gave rise to people talking about and calling me a '2in1'. I have come to learn that medically this condition is known as inter-sexism or intersexuality.

At birth, the doctors said I was female and as such I was taken home to be raised like a girl for being categorised as female. They made me wear dresses at home just like girls should and I did that (wear dresses) till I was around 16 years of age I think, which was when I began to realise that I was actually a man.

This condition pains me because it is the reason why I left school; because I just did not understand what I was going to school for. Perhaps if I had been a stronger personality I could have stayed at school and looked to the future with hope that perhaps Vision2016 will bring something for me to look forward to. But I just could not stay there because it was difficult to be there when other students and teachers did not make it easy to be at school. It was not only at school that was difficult but even just in the community; I grew-up with people calling me with all sorts of names and labels out of ignorance and not knowing I guess. Some guys I grew-up with whom I thought understood my condition would hurt me at times when I was with my girlfriend just walking about by making uncomfortable passes at me and say things like: “I love you and want to marry you” at me while I was with my better half which was just too painful to bear. I remember once upon a time where I was arrested under suspicion of having committed a minor offense; the experience while I was under police custody was no better either. Firstly it was the whole spectacle that ensued with different officers taking their time to satisfy their curiosity as to whether I was a man or a woman obviously stemming from my looking different to the person on my Omang. I believe they even forgot for sometime that I was in the charge office under suspicion of a crime that their interest had now turned determining my sex that I was even instructed by one of the police officers to undress so that they may see for sure whether I was a man or a woman 'down there'.

This incident was most painful for reason that it was humiliating and embarrassing to be asked certain questions about my condition just in front of everyone and then to hear certain nasty remarks being made while in a compromised position already being under arrest where I could not simply walk away and out of there at will. *Story continues on page 7*

A conversation: From love to hate continues...

Nothing stayed the same since, actually everything changed. We; my other friends and I had just learned to hate and hate in the worst kind of way. We didn't want to sit in the same chair he did, we didn't want to eat with the same utensils, we were afraid because of what we were told. That fear became hate and rage; we scorned him, called him names and made his experience on the playground traumatic. It gets worse; we felt good about it. There was a time I dared him to take off his pants and show us what he had in between his legs. I know, awful of me right! A friend of mine once, now all he was reduced to was scum under my shoe.

The one community that he is supposed to associate with, the only society he knew, his true origin, yes we taught him to hate himself because he was wrong in every way and we were right. His family taught him to hate himself more; he was told to start acting like other girls, as it would be expected. 'Expected'! Huh! Maybe that's where it all goes wrong.

My 'different' friend had to learn society was no place for him. We all turned him away. 'From love to hate', we were best of friends. Suddenly I learned that people had color, disabilities, accents, nationalities, sexualities the list is endless. In learning all these, the same people who taught me love also taught me to hate in accordance to differences. The hate begot betrayal and that in turn built self hate in me for the hate I had for others. My society taught me to hate. This is true for everyone else who hates; hates others, hates themselves.

We went on to junior school and I never saw him again. I have never forgiven myself, and I still think about the whole horrible scenario. I find myself smiling at the good memories we have but they are almost always overshadowed by the terrible person I have been to my friend and so many other people. Yes I hate myself as a result. I learned to love to hate. Everyone knew love as a powerful element that drove all things positive from relationships, interaction, and success among others. We then were taught to notice that we were 'apparently' not the same, which in my opinion forged the hate that brought about war, violence, murder and all those other terrible crimes to humanity. Everyone now hates themselves and they don't even know it because they are not what is expected or considered better, prestigious and normal. Some would say transgender, others intersex, white, Hindu, royal, female, able bodied, poor, middle class, married, should I go on? I know two things, I love, and we are all human; we are the same.

Stop preaching hate!■

WHAT IS NON-CONFORMITY???

By Pauline Tro Tihako

The Gender Non-Conforming community in Botswana faces massive challenges as much or even more than the Trans men, Trans women and the intersex individuals. Everyone is so hell bent on rigidity that they even forget to recognise humanity.

For clarity, A Gender non-Conforming person is the one who don't conform to society's expectations of gender expression based on the gender binary, expectations of masculinity and femininity, or how they should identify their gender.

