

Queer HK

**I'm not a woman
but neither am I a
natural born man.
I am a trans-male**

Before and after Kasper Wan (left) and Joanne Lai today; (below) Wan and Lai prior to their transformations



CALVIN SUI

Transgenders: more than meets the eye

Two transgender individuals share their ongoing life transformations with **Arthur Tam**

Every now and then I still think – why couldn't I have just been born a boy?" muses 33-year-old trans-male Kasper Wan. "But I don't want to think like that any more. I don't need to be a natural born male." And so our interview begins.

Wan is just one member of Hong Kong's marginalised transgender community which is this year being recognised for the first time at the city's annual day against homophobia. To put the 'T' back into LGBT, this year's IDAHO has transformed into IDAHOT – the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. Post-op trans-female Joanne Leung (Wai-yun Leung, formerly Donne Wai-ming Leung) and pre-op trans-male Wan of the Transgender Resource Centre know plenty about the challenges faced by transgender individuals during their own long journeys of life transformation.

A year and a half ago, Wan knew for certain that she wasn't a 'she' at all – but somewhat more of a 'he'. Oftentimes the public labelled Wan as a lesbian but a gut feeling told her differently. "I went out with my homosexual friends and knew that I could not relate to what they were talking about," says Wan. "When I think about chasing a girl, I think about how a boy would chase a girl. If I were a boy, how would I date a girl? My interpretation is – I like girls because I am a boy. When I realised that I was a trans-male, I realised my identity. I could move forward with my life."

The physical changes that some people in the transgender community undergo breed much misconception from the public, as 49-year-old Leung explains: "Not all transgender people want to go through surgery. Some choose to do none, some choose to do some and some choose to go all the way – it's all based on the individual's needs." Inappropriate it now seems that Hong Kong's immigration laws changed just last month to require



transgender people to go through complete sexual reassignment surgery before their gender can be changed legally – a problem for the pre-op Wan who intends only to undergo breast reduction with hormonal therapy. "I think my body is fine," says Wan. "I do not want my ovaries removed nor do I need a penis reconstructed. Why do I need a penis if MTFs (male-to-females) do not have ovaries or uteruses reconstructed? I can't see myself as a woman – but neither am I a natural born man. I am a trans-male."

Though not all transsexuals in Hong Kong choose to go through full sexual reconstruction surgery, or SRS, those who do find that the costs are minimal due to the government's controversial classification of gender identity change as a psychiatric disorder. This creates a subsidy for SRS and brings the price right down. For Wan, who is currently undergoing hormonal therapy, the cost reductions are essential for her



important to see if the patient is capable of living life in a new gender. I think it's a good thing." The assessment and completion of surgical procedures normally takes about three or four years in total, says Wan. Through the Transgender Resource Center, Leung and Wan have set out to support individuals who are ready to take the final important step towards fulfilling their identity. "Every time I know that someone is going in for surgery, I want them to let me know so I can be there to visit them and accompany them when they leave," says Leung. "I also want to help them get in touch with more people who they can relate to, because they will be happier that way." Second to assisting pre and post-op transgenders, the Transgender Resource Centre, now in its fourth year of operation, is working to combat the many misconceptions and prejudices that transgenders face every day. So, if you're feeling a little mixed up and need some support, you know where to go. Either that, or at least join in the rally at IDAHOT to show your colours. It's a mixed up, muddled up world – but everyone needs a chance to be who they gotta be. That's what we think, anyway...

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IDAHOT Sat May 12
Chater Garden, 3pm.

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