

# WHO I AM NOT

A FILM BY TÜNDE SKOVRÁN



POV

DISCUSSION GUIDE







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# Film Summary



Sharon-Rose Khumalo, a South African beauty queen, faces an identity crisis after discovering she's intersex. Her path crosses with Dimakatso Sebidi, a masculine-presenting intersex activist, as they both navigate a journey marked by society's stigma and inner struggles. Intertwining raw reality with poetic beauty, *Who I am Not* captures the heart-wrenching fight for acceptance in a binary world.

# Using This Guide

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *Who I Am Not* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

## A NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Dear POV Community,

We are so glad you have chosen to facilitate a discussion inspired by the film *Who I Am Not*. Before you facilitate, please prepare yourself for the conversation, as this film invites you and your community to discuss experiences of intersex identities, societal stigma, gender diversity, and self-acceptance. These conversations require learning truths about society, culture, and political motivations that typically have not been taught in schools. We urge you, as a facilitator, to take the necessary steps to ensure that you are prepared to guide a conversation that prioritizes the well-being and safety of intersex people, trans and gender-nonconforming individuals, and Black communities. Importantly, this film shares experiences through a lens of joy and resilience, rather than focusing on trauma, and we hope this guide will aid you in conversations that expand understanding while maximizing care, critical curiosity, transformation, and connection.

### **Tips and Tools for Facilitators**

Here are some supports to help you prepare for facilitating a conversation that inspires curiosity, connection, critical questions, recognition of difference, power, and possibility.

## **Share Community Agreements**

### **Community Agreements: What Are They? Why Are They Useful?**

Community agreements help provide a framework for engaging in dialogue that establishes a shared sense of intention ahead of participating in discussion. Community agreements can be co-constructed and created as an opening activity that your group completes collectively and collaboratively. [Here is a model](#) of community agreements you can review. As the facilitator, you can gauge how long your group should take to form these agreements or whether participants would be amenable to using pre-established community agreements.

### **Opening Activity (Optional): Establishing Community Agreements for Discussion**

Whether you are a group of people coming together once for this screening and discussion or a group whose members know each other well, creating a set of community agreements helps foster clear discussion in a manner that draws in and respects all participants, especially when tackling intimate or complex conversations around identity. These steps will help provide guidelines for the process:

- **Pass around** sample community agreements and take time to read aloud as a group to make sure all participants can both hear and read the text.
- **Allow time** for clarifying questions, make sure all participants understand the necessity for the agreements, and allow time to make sure everyone understands the agreements themselves.
- **Go around in a circle** and have every participant name an agreement they would like to include. Chart this in front of the room where all can see.
- **Go around two to three times** to give participants multiple chances to contribute and also to give a conclusive end to the process.
- **Read the list aloud.**
- **Invite** questions or revisions.
- **Ask** if all are satisfied with the list.



## HELPFUL CONCEPTS & LANGUAGE

### **Ambiguous Genitalia**

A term used to describe genitalia that developed differently from the typical definitions of male or female.

### **Androgen**

A class of hormones that play a role in the development of male characteristics and reproductive activity.

### **Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS)**

A condition where an individual is genetically male (XY) but resistant to male hormones (androgens), resulting in female or intersex physical characteristics.

### **Assigned Gender at Birth**

The gender label given to an individual at birth, often based solely on visible physical sex characteristics.

### **Autonomy**

The right of individuals to make decisions about their own bodies, health, and well-being.

### **Biological Sex**

The physical traits—such as chromosomes, genitalia, and gonads—that are used to categorize individuals as male or female at birth.

### **Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH)**

A genetic condition affecting the adrenal glands, which can lead to atypical development of female genitalia (virilization).

### **Culture**

The social and cultural context that influences an individual's experiences, including those related to intersex identity and treatment.

### **Dysphoria**

A state of discomfort or distress, often connected to one's body or gender identity.

### **Gender Essentialism**

The belief that gender is inherently tied to biology and that traits like masculinity and femininity are fixed and natural. This concept upholds the gender binary and marginalizes those who do not conform to it.

### **Gender Expression**

How a person outwardly shows their gender, through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and other forms of presentation.

### **Gender Identity**

An individual's internal sense of their own gender, which may or may not align with the gender assigned at birth.

### **Genetic**

Relating to genes, heredity, and biological inheritance.

### **Genital Mutilation**

The non-consensual alteration or removal of genital tissue, often performed without medical necessity. This can be especially harmful in the context of intersex individuals.

### **Gonads**

The reproductive organs (ovaries or testes) that produce eggs or sperm and hormones.

### **Gynaecological**

Relating to the medical care and health of the female reproductive system.

