

This booklet provides wonderful documentation of lives, experiences and amplifying the voices of transgender and intersex people in Botswana. As much as is not equal representation, without any doubt this is definitive work on gender identity. RONA brings to life the issues faced by transgender individuals and highlight the distinction between identities within the transgender umbrella.

RONA seeks to reframe dialogue about gender identity/ expression and moves away from regarding fixed gender categories as normative. Every story has its own strength and emotional power, which promotes healing, and increases discussion and debates about gender identity issues and struggles.



RONA

A COMPILATION OF PERSONAL STORIES
BY MEMBERS OF BOTSWANA'S
TRANS-GENDER COMMUNITY

SUMMARY

2014 was a year of events -both formal and informal - which saw members, friends and family of RIA coming together to laugh, chat and learn together. It was uplifting to hear their stories as they joked, whispered and loudly declared their experiences of being transgender, non-conforming, or just a friend to transgender and intersex people in Botswana. We decided that we wanted a way to capture some of these stories so that our members (old, current and upcoming) would have a way of celebrating, remembering and immortalizing their personal stories.

Rona (the Setswana translation for Us) is therefore a compilation of personal stories by members of Botswana's trans-gender community. These stories will hopefully resonate with the readers in different ways - from providing a reference points for those who have not yet shared their stories (whether out of fear or lack of a place to belong) to teaching members of the general community about what it is like to be 'us' and help them to understand us.

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Le kamoso, Batswana betsho.

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the same sex and my dress code became more manly. I did not feel comfortable in a skirt. Teachers started questioning my behaviour; my response to them was that I felt comfortable that way. Getting to understand myself lead me to do what came naturally for me, which was falling for girls but because of the cultural and societal norms that we are brought up with, I did not know what to do and I started resenting my feelings and tried dating boys like other girls. The sad part about me trying to be hetero-normative was that the relationship did not fulfill me emotionally and I felt depressed, and the funny part about the relationship is that we ended up becoming best friends rather than partners.

I learnt of my sexual orientation after telling my guidance and counseling teacher about how I felt about other girls. That is when she introduced me to some lesbian girls and I started hanging out with them. I felt at peace with who I was and how I identified. For almost three quarters of my life I have always identified as a lesbian until my university years, I started developing different emotions and feelings about myself that I could not understand. A friend introduced me to Rainbow Identity Association and I learnt more about gender identity and I got to understand how I have all these emotions and identity crisis.

THAT IS WHERE I FOUND MY “COMFORT ZONE” AND SELF IDENTIFIED AS GENDER NON CONFORMING.

Gender non conforming to me means that I do not want to be closed into a form of identity because I am in touch with both my femininity and masculinity. I want to fully express myself without any gender binaries or hetero normative norms that we are brought up with.

Challenges that I face firstly is with my parents who have not ‘really’ accepted me for who I am. I think the best thing is to give them time and try to explain to them everything that I am going through and my life journey. With my siblings they have respected me and how I identify and they fully support me in everything that I do. My friends both men and women have no problem with how I identify and we still have great bonds.

The other challenge that I face is that I always have to explain myself and try to have them understand what being transgender is and what being transgender means. The other problem as a gender non conforming person is that the use of public toilets is always a challenge as you get reactions from people; for example when I go to the ladies dressed in a masculine way they tell me to use the men’s bathroom and I have to explain myself.

My message to the society and everyone reading this is that be yourself, love yourself and respect other people’s choices. To the mainstream society it is that they should not fear what they do not know and understand and never be afraid to ask questions to understand what they do not know. 

TRAPPED IN PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS



Disruption occurs because an individual is capable of articulating an identity founded upon both and as well as neither. I have come to realise that understanding oneself is a life-long process.

Certain aspects of my identity may be fluid or fixed, provoked by nature or by choice, influenced by loved ones and interest. Of course, the going can be a little less rough if you can uncover not only the concepts that help you, but people and even whole communities that share your sensibilities on your quest for self-discovery - little “aha!” moments along the way.

I had been terribly unsure about how to define my gender and orientation and experienced varying degrees of dysphoria over my physical sex since I was a teenager.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, QUESTIONING “GENDER ROLES” WASN’T A THOUGHT IN MY MIND. I DID NOTE THAT MOST OF MY FRIENDS TENDED TO BE BOYS, BUT THIS COULD’VE BEEN BY CHANCE.

Besides, I liked both typically “masculine” and “feminine” activities fairly equally:

I played video games, and I played with Barbies; I played dress-up, and I played with toy cars and trains. I saw no conflict of interest in these pursuits, and I did not feel like either a girly-girl or a tomboy.

Most transgender individuals present to the world as men or women, although that is not the case with me. As much as the world has prescribed two boxes I decided to question the boxes and have bit of both boxes. I see myself as both male and female rather than male or female, in my world the two add up to something non numerical. I am simply gender Questioning.