First and far most Non-Conforming people face the challenge of not being addressed by the appropriate pronouns or names. As anyone can imagine it is extremely disrespectful to be called by a pronoun or name one does not chose for themselves e.g. If a Biological male who identifies as a man, is addressed as *mma*, I am of the believe that by the time you finish that pronoun you would have had a share of either insults or even a blow in the face.

Why is it different with a Non-Conforming person? All they want is to be addressed in a certain way, why is it hard to accept it! Non-Conforming have the right to be addressed by name and pronoun corresponding to their Gender Identity regardless of Court ordered name or Gender change. Let's not forget addressing a Non-Conformer with an incorrect pronoun is a form of discrimination.

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The Non-Conforming endure the same struggle even within the Transgender community, they are addressed as not man or woman enough. They are seen as finding a corner to run to, to avoid confrontations or not being content enough with themselves. Like any Box there is in the universe, we have the low esteemed and the people who feel they have no self-worth. It's bad enough that they do not see their worth, now imagine the burden of being called an invalid identity. Most Non-Conformers turn to alcohol and drugs for solace.

Story continues on page 6



It was in 2012 on the first year of this project that we made contact with the District AIDS Coordinating Councils (DMSAC) in the Gaborone region as well as Serowe Sub-District; which consist in their representation from governmental, non-governmental and various parastatals who work in various disciplines that range from general health to HIV/AIDS prevention and care. Given this broad representation of those sitting in the DMSACs opportunity to broaden course to even the remote areas through the already existent kgotla system. Many of the organizations and bodies present made individualized invitations to have workshops on trans and intersex issues in their places of work and operation. Stemming in particular from the Gaborone DMSAC was now the on-going dialogue with the Gaborone City Council's DHMT department to conduct lengthier in-service training for nurses in 3 local clinics in Gaborone so as to create a more inclusive and welcoming ambiance in these clinics for trans and intersex persons.

Events: Gaborone-DMSAC Workshop

FEATURE STORY

“THROUGH THE EYE OF A TRANS-WOMAN”



By: Lolo Teemane

It was one good evening; in fact it was too good because it was a 'ladies night' and my girls and I went out. It was an evening meant for my friends and I to catch-up since it had been a while since we had all hooked-up together to spend time and have fun.

There were 3 of us that evening, so the one girl who was picking us up with her car was stuck in a traffic and such was late a bit. Hence, my other friend and I went down the street from my house to a local tavern, where we were to pass time while waiting for the 'late girlfriend' to arrive. I think we waited for her for an hour, in which we had a few bottles of ciders just to get the night started as well we anxiously awaited our little girl-get-together.

while waiting for the 'late girlfriend' to arrive. I think we waited for her for an hour, in which we had a few bottles of ciders just to get the night started as well we anxiously awaited our little girl-get-together. After a few bottles I got a bit pressed and went to the toilet accordingly. I passed through a group of guys and girls in the hallway just by the toilet whom I did not care much about since they were busy chit-chatting but I just kept on with my own things. I happened to overhear what they were chattering about and that was 'me'; I was their topic of discussion and I just did not care much because I am just too used to the attention I have gotten all my life while growing up. I began to get irritated when the girls in that group began following behind me and whispering how they wanted to go see 'him' meaning I, that is where it all began to piss me off.

That was only the beginning; they got in behind me and I went straight towards the main mirror in the toilet as they followed in behind me. You know that feeling where you can tell that someone is busy building-up their talk to the point of somehow provoking you to talk back at them so they may have reason to now throw those words and insults directly at you and not behind your back, that is the same feeling I began to feel in those toilets with those girls. So the loud-mouth of the group conjured the courage to utter some words direct at me though I still had not entertained their back-chatting me and said to me that we were in a ladies toilet and that gentlemen were not allowed in there, signalling to me that I did not belong in there. I did as I knew best; I ignored her and continued with my touch-ups on my make-up for the evening ahead. That being as it was, the other girls threw their contributions to this bashing and made provoking remark at my make-up and what I was doing.

