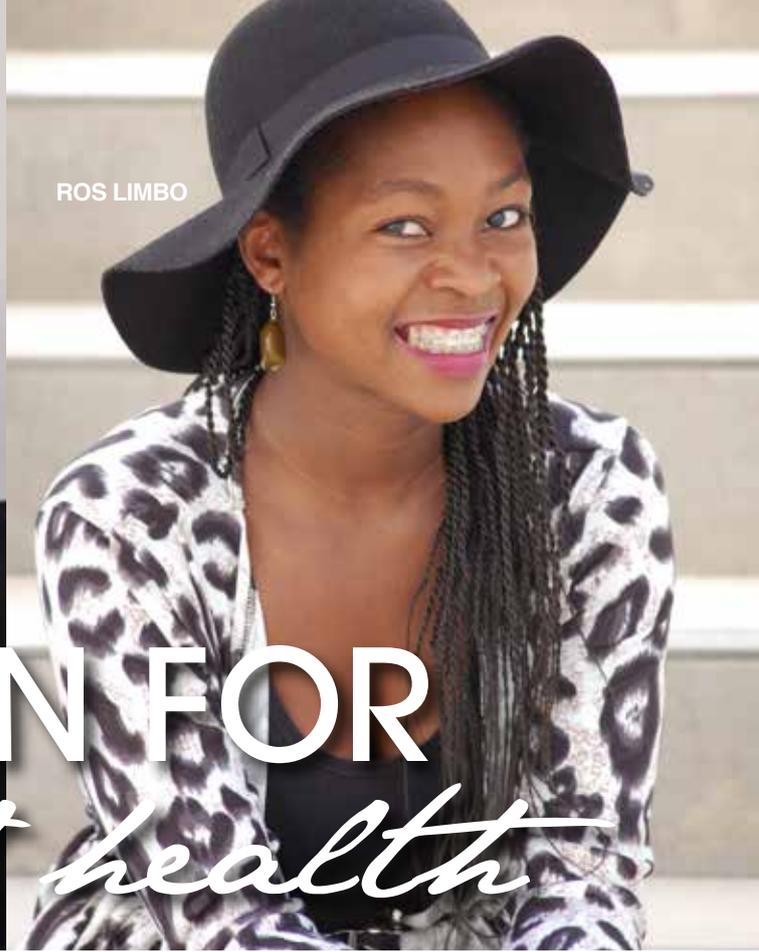


BEAUTY BOOIS



ROS LIMBO

by Masiyaleti Mbewe

# WOMEN FOR *mental health*

**I'M SITTING IN MY THERAPIST'S OFFICE AND I'M FUMING. MY EYES DART ACROSS THE ROOM UNTIL THEY LAND ON AN ODDLY COMFORTING PHOTOGRAPH OF A SEA SHELL.**

I tap my foot nervously, answering her questions as honestly as someone with trust issues can, and I sigh deeply every time she catches me indulging in my problematic defence mechanisms. Eventually, I stop feeling attacked and start to deal with the rotting corpses of my past. I know that this one session won't fix everything but as I grab my bag on my way out of her office, I turn back and think, "I'm glad I'm doing this."

Every few weeks or so, when I feel like I cannot cope with the cold strings of anxiety or the peeling paint of depression, I know I can call on her to help me untangle the ropes that keep me tightly bound. It is during these visits that I begin to heal.

### BEAUTY AND CYNTHIA

For 27-year-old psychological counsellor, founder of Yoga by Beauty and the Nam Mental Health account on Twitter and YouTube, Banshee Beauty Boois has always known her true calling to be aligned with the practice of healing.

"The one thing that I've always known without a shadow of doubt, is that I am a healer and that I want to help people. Studying and practising psychology has enabled me to truly

step into my purpose," Beauty explains. Articulate in her criticisms of the misconceptions and collective stigmas attached to mental illness in Namibia, Beauty's drive comes from a desire to reconcile the patient's past and present trauma by utilising a humanist approach. Self-care, self-awareness and empathy are concepts that Beauty always uses to engage her patients. "I am also of the opinion that more can and should be done; we need more awareness campaigns, more education, de-stigmatisation and information about mental health. Most importantly, people living with mental illness deserve more respect and tolerance," she says.

Both men and women suffer from mental illnesses, necessitating an ongoing conversation about the hyper-masculine gaze affecting men and 'the strong woman' archetype affecting women. In addition to examining the way gender roles inhibit our perception of mental illness, various socio-economic and political norms require scrutiny and investigation.

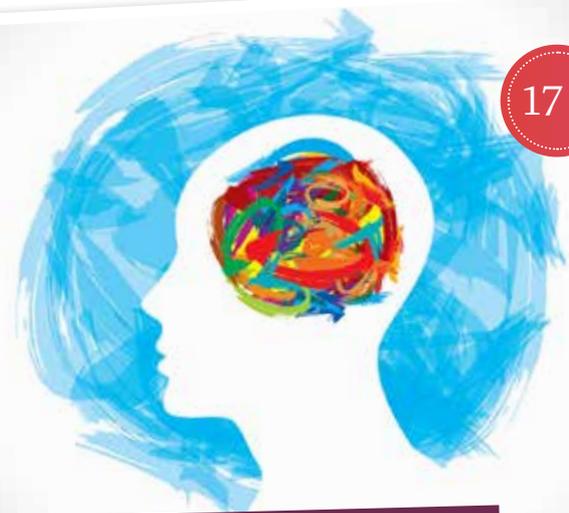
"People generally label women as being dramatic or hysterical and see non-psychotic mental disorders as a woman's thing," elaborates Cynthia Uamuina Beukes, a 37-year-old clinical

psychologist. Much like Beauty, Cynthia knew she wanted to pursue a career in psychology. "Analysing people's behaviour is something that has always come naturally to me (as early as 4 years). I would watch other children interact and try to explain their behaviour. At the time I did not know it was "a thing," but when I started practising I knew I was born for this," Cynthia explains.