People tend to read clothes as a gender marker. It’s hard to dress as femme and not be taken as female, especially when your body and facial features are considered “female.” For me, dressing as femme is a radical act, but others’ reactions to me in femme wear put me in a different place—a place of vulnerability, embarrassment, nerves, and feeling misgendered as female. Societal expectations for women crowd around me when I dress femme. I also feel the disappointment of those around me who are queer, transgender, genderqueer or

AS MUCH AS I AM COMFORTABLE WITH BEEN ANDROGYNOUS, I TEND TO QUESTION GENDER REGARDLESS OF MY APPEARANCES WHICH IS MAINLY MALE BUT AM NOT AN ORDINARY MAN NEVER COULD BE AND NEVER WILL BE.

attracted to androgyny. I often feel that I am not attractive to those I want to be attractive to in femme clothing.

SURELY I WAS BORN FEMALE, BUT I DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS IT LIKE BEING A WOMAN.

While it is true I was raised as female, I practiced and put on pony tails because that is what the world saw as being female. I was imprisoned because irrespective of how I was treated I was not what everyone thought. I have been accused of betraying womanhood but how can I betray something I never related to?

Although many transgender, individuals retain the labels and subsequently the identities, I see myself as a gender blend as I get to be questioned most the time. As for how I identify myself, I present mostly as male or feminine male. Maybe because I have full facial hair which is known to be one of the major characteristics of a man and a flat chest. I embrace my femininity through different presentation; I enjoy pedicures and manicures and at times wear dresses. My feminine aspects do not embarrass me at all.

The more I read, the more I became

apprehensive and confused about taking hormones, and surgery seemed scary to me. I did contemplate surgeries for a while, but I got terrified about it. I had more questions than answers such as do I have to do that, to be finally okay in my body? Does a flat chest and muscles define who I am? What if the surgery goes wrong?

But then surgeries are just like bodybuilding. They are a form of construction - removal of fat addition of muscle; my point is my body reconstruction was mainly to suit my self image as this being not male not female.

I cannot deny the fact that it was a private struggle. Conflicts I went through within self and having to deal with my loved ones. For my family it was not easy to let go of the girl they raised to the boy I grew to be, yet I did not feel I was neither a boy nor a girl.

Living in a patriarchal society, I enjoy the fact that I am respected in the family gathering as a boy child. Negotiations are headed by males, and being gender non conforming as I am I choose the roles I want to do and do not let society determine what roles I should do. 

myself, the challenges I came across and how I overcame them. How I felt and how the society feel and treat me. I am still in the process of learning about how I am going to feel after undergoing surgery.

To this day my family is still questioning why I was behaving differently from what was expected of me. I understand what my family is going through because for a long time I was also trying to hide my true identity from them. Accepting that you are different from others is not an easy thing, especially when you have expectations from the family. My comfort ability comes first before I can disclose my gender identity because some people are transphobic and I

do not want to see myself in such situation. The nature of my work is interacting with people, therefore I know the mindset of people, some can be nice towards you but when they leave they talk bad about you. My boss understands that I'm a transgender woman and respects my identity. If my colleagues are not treating me well, he calls them to order.

I am a very open transgender woman who does not shy away from the fact that I was born male. Looking at my body not many can tell due to the fact that I have a cleavage, a big bum and hips. What else can a woman ask for? I have no doubt that I was born to be a woman. 

LET MY LOOKS NOT OVERWHELM

I am a 25 year old residing in Gaborone, Botswana. Growing up at an early age I have always been different from the other kids. At primary level I began to develop love for football/soccer at the age of 8, doing my standard 3 I was the first "girl" to be picked for the soccer team which consisted of only boys. This passion for soccer went on until I finished primary school.

GETTING TO JUNIOR SCHOOL I WAS NEVER CONFINED TO WEARING THE GIRLS UNIFORM BUT I ONLY WORE IT WHEN I FELT LIKE IT AND THIS REALLY DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO ME NOR DID IT BRING UP ANY IDEAS ABOUT MY SEXUALITY.

Growing up I did not know anything about sexual orientation or gender identity, but the difference that I felt during my primary school days is that I could notice that I did not build friendships and have girl cliques like most girls in school did. Instead I had boys as friends. The second year of my junior school is when my fear began, as I was getting to know and understand myself. I started developing feelings for

I DO NOT DISCRIMINATE, AND NEITHER DOES MY WORK

My name is Elizabeth Reznikoff from United States of America and I identify as a cis-gender female, I have been involved with and worked for the LGBTIQ community since birth. At the age of 3 my parents decided to buy a house in a resort town heralded as the LGBTIQ vacation destination. I knew what drag queens and binding was before I knew how to read. It wasn't until after my late teen years that I became interested in working for LGBTIQ rights and worker competence regarding working with non-binary gendered individuals.

It started when the school I was working for enrolled a 5 year old transgender (from a boy to a girl), I saw the school respond in the best fashion. They ensured that all teachers and staff members were trained in competently working with the LGBTIQ kids, especially those transitioning before puberty. I knew that I wanted to ensure that wherever I worked all clients would be treated with knowledge and care. I found myself working in the HIV/AIDS sector. LGBTIQ people are still disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, so I found myself once again trying to ensure that they were receiving the best care and that they felt comfortable coming out.

THIS MEANT INSTITUTING UNISEX BATHROOMS, LEAVING GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY QUESTIONS OPEN ENDED INSTEAD OF TICKING A BOX, AND ASKING PREFERRED PRONOUNS. OVERALL THERE SEEMED TO BE A NOTICEABLE IMPROVEMENT IN CLIENT INVOLVEMENT AND RESPONSE, BECAUSE THEY KNEW IT WAS A SAFE ZONE.