## **Hormone Treatment**

Medical use of hormones to alter or support physical characteristics, often used as part of gender-affirming care or intersex management.

## **Infanticide**

The act of killing an infant; historically and globally, this has occurred in some cases involving intersex infants.

## **Intersex**

A term describing individuals born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.

## **Medical Paternalism**

A practice in which medical professionals make decisions on behalf of patients, often based on the belief that doctors know best. In intersex contexts, this often leads to irreversible surgeries on infants or children without informed consent.

## **Medicalization**

The process by which human conditions and experiences are treated as medical issues. For intersex people, this has historically led to pathologization and unnecessary surgeries.

## **Non-binary**

A gender identity that does not conform to the traditional categories of male or female.

## **Ovaries**

The female reproductive organs that produce eggs and hormones such as estrogen and progesterone.

## **Progesterone**

A hormone involved in the menstrual cycle and pregnancy, primarily produced by the ovaries.

## **Reproductive System**

The group of organs and structures involved in reproduction.

## **Structural Inequality**

Systemic disadvantage rooted in historical and institutional policies, practices, and norms that privilege some groups while marginalizing others. The film illustrates how structural inequality affects intersex individuals in areas such as healthcare, employment, and social acceptance.

## **Testes**

The male reproductive organs that produce sperm and testosterone.

## **Testosterone**

A hormone associated with the development of male characteristics and reproductive functions.

## **Uterus**

A female reproductive organ where a fetus develops during pregnancy.

## **Vaginal Canal**

The internal passage that leads from the vulva to the uterus.

## **Vagina**

A muscular canal that connects the external genitalia (vulva) to the uterus.

## **Variations of Intersex**

Refers to the broad range of naturally occurring differences in chromosomal, gonadal, and genital development found in intersex individuals.

# Participants

## **Sharon-Rose Khumalo (She/Her)**

Sharon-Rose Khumalo is a South African beauty queen whose life took a turn upon discovering she is intersex, which leads her to confront deeply ingrained societal norms and personal identity questions. The documentary follows her as she tries to understand the complexities of her identity, seeking understanding and acceptance in a society that enforces gender binaries.

## **Dimakatso Sebidi (They/Them)**

Dimakatso Sebidi - *also referred to as Garfield* - is a masculine-presenting intersex activist based in Johannesburg. They have dedicated their life to advocating for intersex rights and visibility, working to create supportive spaces for intersex individuals, including initiatives like summer camps for intersex youth in South Africa. Their activism is rooted in personal experience, and they serve as a mentor for many within the intersex community.



# Key Issues

*Who I Am Not* is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Intersex identity and visibility
- Medical ethics and bodily autonomy
- Gender norms and binary systems
- Intersection of race, gender, and class in post-apartheid South Africa
- Reproductive justice and bodily sovereignty
- The role of activism and community organizing in social change
- Cultural and familial expectations around gender and identity
- Human rights and the global intersex movement



# Background Information

## Historical and Sociopolitical Context in South Africa

Intersex people in South Africa have long existed in a complex sociopolitical landscape shaped by colonialism, apartheid, traditional norms, and more recently, constitutional democracy and human rights advocacy. Their experiences intersect with issues of race, gender, sexuality, and medical ethics.

Before colonization, many South African communities held fluid understandings of gender and the body. Among indigenous groups, difference was not always pathologized—bodies that varied from norms could be seen as spiritually significant or simply part of life’s diversity. Though the term “intersex” didn’t exist, intersex people lived within these societies, often interpreted through relational, not rigid, frameworks. European colonial rule introduced rigid gender binaries and Christian moral frameworks, which sought to erase or punish non-conforming bodies.

South Africa's history of patriarchy and apartheid has had a lasting impact on the country, and the struggles faced by intersex individuals are deeply intertwined with this history. Under apartheid - a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination, was enforced from 1948 until the early 1990s. During this time, strict racial and gender classification systems reinforced binary understandings of sex and imposed harsh penalties on those who did not conform. Intersex bodies were pathologized and hidden through enforced "normalizing" surgeries and children born with ambiguous genitalia faced genital mutilation due to their non-conforming sex characteristics. The struggles encompassed social secrecy, forced to conform to the chosen sex, lack of access to factual information, and clear erasure through infanticide and lack of legal recognition of intersex identities.

## **Intersex Rights and Activism in South Africa**

South Africa has played a pioneering role in the global recognition of intersex rights, marked by constitutional progress, grassroots activism, and the life and legacy of Sally Gross. Although South Africa's 1996 Constitution was the first in the world to prohibit discrimination based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation, intersex individuals often remained excluded in practice. That changed in 2003 when "intersex" was explicitly added as a protected category under South African anti-discrimination law—an unprecedented legal milestone.