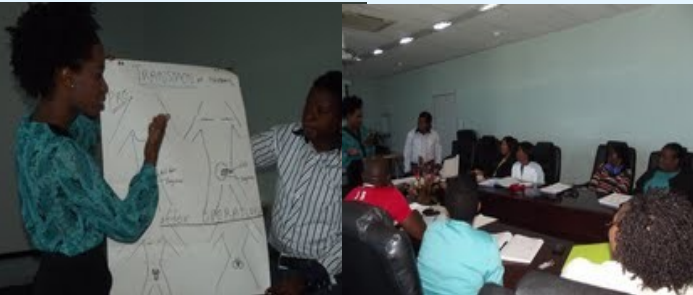
I was fed-up with their little talks that I ended-up just bursting at them and asked them who the male in the ladies' toilet was and one of them said direct me that the male was me. As I began to make my way out of the toilet she stood in my way as I wanted to leave the toilet. I do not remember specifically the sequence of events in between their remarks and wanting to exit the toilet but it all go to me that I gave her a big slap which ensued into a cat fight right there in the toilet.

The other two girls decided to run to the tavern owner for some sort of support, only to find that the owner knew me and my whole story of being a trans-woman and they were thrown out instead of me and were banned from the tavern. I often ask myself that if it had been any other establishment or tavern I probably would have ended-up victimised by the tavern owner as well in that evening and perhaps by other clients that night as is the experience of other women born like me. The pain and ramifications of that evening I still feel to date.

Those girls stirred a can of worms in my life that evening where they made other people who have never vocalised their curiosities of me perhaps even

those who had never wondered anything different of me from other ladies to begin questioning my gender and/or sex from that date till present day 2013. I continue to get new stares and remarks from people who otherwise had never known me to be anything but a regular girl in my neighbourhood that my life has since been under the spotlight which I do not appreciate because it is a spotlight I do not want nor entertain but it comes due to the lack of understanding and acceptance of people born differently like me and other transgender persons out there.

It is a nightmare to be one of the few people whose lives are always under scrutiny and insult for being something that people just do not understand. I did not make myself nor did I have a chance to speak to the Creator or else I would have asked them not to make have to live a life of fear. I and other women like me have a great difficulty in using simple amenities like public toilets due to the fear of victimisation in such spaces as was the case with me. So, it's a constant challenge to live a completely fulfilling life when there are places and spaces I have to avoid just because it is not safe for a trans-woman like me and is not so for the majority of people. I fear going to hospitals, clinics, banks and most public offices due to fear of being made into a circus attraction when trying to ask for simple services. I do not think that in a democratic and seemingly free country like Botswana the situation should be as it is where we just do not have any protection as gender variant persons from social discrimination, harassment, victimisation and intimidation just for being born different to most members of society. I have rights; the right to be me without coercion or intimidation to be something I am not or persecution for being different; I have the right to be protected by law from people who instigate such action against me, but we are far from that here in Botswana. I believe that it is high time our government puts measures in place that will ensure that trans-women and all other gender variant persons in this country feel safe when walking down the streets of their communities; safe from discrimination and harassment for being born as they are.■



2012 was a highly successful year for this project with regards to the relationship that took off between RIA and the Ministry of Health (MOH). Above is one of the workshops conducted with MOH's departments of HIV Prevention & Care and Sexual Reproductive Health through the year. Stemming from these, MOH has committed to working with RIA use the findings from the 2012 Needs Assessment RIA completed last year so as to inform policy review that MOH has embarked on so as to broaden the reach of its services to sub-communities like trans and intersex persons. This relationship is yet to bear more fruit in the future for trans and intersex persons and their access to better health services in the public sphere.

Events: Ministry of Health (MOH) Workshops

Repudiate Social Norms



By: Skipper Mogapi

“Just like any other transgender person I carry the identity card that does not correspond to my gender presentation; all my state issued identity documents are in my female sex designation which creates a real challenge when I travel”.

Transgender people throughout the world experience frequent and unacceptable discrimination, violence and abuse especially when travelling. As much as I have the right to travel just like any other person in this country, my right to movement have to be compromised due to my gender expression. I have experienced harassment and discrimination at airports and boarder gates due to the passport with the gender that does not correspond to the expression and identity I present physically. Obtaining a legal change of sex and new identity document are critical for many transgender persons. When one undergoes gender and sexual reassignment they may need to get their passport, driver's license and identity card changed to reflect that transition. I chose not to changed mine because I do not want to conform to any gender, hence I encounter problems, invasive questions and even discrimination when travelling and any other times I have to present my identity card.