The United States has made great strides in lesbian and gay rights; however transgender, intersex and gender non conforming rights are still in the early stages. There is not as much focus put on gender identity because on some level it is still associated with sexual identity. The change comes through education both at home and in the workplace. Service providers should work hard to be culturally competent, because if they cannot relate, they should be able to empathize, and act professionally.

My message for allies of transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming people is "know the world around you, accept that everyone is different and ask if you don't understand. we all are human beings regardless of our sex identity and skin color"

I AM A PROUD WOMAN AND WHAT'S BETWEEN MY LEGS DOES NOT MAKE ME LESS OF A WOMAN

My name is Nelly am 24years old and I identify myself as a transgender woman, meaning I was born male bodied. I come from a small village called Thamaga. My father passed away when I was very young and I was raised by my mother; I have 3 siblings 1 younger sister and 2 elder brothers and sister.

Growing up I always felt that I was different from other children. I never used to play with boys, I hated football I hated playing cars or racing or doing what the boys my age did. I would prefer to be with girls and play with dolls, put on makeup, play "koi (skipping rope) and safe (wool)" and when there was a beauty contest competition I would enter. I did not really care when people made fun of me, that is what I wanted and I felt that I lost because they said I was a boy which really hurt me. Just being called a boy really made me so uncomfortable because I felt like a girl. There was no part of me that said I was a boy except what

was between my legs.

I remember when I went to high school, I had to go to a boarding school. I was forced to stay in the boys hostel and when I asked the boarding master to change me to the girls hostel they refused and told me that I must be crazy because what I am asking for never happened and it will never happen.

MY LIFE WAS VERY DIFFICULT. THE FACT THAT I HAD DIFFICULTIES ACCEPTING WHAT WAS BETWEEN MY LEGS AND NOW I WAS BEING FORCED TO SHARE BATHROOMS WITH THE BOYS.

For this reason I had to wake up before everyone to bath as I did not want to be seen naked, and I had to live that miserable life until I finished school. I heard of LEGABIBO and started attending meetings and workshops, and started identifying myself as a young gay man. Somehow I still felt that I did not fit in, I did not feel that I was gay.

Mine was more than being gay, because firstly I had politics with what was between my legs and felt that I was a woman trapped in a man's body. I kept on asking myself if maybe I was gay, and that maybe it was just confusion but it did not feel right. After a while, still in the confusion with my identity, I met a transgender identifying person and through the conversation we had I realized the similarities we had.



I learnt about the transgender and intersex organization called Rainbow Identity Association and I started attending meetings and meeting people. I learnt a lot from the organization and that is when I started to acknowledge my identity as a transgender woman and I must say, today I am a very conceited transgender woman who won the 2014 beauty pageant and I am a team leader for transgender women.

Even though there are a lot of challenges I face on a daily basis, such as unemployment (because when I present my identity card it show that my sex is male and I present myself as a woman going for an interview wearing makeup and a dress) automatically I am already dismissed before even being given a chance to be heard and what I can bring to the company. I believe that when called for an interview somehow you have the qualities they want and they need to see the person who impressed them with the letter and the CV, which is me as a transgender woman.

Another challenge is proper health services, which is all transgendered person go through, be it transgender men or transgender women. For example, when you walk into a government clinic wearing a dress and they see your identity card written male, instead of helping you they make fun of you and they will be calling others nurses to come and see and point at you or gossip. That alone makes most of us transgender women to be

afraid of seeking medical attention.

THERE IS NOTHING SO PAINFUL LIKE SOME STRANGER INVADING YOUR PRIVACY AND MAKING FUN OF WHO YOU ARE, WHEN ALL YOU WANTED WAS THEIR SERVICE - NOTHING MORE NOTHING LESS.

When it comes to my family they have difficulties with understanding my identity. I remember my mother once saying to me “Nelly o rile o gay jaanong wa re o transgender woman nnya ngwanaka sentle sentle wa re o eng ?” (Nelly you said you are gay now you are telling me that you are transgender woman, where exactly do you fall?). My family still use the male pronoun “ rra” and to them they ignore this transgender woman issue and act like what I told them was a joke because I can see they do not take me seriously. This is fine by me because honestly you cannot change someone’s mind just like that. I have decided to give them time to accept that this is who I am.

With this identity I have lost some of my friends. The most painful thing is that I grew up and schooled with most of them. Sometimes I do understand that it takes time for people to accept that we are all diverse and I believe that friends should stand by each other and try by all means to understand who I am instead of deserting me. I used the negativity that some of my friends brought to my face to my build my strength as it has helped me to defend not just my own rights but the rights of



in my life. I wish to transition medically but I cannot afford it because it is too expensive here in Botswana, unlike in South Africa where the government covers the cost within the government hospitals. Doing the mastectomy surgery, will be the best thing that happens to me.

I find women attractive and they also find me attractive. Most of them do not know that I was born female, they see me as a cis-gendered man. I disclose my gender identity when I see that the relationship is serious as at times I feel no obligation to tell them about my gender identity.