A central figure in this evolution was *Sally Gross*, a former anti-apartheid activist, Catholic priest, and founder of *Intersex South Africa*. Gross was active in the African National Congress (ANC) during exile, and her early life was marked by religious leadership and political engagement. Assigned male at birth, she began to question her sex classification and



eventually underwent medical testing, which led to her being reclassified as female. This decision led to severe consequences: she was expelled from the Dominican Church, had her vows annulled, and was left without legal recognition by South African authorities, who failed to issue her appropriate identity documents. In response, Gross became a leading intersex rights advocate, campaigning against medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children and promoting recognition, dignity, and legal protection. She used her personal struggle to highlight systemic injustice and worked to align South African law with the constitutional promise of equality. Her advocacy led to the creation of *Intersex South Africa*, which supported education, visibility, and peer mentorship for intersex individuals. After her death in 2014, the organization became dormant but was revived in 2017, continuing her work and legacy.

The revival of Intersex South Africa in 2017 marked a significant milestone in the ongoing struggle for intersex rights in South Africa. The organization's resurgence has provided a platform for intersex individuals to share their experiences and advocate for their rights, highlighting the pervasive challenges they face in various aspects of life. Today, South African intersex activists carry forward the movement Gross helped ignite—demanding bodily autonomy, inclusive healthcare, and the eradication of stigma. Their stories and resilience are a powerful testament to the fight for justice. As Nelson Mandela once said, *“there can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”* Protecting the rights of intersex children and adults is not only a human rights issue—it is a moral imperative. The movement calls on all sectors of society to end intersex infanticide and genital mutilation and to ensure that intersex people live with dignity, safety, and full legal recognition.

## **Gender Norms, Cultural Expectations, and Intersex Experiences**

In many societies, including South Africa, gender norms and cultural expectations strongly influence how people understand and experience sex and gender. These norms typically define clear roles, appearances, and behaviors for those identified as male or female. For individuals born with intersex variations—natural differences in sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female bodies—these expectations can create unique social and institutional challenges.

Intersex individuals may encounter pressure to conform to binary gender norms through medical procedures performed in infancy or childhood. These are often aimed at aligning a person's body with typical male or female characteristics. As they grow, intersex people may also face expectations related to appearance, reproductive roles, and social identity. These pressures can contribute to a range of difficulties, such as bullying, mental health challenges, interrupted schooling, and in some contexts, exposure to violence.

Institutions such as healthcare systems, correctional facilities, and government departments may present additional challenges. For example, some intersex individuals report difficulties accessing appropriate medical care, or experience complications with identity documentation through departments like Home Affairs. These experiences reflect how gender norms and cultural beliefs can influence access to services and recognition.

Public figures such as Caster Semenya, a South African athlete, and Active Holali, a footballer from Ghana, have brought international attention to the experiences of people with diverse sex characteristics. Both have

spoken about the personal and public scrutiny they've faced, which offers insight into the broader societal attitudes and expectations surrounding gender and biology.

Understanding how gender norms and cultural expectations affect intersex individuals can contribute to more informed discussions about sex diversity and inclusion. It also highlights the importance of considering how social and institutional frameworks impact people differently based on their biological characteristics.



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# DISCUSSION PROMPTS

## Prompt One: Starting the Conversation

Immediately after the film, you may want to give participants a few quiet moments to reflect. Consider posing a general question (examples below) and giving individuals time to jot down or think about their responses before opening a group discussion. Alternatively, you might invite them to share initial thoughts with a partner before coming together as a larger group.

- In what ways do cultural and societal norms in South Africa shape the experiences of intersex individuals, and how might these patterns compare to those in other countries, such as the United States?
- What are some ways communities—locally and globally—can begin to question and reshape cultural narratives that contribute to the marginalization of intersex people?
- The phrase “*You can’t pray intersex away*” is used in the film as a powerful expression. How do you interpret this phrase, and what conversations does it spark about acceptance, identity, and community?

## Prompt Two: Culture, Tradition, and Human Rights

The scene depicting Dimakatso’s cleansing ceremony brings forward questions about the intersection of cultural tradition and personal rights.

- How might individuals and communities navigate the tension between honoring cultural practices and upholding the rights and dignity of intersex individuals?

- In what ways can international human rights principles support efforts to address practices like infanticide or the abandonment of intersex infants, while remaining sensitive to local cultural contexts?
- What impact do religious or spiritual interpretations of intersex identity—like those shown in the film—have on societal attitudes, and how might open dialogue begin to shift these views?

### **Prompt Three: Gender Norms and Femininity**

The film raises important themes related to gender identity and societal expectations.