One of the milestones set for 2013 was the workshop hosted by this project and a women's organization called Bomme-Isago in Lobatse. Resulting from this workshop was a new relationship born between RIA and Sbrana Psychiatric Hospital which had representation with a psychologist from the hospital who was in attendance. It became clear that there is more training and not merely awareness raising done for practicing psychiatrist, psychologists and counselors so as to better handle referrals of patients from RIA; so in-service training will start to be an on-going system between RIA and Sbrana Hospital. Many of the women in attendance from Bomme-Isago iterated to the necessity of taking this conversation on trans and intersex persons to the very traditional minds in our communities through kgotla meetings.



EVENTS: BOMME-ISAGO WORKSHOP

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Obtaining a legal change of sex and new identity document are critical for many transgender persons. When one undergoes gender and sexual reassignment they may need to get their passport, driver's license and identity card changed to reflect that transition. I chose not to changed mine because I do not want to conform to any gender, hence I encounter problems, invasive questions and even discrimination when travelling and any other times I have to present my identity card.

The first important step was coming out to myself and accepting my incongruence with the gender binary. For most of my life in the closet, I thought I was a trans-man; it was the only option on the table that made sense to me. When I discovered that I wasn't limited to the gender binary, I started to realize that I am a bit more complicated. My beard has been a big part of my identity since. I don't think it clashes with my femme personal and manner of dress; it's simply who I am. I don't have anything to hide.

Even though the world doesn't typically recognize me for who I am, that doesn't change my resolve to live my life the way I want to. People see my beard and perceive me as male, no matter how much time I spent coordinating my outfit. Am struggling to find balance but one advice I once received from my psychologist is do not worry about transitioning to become a man, or a woman focus on transitioning to be yourself or whoever you need to be. ■

ARRESTED AT A CLINIC

By Christinah Moemedi Gugulethu Mavuma



The following is an experience I never thought I would ever go through in life. It was October the 17th 2012 and I decided to visit a local clinic in my area in Phase2-Gaborone due to having felt a bit unwell that day. I did not yet imagine that I could encounter any problems whatsoever in doing so, reality was yet to prove me wrong.

When I got to the clinic I had to see the nurse first to register. When I was alone in the room with the nurse, she was busy with my registration and it came to a point where I had to produce my Omang and soon as she saw it she began to look at me differently and she asked me to excuse her as she had to go outside of the room. She began a long process of about 40minutes of walking in and out of the room with nothing specific she was saying to me. I could already sense there was something wrong; call it gut feeling but I felt there was something wrong with the situation but I did not know what or how. This was made worse by the fact that other patients who came before me had taken way less time to register than how long mine was taking at that point.

She then began to come in and out with different colleague nurses of hers with each visit, in which they would whisper things about me as they would be looking at me while doing this. In all this time she had my Omang with her and I remained calm and quiet through it all.

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Arrested at a clinic continues...

After a long while it was then that she came in and began questioning me as where I originally am from, my full names, where I stay in Gaborone and kept on repeating one particular question as if she was not interested in the answer of why my names read as Christopher Moemedi Mavuma (which are boys names) and I never responded to her on that one. At no point did I hear the question of what I was looking for in the clinic that day. She progressed to enquire on whether the Omang was mine or not, of which I iterated to her that it was indeed mine. To my surprise, before this little interrogation was done there were a couple of police officers in the consultation room. She began explaining to the officers on how she called them because she was not sure if that Omang was indeed mine.

This meant that she had already called the police even before she began to enquire from me if the Omang in question was mine. The police also did their inquisition to the same conclusion I had given the nurse; that the Omang was mine. The police asked for a duplicate of my signature to compare to the one on the ID and progressed now to attack my gender/sex with endless questions till they asked me to escort them to the police station so as to confirm the legitimacy of my Omang. I refused to go with them to police station because I had done nothing wrong and beyond that I needed medical attention which is why I was at the clinic in the first place. I feel strongly that if the nurse really was questioning the authenticity of Omang, there was many ways that she could have done so without making me feel like an animal that is not human like when she brought in nurse after nurse to scrutinise me like specimen in a laboratory. She as well could have done a better job at interrogating me with integrity firstly before she could entertain the urge to call the police on me before talking to me in an inviting manner first.