NOT ALL WOMEN I HAVE BEEN WITH HAVE RECEIVED MY GENDER IDENTITY NEWS POLITELY, SOME ARE VERY UNDERSTANDING AND SOME EVEN BECOME MORE ATTRACTED TO ME.

Luckily I am an activist and most women I date have no history of LGBTI. I get to educate them about gender identity and sexual orientation. Once they are familiar with the issues they can educate their friends and colleagues.

Although my family has accepted me, some family members use the female pronoun to describe me. This really hurts me because I do not feel pleased being called that since I am a man. I would prefer to be called *him* and it seems like when I say this it is just a joke to them. I guess it goes back to the fact that they knew me from birth and to them it is not

easy to accept that I am a man.

In Lobatse people know that I am a trans man because I always tell them. I am not afraid to explain to them if they do not understand. As much as this is the town I was raised in and it is like we all know each other, some are still confused by transgender and homosexual. They do not understand when I explain to them that I am a man, not homosexual.

When I think of going home at my village for funerals and wedding functions, I refuse only because I am expected to dress like a woman, which is something that I cannot even dream of. As a man I should wear suits or blazers for the funerals so I cannot wear a dress. The tribe that I come from is very strict in culture and because I am still in the transitioning process I will be faced with problems which may lead to me receiving corporal punishment which is why I avoid going to the village.

I hope after I finish my transitioning process they will recognize me as a man and I will feel free to attend these functions.

To everyone out there be yourself don’t be afraid to be who you are especially trans men and trans women just because your family has expectations based on what you have between your legs, this does not necessary mean that you need to fulfill those expectations and forget about yourself and what you want. At the end it is all about you. ☺

TIME TO OVERRIDE MY UPBRINGING

My name is Batesta Segale, a transgender man (trans man). I stay in Lobatse that is 60 km from Gaborone. I grew up knowing that I am different from other children because unlike any teen girl I preferred playing soccer and I used to do what boys did like play soccer play wrestling and race with wire cars. I was really good in soccer because it became my profession.

IT WAS NEVER EASY GROWING UP BECAUSE I WAS CALLED NAMES (TRASSIE AND TOMBOY) BUT IT NEVER REALLY MATTERED THAT MUCH TO ME BECAUSE EVENTUALLY I GOT USED TO THOSE NAMES.

I identify as a trans man but I used to identify as a lesbian and those days I made sure that in all my relationships my partners addressed me as a man because I did not see myself as a woman even though I was born with female genitals.

A good friend of mine introduced me to Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana (LEGABIBO) and I started attending their workshops and meetings, but somehow I just did not fit in. I felt that the issues they addressed were very irrelevant from issues I would have loved to know because firstly, I had body politics and secondly I wanted to understand why

my body did not match with what I felt inside; outside I am a woman inside I am a man.

I wanted to know if I was the only person who felt like this or if there were other people out there, because many people at LeGaBiBo that I hung around with were identifying as lesbians and were women who were proud to be women and loving other women. Meanwhile I was not proud to be a woman and I had strong feelings that I was a man and love women, even though my physique was not the same as that of other men. I found answers when I heard of a support group for transgender and intersex people. I met people who understood me and it was the best thing that happened me because I learnt a lot about people with trans and intersex issues.

Through the support group the organization Rainbow Identity Association was formed. As one of the members I even managed to attend workshops and represented the organization outside Botswana with other transgender and intersex people all over Africa and the world.

Though it has been a long journey for me there are still some challenges I still face

I AM A PROUD WOMAN...

AS MUCH AS I WAS BORN MALE BODIED MY BODY REFLECTS DIFFERENTLY, I HAVE THE HIPS OF A WOMAN AND THE VOICE TO GO WITH IT ALL.

transgender people who are mistreated just because they are different. I took part in the first transgender women beauty pageant in Gaborone in 2012, it was one of the events that I had to stand up as a transgender woman and showcase to Botswana that we are here. Even though I did not win in 2012, I never gave up. I continued to raise the voice and visibility of transgender women. In 2014 I was crowned Miss Rainbow Identity Association 2014.

Many men finds me attractive, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Some after discovering that I was born male get so embarrassed and end the relationship saying they are not gay, while some who identify as gay would want me to be a man and not apply makeup or wear female clothes. But the true is I am NOT gay, I am a proud transgender woman and I love men. 

BORN TO BE A WOMAN

My name is Christina but my friends call me Chrissy. I am 30 years old and I come from Eastern Cape, South Africa. We relocated to Botswana with my 5 siblings and my mother I was very young because I started my primary here in Botswana. I identify myself as a transgender woman and I cannot say I am a straight transgender woman because I have had a relationship with a transgender man before.

I realised that I was different when I was at my Junior school, but at that time I did not understand sexuality and gender. I just felt that because we were young and liked to play it was one of the stages as a child you go through. But then when I finished school I realised that I am still the same person, nothing changed. In my head I thought it

was going to change but nothing changed. That was before I met some people.

For many years I stayed with my mom and I moved to live with my grandmother, still searching for my true identity. It was still the same story that is was when I started working. I went to study in Johannesburg, South Africa and came back to work here in Gaborone, Botswana. I began to question why I was different from other people. As I continued searching for answers I met some people who felt the same way as I was feeling.