- How do cultural definitions of femininity and womanhood affect the daily lives and identities of intersex individuals, particularly those who identify as female or feminine?
- Dimakatso's story explores the pressure to conform to specific gender roles. What thoughts do you have about how gender expectations can be reimagined to include a broader range of identities and expressions?
- In what ways do traditional gender roles in contexts like South Africa or the U.S. shape opportunities—or create barriers—for intersex individuals in education, employment, and public life?

### **Prompt Four: Fertility, Parenthood, and Relationships**

Sharon's reflections on dating and relationships bring attention to the intersection of identity, intimacy, and social acceptance.

- What assumptions about fertility and parenthood exist in society, and how do these impact intersex individuals and others with diverse reproductive experiences?
- How might conversations around family, love, and partnership evolve to become more inclusive of people with intersex variations?

### **Prompt Five: Labor, Livelihood, and the Informal Economy**

Dimakatso's story also explores the challenges of finding meaningful and secure work.



- What does Dimakatso's experience in the job market reveal about how gender expectations affect access to work in both formal and informal economies?
- What are some ways communities and institutions could begin to break down gender-based barriers to employment and economic opportunity for intersex individuals?



# OPENING/CLOSING ACTIVITY

## OPTIONAL

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions.

- What new questions or perspectives are you leaving this conversation with?
- What is one cultural narrative you'd like to challenge in your own community?
- What's one small but meaningful step you can take to support the intersex community?

# Resources

## **Intersex Society of South Africa (ISSA)**

*ISSA is dedicated to advancing inclusive mental health care and amplifying the voices of intersex individuals. We will persist in our efforts to create a society where every person is treated with dignity, respect, and compassion.*

## **Intersexions.org**

We're dedicated to amplifying awareness about intersex issues and challenges, and pleading for a world that embraces compassion and understanding.

## **African Intersex Movement (AIM)**

Established in 2017 is a collective of intersex organizations and activists working across Africa to advocate for the rights of intersex people. AIM's key goals include promoting intersex education, advocating for legal recognition, and ending non-consensual medical interventions.

## **InterACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth)**

A leading intersex advocacy organization in the U.S. focused on protecting the rights of intersex youth through legal and policy advocacy, education, and youth leadership development.

<https://interactadvocates.org>

## **Intersex Justice Project (IJP)**

A grassroots organization led by intersex people of color in the United States. IJP focuses on ending intersex surgeries on children and raising awareness through public demonstrations, campaigns, and education. <https://www.intersexjusticeproject.org>

## **Organisation Intersex International (OI) Europe**

The European intersex network working to ensure human rights, legal recognition, and bodily autonomy for intersex people across Europe.

<https://oiieurope.org>

## **GATE (Global Action for Trans Equality)**

An international organization that works at the intersection of intersex, trans, and gender-diverse issues, advocating for human rights and access to healthcare globally. <https://gate.ngo>

## **AIC (Advocates for Informed Choice)**

Now a part of interACT, AIC pioneered legal advocacy for intersex youth and continues to support informed consent and legal protections.

<https://interactadvocates.org/aic>

## **Intersex Campaign for Equality (IC4E)**

Co-founded by ED Hida Vilorio, along with intersex activists Dr. Dani Lee Harris and Dana Zzyym, IC4E works to raise public awareness and promote legal and human rights protections for intersex people in the U.S. and beyond.

<https://www.intersexequality.com>

# Credits & Acknowledgments



## Peace Maquba

Peaceworth Maquba, known as Peace, is a multifaceted artist and advocate who has made significant contributions to the fields of photography, filmmaking, writing, and intersex rights activism. Born in KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, and now based in Johannesburg, South Africa, Peace brings a unique perspective to their work, driven by their passion for advocacy and art.

As the CEO of Unmadebrand, a queer brand, and founder of Intersexions, an intersex organization, Peace has established themselves as a leader in promoting intersex rights and visibility. Their work as an intersex human rights defender has included providing support to victims of human rights abuses and conducting workshops on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) from an intersex perspective.

Peace's artistic endeavors have garnered recognition, with notable projects including collaborations with MTV Aids awareness and Shuga series, Mabala noise events, and documentaries such as "My Attractive Life" and "Eaglette." They have also worked with prominent artists and photographers, including Zanele Muholi and Dr Beverley Ditsie.

As a filmmaker and director, Peace has written and directed short films, including "My Body vs Our Body" and "The My Unboxing," which showcase their commitment to telling stories that promote intersex visibility and empowerment.

Through their art and advocacy, Peace aims to raise awareness about the intersectional challenges faced by intersex individuals and to promote a more inclusive and accepting society. Their work is driven by a passion for using photography, film, and animation to highlight the invisible intersectionality of discrimination faced by minority groups, particularly intersex individuals.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE PRODUCERS

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