I strongly pushed that the police officers take me to my mother's house which is close to the clinic so as to get the confirmation they were looking for on the Omang being mine. I left the clinic feeling embarrassed and humiliated by being escorted by the police like a common criminal and pained by having gotten no medical assistance I had gone for at the clinic just because of an Omang that does correspond to my physical state of being and presentation.

I got home to my mom and filled her in on what had happened and she confirmed to them that it was my card and that I was her child indeed. It was then after deliberation with my mother that they began to take a softer and nicer approach to the whole scenario surrounding my Omang. I remember at the point where I had had enough I encouraged them to use better methods of enquiry in determining people's ID's so they do not leave such individuals in question feeling like lesser of persons than before since my case proved to them that not all Omangs that do not reflect one's physique does not mean any illegal or criminal dealings.

I then went back to the same clinic since I really needed some medical care but to as well go and spit fire on the face of that nurse who registered me and called the police on me. I met-up with the matron of the clinic to lay a complaint against that nurse, which then brought about an investigation into the matter as I was told. I eventually got an apology from this nurse. I however ask myself as to the extent to which such kind of cases need to go till we as a country begin to see that there is something not done right in dealing with us transgender, transsexual and intersex clients/patients in spaces like clinics before something can be done to change this sad state of affairs where trans people are treated like criminals due to ID's that tell a different story to how we look gender-wise in person? explained to her how people like her are driving patients with the same issue like mine away because of not following the right channels and not asking if they do not know or understand certain things. I This can only be done efficiently and decently with a courteous and welcoming approach that would not leave one feeling like less of a human being.

Everyone has the right to proper service that tends to their medical and health needs without stripping them of their humanity. This is however a right that most people like me do not afford to have due to many a service providers who still treat gender variant patients different to other persons coming for the same needs in a clinic setting. Many trans and intersex persons I know have had this very similar experience from service providers who are just not well capacitated to deal with situations like meeting and attending to a gender variant patient.

Something good came out of this misfortune of mine; the matron of the clinic on later dates apologised to me and showed interest to want to train her staff to better understand and deal with other trans people like me; which presents future hope for a change in the health fraternity for trans and intersex persons in Botswana if more service providers are to speak the same language as this matron.■

A CONVERSATION: FROM LOVE TO HATE

By: Ludo Senome



My mother has always said to me, “Hate begets hate.” Self love is the one thing I've come to learn builds a strong personality in each and every individual. The process to achieving self love never actually begins with the individual; society cradles you, family cradles you, from the day you are born to the day your awake to the challenges of being part of the bigger picture. The bigger picture being the society you have to become a part of, not out of choice but because that's just the way the world turns.

Oh yeah, ‘From Love to Hate’, what inspires such a curious subject? Think back to your childhood; we have all lived through a time when caring was all that mattered, we never saw the difference in each other. Being a child is such a beautiful thing because all you know is to love and be loved. A child is taught unity, support, care, love and so many other multitudes of positive values and norms. Is not amazing how actively we go out of our way to teach these positive values. We communicate and reinforce them in so many different ways with various mediums. We deliberately teach love to our children, but hold on, there is a catch... In the same way we uphold this immensely desirable value, we also contradict it with the hate we teach.

Let's see, the idea you are taught to love from childhood is to carry this value through a lifetime as a skill to everything possible, is it not? Let me share a personal experience to just provoke thought. I have a friend, well, once upon a time! If only I knew where to find her today. She was the best thing to have ever happened to me then, I was 8 years and she was 9 when I last saw her. We had the best of times. But then my aunt one day came at us as we kicked a soccer ball and just got furious in a way we thought she was about to spew fire from her mouth with fury. “This thing is sick, get out! If you play with her again you will catch her demons.”

Now let's correct something here. See my friend; my best friend was never a ‘she’ to me or to the many other friends ‘he’ had. Yes we all knew she was biologically female. Still, in our eyes she proved to be a loving boy who really knew how to make the gang have epic great times.

My aunt, the woman who told us God loves all his children had deterred me from being with my friend. She told me he was evil and that he was an evil seed. That is when I first learned hate. See my friend here acted like a boy, played with boys, sounded like a boy, really nothing about him suggested anything besides that he WAS a boy.

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