One day a friend of mine invited me to a meeting organised by Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana (LEGABIBO). I was very resistant to attend the meeting but

AUTONOMY IS NOT BINARY

Gender has always been confused with sex, therefore it has resulted in deliberate attempts by various social engineers to convince us that gender is not fixed or static, but fluid and changeable; that there are not only two genders but many genders; that gender is really a social construct; that gender roles are interchangeable; that humans are really androgynous; and that gender is not important in human relationships. Gender is a basic physiological reality, which unfortunately has been politicised. The evidence shows men and women are different, including the fact that our brains are different, our biochemistry is different, our hormones are different, our strength levels are different, our physical designs and sizes are different, and therefore our needs for protection and security are different. Such hardwired differences explain why men and women are so different in areas of behaviour, perceptions, the way they process information, and so on. Does construction suggest that certain laws generate gender differences along universal axes of sexual difference?



it is also applied to embodied persons as a mark of biological, linguistic and cultural difference. What circumscribes that site as the female body? Is the body or the sexed body the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is the body itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex?

As I was growing up I questioned a lot, what really defines a woman or a man? Some people who studied gender tried to explain to me but I continue to be more confused. Identity, rules, conformity and perception I began to mix and match the two binaries.

I WAS TOLD THAT THERE ARE THINGS I AM NOT SUPPOSE TO DO BECAUSE THEY ARE FOR MEN, AND I WAS FORCED TO WEAR LIKE GIRLS AND WEAR PONYTAIL HAIR. SOCIETY THEN TOLD ME I CANNOT MIX AND MATCH AS THIS WILL BE THE END OF THE WORLD. I DECIDED TO TAKE RISK AND REDEFINE GENDER FOR MYSELF.

How and where does the construction of gender take place? What sense can we make of construction that cannot assume a human constructor prior to that construction? Can construction in such case be reduced to a form of choice? Although social scientists refer to gender as a factor or a dimension of an analysis

NOT BOTHERED BY GENDER OR SEX...

to the person. It was very interesting for me, I never expected that and clearly the person who introduced us to each other knows me very well. He had been to many of my workshops and knew what type of a person I was, and they knew I would be attracted to him. I still do not know even after a year and a half of talking to each other. We haven't engaged physically with each other and I think it will be a big thing the day we choose to be physical with each other. However on the emotional side for me, part of me feels there is no difference from another relationship. Any relationship comes with baggage, it just depends on how you engage with that person, no matter what relationship you are in. I do not see it as something I just jumped into.

I am very conscious because he makes me aware of his hormonal infatuation but I am a woman, I have hormonal infatuation, so for me clearly it is a relationship that interest me it is a person who I feel for. He is one person I have been transparent to, in my entire life. He is the second person I have been transparent to. The fact that he is transgender means

I would not be this kind of transparent if it was just any other relationship, it would take many years before we reach that point. He has been very fortunate to know me this well, simply because he is transgender, because of what my feelings are. Whether they are right or wrong I do not know. Life is already tough, I do not need to make it more difficult for him to read me.

I will rather say this is me, I like you, come lets like each other together and see where it takes us, so that all the other things can be out of the way. This I feel is because of my maturity. I am able to be transparent because of my spiritual, sexual, psychological and emotional maturity, but I do know. It is not easy and it also comes with a lot of baggage.

My message to the society out there is that this is something I have been saying since I was 13 and now I am 48 years old. A person is a person, your sexuality is not you, your virtuality is not who you are, you are a person , if we could see humanity like that we will be fine. ☺

BORN TO BE A WOMAN...cont'd FROM PAGE 09

The way I felt, I always thought that people could see I was different, but it was not always the case unless you knew me from childhood. But some people think I was born female, not male. Many people who have not seen me before my transition can only see a woman, unless I disclose. I feel happy when people recognise me as a

woman because that is what I am and have always wanted people to see me as one, not having to prove or convince them that I am a woman.

I did get to visit University of Botswana and share with them my story and what transgender means: how I discovered

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see a person. For most of my life I need to explain to you my journey sexually.

For most of my life I was incredibly conservative. Like I said, I would not have sex before I was married so I was married 3 times. Before that I was incredibly straight heterosexual. I would not even think of women or a trans person or anything like that. Nothing, never once did it cross my mind. It was just people I enjoyed and socialised with, but I was always attracted to men. I was always attracted to male transsexual men, meaning a gentlemen, never harsh hard men, confident men.

AND THEN SUDDENLY ONE DAY I WALKED INTO A ROOM AND I SAW THIS MALE LOOKING PERSON AND I WAS VERY ATTRACTED TO THEM - RIDICULOUSLY ATTRACTED TO THEM. I DID NOT DECIDE TO BE ATTRACTED TO THEM. IT WAS NOT THAT SOMEBODY TOLD ME TO BE ATTRACTED TO THEM AND I NOW KNOW HER. SHE WAS SIMPLY A BUTCH LESBIAN AND FOR 8 YEARS WE WERE IN A RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER.

We were incredibly happy because in my mind all I experienced was a female friend who I happened to be intimate with. It did not make a difference to me when the relationship fell apart.