### OF CULTURE AND PRACTICE

As women specialising in psychology, the job has its rewards and its setbacks. Cynthia explains cultural perspectives can be a barrier as when the symptoms of mental illness are ascribed to witchcraft or demonic possession, while medical causes are often overlooked. Perceptions of age and gender can also be limiting as she often encounters prejudice towards her, when people's attitudes suggest them thinking, "what can this small girl or this woman tell me about life?"

Beauty chimes in claiming that, "There's this huge misconception that people with mental illnesses are simply faking it or looking for attention which is the furthest thing from the truth. That attitude is dismissive. Mental illness can be debilitating and seriously



## FAST FACTS

- **MENTAL HEALTH** is determined by a range of socioeconomic, biological and environmental factors.
- **POOR MENTAL HEALTH** is associated with rapid social change, stressful work conditions, gender discrimination, social exclusion, an unhealthy lifestyle, risks of violence, physical ill-health and human rights violations.
- **SUICIDE IS ONE OF THE MAIN** causes of death which affects all age groups.
- **EACH SUICIDE INTIMATELY** affects at least 6 other people.
- **ACCORDING TO A 2017** World Health Organisation (WHO) update, depression is a common illness worldwide, with more than 300 million people affected worldwide.
- **DEPRESSION IS DIFFERENT** from usual mood fluctuations and short-lived emotional responses to challenges in everyday life. Worldwide, close to 800 000 people die due to suicide every year. (WHO, 2017)
- **ABOUT 2/3 OF PEOPLE** who complete suicide are depressed at the time of their deaths. Depression that is untreated, undiagnosed, or ineffectively treated is the number 1 cause of suicide.

deter people from reaching their true potential and even result in death (suicide) if ignored or swept under the carpet. Another misconception is that when one seeks to enhance their mental health by starting counselling or seeing a mental health professional, it means that there is something very wrong with them. Contrary to popular belief, people can actually seek counselling for everyday life issues from career or school guidance to relationship problems.”

For both practitioners, seeing a positive change in their clients’ lives makes all the difficulties they face worth it. Cynthia explains, “Walking a road with someone and seeing people who were broken, and on the verge of giving up, walk out with a little bit of hope, is so absolutely rewarding.”

### A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Writer, blogger, poet and yogi, Ros Limbo explains having felt like she had been struggling with mental illness all her life. “When I was younger, my emotional outbursts were called tantrums of a spoilt child but they were deeper than that. At the age of 10 I began withdrawing from those around me. I found it hard to interact with my peers and soon found myself with no friends. This trend continued through high school and university,” she explains. At the age of 21 she was diagnosed with severe depression and later with bipolar disorder type II.

Ros’s perspective concurs with that of Cynthia when she says, “Society has also implanted this idea that women are supposed to bear so much emotional turmoil because women are “stronger” emotionally. So, when a woman begins to feel like she is breaking down emotionally, those around her begin forcing her to be happier because women should have the ability to bear all. Women might find that those around them will call them dramatic or will cut ties with them due to an incorrect notion of mental illness,” Ros says.

### IS THERE ANY HOPE?

The discussion around mental illness is one that is peppered with complex ideologies that build layer upon layer of learning and unlearning. This process

might be taxing, but for people that suffer from mental illnesses, it might start the necessary dialogue around intersecting perspectives and their effects on the mentally ill.

“I wish people could see how real mental illness is. Many people deny its existence because they have been lucky enough not to know someone with a mental illness. I get very upset when people are sympathetic when they find out someone has committed suicide because these are the same people that made fun of the individual when they tried to seek help; whether in person or via posts on social media”, Ros says.

Cynthia leaves us with this thought-provoking question, “Mental illness stigma is rife and to combat this we need to understand that mental illness is an actual medical condition.” You would not label someone with a heart condition as dangerous or crazy or treat them with disregard. Why do we do it with those who have a mental illness?”

### THERE’S ALWAYS HOPE

Mental health, as Cynthia explains, is a continuous practice: dealing with negative experiences, no matter how small, is important in sustaining good mental health. “It is better to be proactive and preserve the health you have than to begin treating it when it has become an illness. Do not let the negative perceptions around mental illness keep you or your loved ones from getting the help you need,” she adds.

At the ministry of labour, where Cynthia can be found, help is available from various mental health professionals. Contact numbers are under Classified Medical Listings in the directory. For those without medical aid, the mental health unit at the Windhoek Central Hospital offers free services to the public.

The Psychology Association of Namibia is found online, under the tab ‘Find a practitioner near you’ for a comprehensive list including contact details of various registered mental health professions. Beauty can be contacted at: 0812543091 or [bbbooispsychologypractice@gmail.com](mailto:bbbooispsychologypractice@gmail.com) or on [www.bbbooispsychologypractice.wordpress.com](http://www.bbbooispsychologypractice.wordpress.com).