I did not know what my journey was going to be now sexually, because I did not know that if I was now lesbian. Was I bisexual or what was I? So I sat down and I decided to embrace my experience and

explore my life. I then did a lot of things to experience and one of the things I did was tell somebody that I would love to meet a trans man. Because many came to my house, I was never attracted to them because I liked butch women. So I was only attracted to them but I never really knew what to expect or what to consider. I do not imagine dating anybody who is transgender right now but I do know that there is somebody that I am interested in and have been for almost a year and a half now. What I also know is that it is a very slow process and it is ok to me because I am not the kind of person who just gets to date someone just like that. I am too conscious of their emotion, I am too conscious of their heart, I am too conscious of who they are, and you and me considering again my spiritual journey

I am very conscious of the person, and being an NGO person who actually drives them, so clearly I am very conscious and very slow.

I will say to you it has been (and I kind of knew before the time) it is not going to be easy because I believe a lot about him and I have many friends who are trans. I knew it was something I needed to be conscious about and the first time I got to speak to this person I had many questions. I wanted to know have they transitioned? Have you done top surgery? have you this have you that? It was very interesting for me, but more importantly the interest was that I was attracted to the person sexually. I did not know what to expect. But I was sexually attracted



I began to take male hormones and I was recognised as male, I asked myself am I happy been accepted as male? I understand gender, sex and myself. I do not want to follow the patriarchal society that I grew up in; I want to change the thinking of what is a man and a woman.

WHEN ALL THE IDEAS OF WHAT GENDER IS ARE TAKEN AWARE, I AM LEFT WITH MY BODY AND MY BODY IS STUCK WITH ME - NOT PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS.

Everyone thinks periods are the ultimate

expression of femininity. Sometimes it makes me feel very, very feminine but the truth is there is no reason bleeding makes me feminine. Gynomastia does not make men women, and my period does not make me one either. Most transgender men have to deal with their periods at some point or another.

It is not something we talk about — a lot of us are ashamed, which is understandable. But this should not be a shameful thing. We should be able to talk about what our bodies are doing and help each other out with tips and support. ☺

CONTENTED SELF

My name is Gobakwe Legusty Kebaswele am from a small village called Moshupa. I am 31 years old and identify myself as a gender non-conforming individual.

THIS MEANS I REALLY DO NOT CARE IF YOU REFER TO ME AS HIM OR HER (RRA KANA MMA). I BASICALLY DO NOT CARE. MAYBE IT IS BECAUSE WHEN I GREW UP SOME PEOPLE CALLED ME A GIRL, SOME CALLED ME A BOY. MAYBE IT IS BECAUSE I AM UGLY.

When I grew up I did not know anything about transgender or intersex or non-

conforming people, but one thing I knew is that I was different from my girl friends. I preferred being with the boys, hunting for birds and racing cars or playing football. Actually I was a really good football player and I never liked dresses. When I was bought a dress I would cry as if I was beaten up.

At school I would prefer to be in the company of boys and mostly I would be given the same punishment that boys were given, because I was always the only "girl" who was a rebel. I remember one day we dodged and we were caught,

during the next assembly we were called in front of all the students by the principal. When he saw that I was the only girl he passed a remark. He said that I could have just been a boy because there is no normal girl who is always in trouble like I am and if I don't change my ways I will never find a man to marry me.

I laughed at the principal because besides the fact that I was seen as a rebel, I did not have any feelings towards boys and that was my little secret. Although the laugh got me in trouble I also felt relieved by his words that I will never find a man.

When I reached puberty I learned that sexually I am not attracted to boys. If a boy asked me out I would get so offended and beat that boy up. My friends will make fun of me that I am afraid of relationships because of the way I reacted when I was asked out.

When I finished school I moved to Gaborone. That is when I came across different individuals who identified differently and by then most people I met were either identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual. That is when I started identifying myself as a lesbian woman, because I was born a woman who loved other women. That is when I started having relationships with women.

I decided to tell my mother about my sexuality and she really did not have problem though my siblings did not understand. One thing about my mother

is that I guess she long accepted me and was just waiting for me to disclose my sexuality. She always called me her boy, so my identity to her didn't come as a surprise.

When I started working that is when I ran into different people from different characters. This was basically because I work as a combi driver. I met an individual who told me about Rainbow Identity Association. At first I was not really interested because I have never been interested in any LGBTI organisation, but he kept on inviting me to the meetings and workshops. I kept on giving excuses for not coming as I was really not interested and did not see the need for me to attend such. Eventually I did, and the first thing they did was introduce me to the organisation. I was told about the five groups that the organization has, being trans women, trans men, alliance, non-conforming and intersex.

That is when I started to learn that there are people out there who are transgendered and intersex and some who are just like me who do not want to conform to any gender. After they explained fully to me that is when I got to realise that am gender non-conforming.

WHERE I STAY AND I WORK AM MOSTLY REFERRED TO AS HIM (RRA) EVEN IN THE STREETS WHEN I TALK TO THE KIDS THEY WILL ANSWER ME BY SAYING SIR! (RRA). SO TO ME SIR OR MADAM DOES NOT MATTER.

NOT BOTHERED BY GENDER OR SEX

My name is Jaqualine from South Africa Cape Town, and I am a friend to transgender and intersex people.

MY DEFINITION OF TRANSGENDER IS SOMEONE WHO WAS BORN WITH ONE GENDER AND WHO DEFINES THEM SELF WITH ANOTHER GENDER.

I came across the context of transgender in my teenage years. I have always been interested in sexuality and people's gender and my first introspective from my spiritual subjectivity. My own journey with my sexuality has been really an interesting journey. For most of my life I was incredibly conservative. Incredibly, from my first relationship I got married. I did not have sex before I got married.

I was really conservative but all my friends were not conservative. All my friends were lesbians, bisexual, transgendered, intersex or gay you name it all. My friends have always been like that. I was always interested in their experience in their own journey. From a spiritual perspective I was always interested that how do you connect your sexuality with your spirituality. That is when my interest in transgender and LGB came in. Like I mentioned in my journey with my

spirituality from a very young age, I always had a very strong spiritual connection. It is really important that you understand, not religion, but spiritual connection. It is a personal journey that I have had and in my personal journey I always understood inside of my heart that God did not have a problem with your sexuality. I just knew it, nobody told me that.

I JUST KNEW THAT WHAT GOD HAD A PROBLEM WITH WAS NOT RESPECTING YOURSELF. NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, NO MATTER YOUR SEXUALITY IS, NO MATTER WHAT YOUR JOURNEY IS. GOD DOES NOT HAVE A PROBLEM WITH WHO YOU ARE I ALWAYS FELT LIKE THAT.

My engagement with the transgender community resulted directly from the fact that people are conscious of the fact that spiritually I am as open as I am. A lot of people I engage with through the organisation I work with where surprised that I have no problem with whatever their sexuality might be. Most of the time they will introduce to me to somebody who is having a hard time spiritually and after speaking to them I would not know if they are male or female. I would not know what they are because it would not matter to me because I will always just

AS MUCH AS I AM LIVING FREELY AS A TRANS WOMAN MY FAMILY STILL FAILS TO APPRECIATE AND TOLERATE THE LADY IN THEIR SO CALLED SON. THEY FEEL AM SUDDENLY CHANGING BUT I TRY TO EXPLAIN TO THEM THAT AM NOT, AM ONLY BRINGING OUT WHAT I FEEL INSIDE OUT WHICH IS THE REAL ME.

I was not afraid to wear stilettos, with my favorite mini skirt and tight tops, during the day that we were asked to wear what we like. We used to call that day 'dress to kill'. This dress code made all the girls in the school want to befriend me because I was not afraid of anyone. When boys insulted me I would insult them back and I made sure it hit hard in their hearts.

During my senior school I made a conclusion that most of my school mates did not like. The reason why they did not like me is because some where not true to their identity. Others were jealous of me or some where just being haters and that alone made me appreciate myself more, and accept the fact that I am different and we are all different in this world.

After I finished school I started living my life as a trans woman, making up for the lost years and I began to enjoy my freedom of expression. I am able to use the bathrooms in public spaces that I feel comfortable in which are the ladies. Even though some people who know my past do gossip and/or sometimes disclose my transgender status this does not bother me that much as I have come so far - Quin Komane is here to stay.

Despite this, my family loves me as Otsile

not Quin. They enjoy my company as I am very talented. I can sing, I am also good in comedy and plaiting hair.

Most of my friends are trans women like me and we love each other so much. We are like a family. We are there for each other and protect each other from those who choose to make our lives difficult. I also have friends who are not transgender and they are aware of my identity and they do respect it.

I am very much attracted to men, but the problem comes when they get to know what I have between my legs. When they approach me they just see an ordinary girl and I find it difficult to just disclose to everyone who just asks me out. This is the most painful thing as you may disclose to someone and they dump you and start saying horrible things such as I am not a woman or I am just a fake. Just like any other woman, I would like to get married to a man and have a family. But time will tell. I will find Mr Right, he is somewhere out there waiting for me.

I would like to advice other trans women out there who are still closeted that life is too short. Learn to accept yourself and do not sacrifice your happiness for someone else's happiness. We only live once. ☹

Honestly they are no challenges I face from my friends, because most of my friends are either lesbians bisexual, trans or intersex so honestly they are the least to judge or have a problem with me. With them we would prefer to support each other rather than be against each other. I believe that is what friends do, unless they are not being honest with me "kana tsala le yone mathata".

The society around me, especially those I work with, have no problem with me but at first they could not accept that a woman can do the job I do and again date women. You should remember that men do not like competition - worse when it come from a woman. I am one of the first few women to drive public transport, so to them it was a No No. The fact that my name is not gender orientated means that when you say Legusty people expect

a masculine man with a 6 pack, only to find a woman.

As much as I am happy with the society and my family there are challenges that I face with my partner. As I already stated I date women and because my current partner is bisexual, I find it difficult to accept that she can have relationships with men. I also feel insecure that maybe I would not satisfy her sexually and she will cheat on me. When I think of this I really feel hurt because our lives can be at risk of contacting STIs and HIV.

And to all the readers out there who identify as non-conforming you are not alone. Why should there be a man and a woman? Why can't you be both since you can do a man's job and a woman's job? So be comfortable with who you are. ☹

BORN TO BE A WOMAN... cont'd FROM PAGE 05

this friend pursued me and I decided to let me just go for it. It would not hurt just to go and hear what they were talking about. Surprisingly I got even more curious as I met many people with different identities as I went there with the perception that I am going to meet gays and lesbians only. I automatically became a member after the first meeting; I was thirsty for knowledge and was free to ask questions that had been in my head for years. People shared their experiences and at that point I did not know anything about activism.

I began to engage with transgender people

from outside the country. That was before Rainbow Identity Association was formed. Since the transgender movement was not strong in Africa, we began to share information on social media. I made friends from Africa, Asia and Europe.

Our experiences are not the same but we were able to help each other in finding self through the information sharing with others, and the numbers kept on increasing. LeGaBiBo then asked me to help in educating people on the issues of transgender (trans men and trans women). I did workshops with students and also with the media.

No Obligation

My name is Alexis but I have never used that name. I understand it's a gender neutral name but there is a name that my peers call me which I have coined myself to be identified with. I was born intersex and realised that at puberty. I had no ambiguous genitalia at birth and was raised well as a girl. At puberty I did not change as other girls i.e. developing breast and having acne. The condition is referred as complete androgen insensitive syndrome (CAIS). I have been acne free my entire life and grew taller than other average girls.

At 13 years some girls advised me to rub my chest with a certain weed to promote breast development but nothing happened. At secondary school I used to wear a light jersey to hide my flat chest but I tried my level best to pass at school. A few guys used to pull my jersey and touch my breasts but I was very strong mentally. At 15 years old I attempted to do an operation because I had undescended testes and normal female genitalia, though not complete.

The doctor was afraid and later I did my operation at 18 years through my consent. I waited for a year to develop before going to tertiary school. The doctor advised me and my parents that if I did not do an operation I would develop cancer. I was operated on and put on hormones to pass. Though hormones are good they don't change your self i.e. it does not make you a real woman nor correct anything, instead it promotes cancer later in life. The other problem is that there is no psycho social support and

one is still addressed as intersex by the medical fraternity. There is still no genetic mapping for our genes.

TO BE INTERSEX MEANS YOU TEND TO LIVE A VERY LONELY LIFE BECAUSE OF FAILURE OF RIGHT OF PASSAGE. EVEN WHEN FALLING IN LOVE YOU DO IT FOR FUN, RATHER THAN THE SERIOUSNESS THAT WE FIND PEOPLE EMBRACING.

I know a lot are curious about my love life so I might as well share with you. I have dated guys and they loved me dearly - that I can confidently say. The problem was that I could not disclose my gender identity for fear of stigma which is something we intersex people face on a daily basis. Normally I want relationships that last, I mean who doesn't want that? I have kept them ,the longest was 6 years, and I exited when certain demands were required which I couldn't provide. Not because I didn't want to but I couldn't. Currently I am single and enjoying life because somehow I don't have any obligation to please anyone.

TO SOCIETY AT LARGE, I CAN ADVISE THAT INTERSEXUALITY IS GENETIC AND RUNS IN FAMILIES. TO THE GOVERNMENT I ADVISE THAT OPERATIONS SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE CONSENT OF AN INDIVIDUAL AND PARENTS SHOULD NOT BE SCARED THAT THEIR CHILDREN WILL DEVELOP CANCER.

Even those who do an opposite gender reassignment surgery opposite to their known gender later in life should be accepted as normal people with integrity.



Put Things Into Perspective

My name is Otsile Jerusalem Matlhomane known as Quin Allsorts Komane. I am 22 years old and I identify as a trans woman, born and bred in Mogoditshane.

When I grew up I identified myself as male and tried by all means to behave and do that boys did, but something deep inside always reminded me that I was never really meant to be a boy. Although I tried so hard to be a man and act like a man, my feminine side said the opposite thing. I enjoyed playing with dolls and only enjoyed girls' company I found boys' games too rough for me.

When I grew up I already knew about Transgender people and I also knew about lesbians, gays and bisexuals because I was raised by a same sex couple from 12 months to 5 years. Although when I grew up I was a little confused, I took a journey of discovering myself more.

SOME PEOPLE DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHY I BEHAVED LIKE A GIRL YET I WAS BORN A BOY, THEY STARTED ACCUSING ME OF BEING GAY.

I denied because I knew I was not gay but

then I did not need to explain to them that I am a girl. Only my friends and very close relatives knew and understood what I meant when I said I was not a boy but a girl.

Some thought I was crazy and too young to understand what I was feeling and thought I will grow out of it and be a real man. The sad part was that my mother was among the people who did not even want to hear a thing about transgender and hated me expressing my femininity. She would buy me boys' clothes and made sure that I was more masculine. When people make comments that I look like a girl she would get upset and shout at them that I am a boy, not a girl. Unfortunately she passed on when I was in standard seven, pity she could not see this girl she gave birth to reach puberty. Maybe at this point she would have accepted that she gave birth to a boy who is actually a girl, and maybe she could have better answers to why I am pretty and not handsome. At junior school I became famous and got my name Quin from the students as to them I was more than a Queen or a Diva.